

SUSTAINABILITY STRATEGIES FOR INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS

Bachelor course (ECTS: 6)

Course leaders:

BEVERIDGE Ivana, University of Houston, C.T. Bauer College of Business, United States

*Ivana is a Professor of Practice at the University of Houston, C.T. Bauer College of Business, ranked # 1 in the U.S. for its entrepreneurship and marketing program, and she works actively in the marketing practice. She brings diverse international experience from the marketing practice, having held management positions with global marketing agencies and corporates in Asia, the Middle East, Europe and the U.S. Her marketing campaigns won awards such as the top Integrated Marketing Campaign of the year by the Public Relations Society of America (PRSA). Her client portfolio spans Fortune 100 companies and governments, including the Abu Dhabi Government, Etihad Airways, General Electric, IMG, and Nauticus Robotics, among many others. She holds a PhD from the Sorbonne University and an M.B.A from Warwick University. She authored a textbook *Intercultural Marketing: Theory and Practice* with Routledge Publishing, and her intercultural marketing research has been published in top marketing journals.*

Milton Aldrete, Polar Partners Finland, Education and Consulting, Finland

Milton has taught at Laurea University of Applied Sciences in Finland for 10 years and in Ljubljana University's school since 2017. Milton is an experienced international sales consultant with strong knowledge on marketing and business development on different continents. Milton holds a Master of Science in Economics and Business Administration with a major in International Business from the University of Vaasa, Finland. Additionally, Milton holds a Post-Degree Programme in Vocational Teacher Education from the Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences, Finland which has shