

IMBA 6430: Business Strategies for Sustainability

Georgia Tech Scheller College of Business | Executive MBA Program

Course Information

Professors	Andre Calmon & Michael Oxman
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Office Hours	Available by appointment.
Material	All course materials, detailed assignment instructions, submission links, and updates will be available on Canvas . Please check Canvas regularly.

Course Description and Learning Objectives

Sustainability is about meeting our short-term goals without compromising the ability to meet long-term goals. It requires proactively managing the interaction between economic, social, and environmental systems to ensure durable value creation. As a critical global issue, sustainability has far-ranging business implications. Some firms have articulated a comprehensive, value-adding business strategy for sustainability; others are in the early phases of their “sustainability journey” or primarily focused on compliance. Even those in the early phases may be faced with emerging regulatory requirements and/or increasing industry-specific voluntary standards.

This is a team-taught course that leverages the unique depth and breadth of expertise in sustainability at the Scheller College of Business, ranked in the top 5 in the US in Corporate Knights magazine’s Global 100 Sustainable MBA rankings and most recently by [Fortune](#) as a top 10 MBA program for sustainability.

This course aims to help you:

- **Analyze** best business practices and cutting-edge thinking on sustainability as a strategic business imperative and a value creation tool.
- **Apply** tools and frameworks to evaluate, improve, and create sustainable business models.
- **Formulate** and articulate sustainable business strategies relevant to your respective roles.

Deliverables and Evaluation

Your grade will be based on a mix of individual and group work designed to build toward the final project. Specific details, rubrics, and deadlines for all deliverables will be posted on Canvas. Students are expected to adhere to the Georgia Tech Honor Code.

Grade Component	Individual or Group	Weight
Attendance and Participation	Individual	10%
Case Study Writeups	Group	30%
Reflection Questions	Individual	30%
Final Project Deliverables	Group	30%

Course Schedule & Topics

This schedule provides a high-level overview. All required readings, videos, and detailed instructions for pre- and post-session assignments are located in the corresponding module on Canvas.

Session 1: Sustainability Overview & Major Topics

Modality: Synchronous | Date: August 8 (A&B)

Description: We will provide an introduction and overview of sustainability in business, some of the major drivers of sustainability as a function of senior management and will discuss the tragedy of the commons.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze the relationship between a “tragedy of the commons” and sustainability.
- Evaluate the landscape of material sustainability issues and trends.
- Formulate a business case for sustainability based on material issues.

Skills & Frameworks: Foundational elements of the business case for sustainability; Selected sustainability in business rationales.

Key Readings:

- Fishbanks Game Instructions (distributed separately)
- ERM Trends Report 2026: Read Executive Summary and select 1 trend of interest.

Assignments (check Canvas for a full description):

- **Pre-Session:** Submit a 1-page write-up on the professional relevance of your chosen trend from the ERM report and explain why you selected this.
- **Post-Session:** As a fishing team, submit a maximum 2 Page single-spaced summary answering the following (in MS WORD) questions:
 1. What are the top 1-2 most critical elements or interventions that you think would have materially changed the outcome of Fishbanks into something more sustainable? Briefly but logically explain your rationale and note any (constructive) disagreements on your team.
 2. How did your fishbanks experience (including reference to class debrief / lecture slides) shift or reinforce your perspective on the 1 trend you chose prior to class (determine which trend(s) to focus on for the write-up. Consider the concept of overshoot in your response and why this is relevant.

Grading will be determined by the thoughtfulness of your response and reference to learnings from slides/session.

Session 2: Sustainable Value Creation: Circular Economy & Regeneration

Modality: Synchronous | Date: August 16 (A&B)

Description: We introduce environmental sustainability concepts such as Life-Cycle Assessment, Circular Economy, and Regeneration. We examine and contrast the challenges of implementing a "circular" initiative among different companies.

Learning Objectives:

- Describe Life-Cycle Analysis (LCA) and critique its limitations.
- Evaluate the challenges of implementing a circular initiative in a company.
- Analyze how regeneration applies to different companies.

Skills & Frameworks: Life Cycle Analysis; Cradle-to-Cradle Design; Circular Economy Concepts.

Key Readings & Media:

- Case: *Emma Shoes: Designing a Circular Shoe*
- Watch: *Beyond Zero* film (link on Canvas)

Assignments (check Canvas for a full description):

- **Pre-Session:** Watch the *Beyond Zero* film and read the Emma Shoes case. Answer the short reflection questions posted on Canvas.
- **Post-Session:** Individually, answer the reflection questions posted on Canvas regarding regenerative opportunities.

Session 3: Stakeholder Engagement & Social Impact

Modality: Asynchronous | Date Window: September

Description: We will focus on the critical importance of stakeholder relations underlying any sustainability strategy and address the "S" in ESG.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze the linkages between stakeholder relations and material sustainability issues.
- Construct a business case for social impact initiatives.
- Evaluate the role of business in upholding human rights and ensuring social performance.

Skills & Frameworks: Stakeholder identification & management; The "Fire-Alarm, Police Patrol, and Fire Extinguisher" compliance method.

Key Readings:

- BSR: *Sustainability Goal Setting: A New Chapter*
- Conference Board: *Zooming in on the S in ESG*
- UN: *Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights*
- Case: *Governing Sustainability in a Shifting Context (A)* (for post-session)

Assignments (check Canvas for a full description):

- **During Session Window:** Complete the asynchronous activities, including watching the video lectures and participating in the Canvas discussion forums.
- **Post-Session:** After reading the *Governing Sustainability* case, select one company example and create a 5-slide presentation outlining your recommendations for its CEO.

Session 4: Business Leadership in Climate

Modality: Synchronous | Date: October 18 (A&B)

Description: This session explores the implications of climate change for businesses, examining adaptation, mitigation, and value creation strategies.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze the channels through which climate change translates to business risks and opportunities.
- Differentiate between carbon mitigation and adaptation strategies.
- Evaluate climate-induced business risks and assess potential market and non-market strategies.

Skills & Frameworks: Carbon footprinting; Carbon mitigation and adaptation.

Key Readings:

- Case: *Driving Decarbonization at BMW*
- NewClimate: *Corporate Climate Responsibility Monitor 2023* (Read Section A and one company profile from your chosen sector).

Assignments (check Canvas for a full description):

- **Pre-Session:** As a group, submit your answers to the BMW case questions. Come to class prepared to discuss the company you reviewed in the NewClimate report.
- **Post-Session:** Complete the post-session reflection questions on Canvas.

Session 5: Asynchronous Work on Final Project

Modality: Asynchronous | Date Window: November

Description: This guided session is dedicated to asynchronous work on your final project. You will apply the concepts and skills learned throughout the course to your chosen project option.

Activities:

- Review the Final Project guidelines and form teams.
- Follow the project steps posted on Canvas. The instructors will be available for virtual office hours.
- *A short, additional asynchronous module will be announced on Canvas.*

Assignment (check Canvas for a full description):

- **During Session Window:** Complete the asynchronous activities posted on Canvas
- Submit a rough draft of your project writeup to Canvas.

Session 6: Project Discussion & Sustainability Transformation

Modality: Synchronous | Date: December 6 (A&B)

Description: We examine models for industry self-regulation, conduct in-class peer reviews of final projects, and wrap up the course by discussing key take-aways on sustainable business transformation.

Learning Objectives:

- Analyze the business model of sustainability rating and self-regulation organizations.
- Critique different response strategies to manage supplier non-compliance.

Skills & Frameworks: Supply Chain Traceability; Sustainability Transformation.

Key Readings:

- Case: *EcoVadis: A Sustainability Rating Company Goes Global*
- Case: *From Fast Fashion to Sustainable Apparel: The Making of the SAC*

Assignments (check Canvas for a full description):

- **Pre-Session:** Read the EcoVadis and SAC cases. Come prepared to discuss your final project with your peers.
- **Post-Session:** Finalize and submit your final project deliverables (write-up and video).

Final Project

The final project gives you a hands-on opportunity to apply the course's frameworks to a real-world challenge. It consists of two deliverables: a **final write-up** and a **3-minute pitch video** to be shared with your peers. Your group will choose **one** of the following two options. Full guidelines, resources, and deadlines will be available on Canvas.

Option 1: Creating a New Sustainability-Focused Venture

Develop a business plan for a new for-profit venture that profitably addresses a key sustainability challenge, aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals. This can be a new startup or an "intrapreneurial" project within an existing organization. The goal is to develop a pitch and a set of experiments you could pursue after the course, potentially through programs like Create-X. Check Canvas for full details on deliverables.

Option 2: Strategic Sustainability Recommendation(s) for an Existing Organization

Select an organization (e.g., your own) and address a core strategic question related to its sustainability performance. This project requires open-source research and at least two stakeholder interviews to develop a set of actionable recommendations for the organization's leadership, presented in a McKinsey style slide deck (full

guidance on Canvas) as the final write up.

Your analysis should address questions such as the following (you may also suggest other/different strategic questions to address that are of interest to you. You do not need to address all of these:

- How effectively does the organization's strategy address its long-term, material sustainability risks and opportunities (e.g., preventing a "tragedy of the commons" as seen in Fishbanks)? Based on your analysis, what are your recommendations?
- Where does the organization fall short in using sustainability to drive innovation and top-line growth, drawing lessons from cases like BMW, Interface, or Emma Shoes? How can they improve – what are your recommendations?
- Based on external sustainability rankings and criteria, what are the organization's primary strengths and weaknesses, and what are your key recommendations for improvement?
- How well is your organization aligned between its sustainability activities and goals with other public-facing positions, government lobbying, etc.? What are your recommendations to address any gaps or extend opportunities?

Check Canvas for full details on project deliverables.

Instructor Bios

Andre Calmon is Associate Professor of Operations Management at the Scheller College of Business, Director of Sustain-X, and a Brook Byers Institute Faculty Fellow at Georgia Tech. Andre's research focuses on designing and optimizing sustainability, innovation, and operational strategies for innovative business models. His work is regularly published in premier management journals. In 2024, Andre's research portfolio was recognized with Georgia Tech's Brady Family Award for Faculty Research Excellence. A renowned educator, Andre has developed several award-winning courses, case studies, and student-led ventures through his innovative teaching methods. Andre's teaching fosters a unique "classroom-to-startup-to-research" pipeline, with much of his research examining new management challenges faced by startups founded by his former students. He holds a Ph.D. in Operations Research from MIT, an M.Sc. in Electrical Engineering from the Universidade Estadual de Campinas (Unicamp), and a B.Sc. in Electrical Engineering from the Universidade de Brasília (UnB).

Michael Oxman is the Managing Director of the Ray C. Anderson Center for Sustainable Business and a Professor of the Practice who has worked in industry, non-profits, government, and academia over the course of his career with assignments in Brazil, China, Guatemala, Iceland, Indonesia, Israel, Japan, Kazakhstan (resided in Kazakhstan for 7 years), Mauritania, Mexico, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, the Philippines, Russia, Rwanda, Turkey, and the U.S. In addition to work in political risk and financial valuations, Michael has spent much of his career focused on corporate sustainability and social license to operate in both the U.S. and across many of these international locations. At the Ray C. Anderson Center for Sustainable Business, Michael helps to lead a number of initiatives along with the Faculty Director and Center staff such as the recently launched Drawdown Georgia Business Compact (focused on carbon reduction in Georgia through a just and sustainable transition). He also teaches a consulting-based practicum course that focuses on corporate sustainability topics, leveraging best practices in problem-solving approaches for companies of all sizes. Michael has a B.A. in Russian Area Studies from Trinity College (Hartford, CT), a Master of International Affairs from Columbia University, and an MBA from Rice University.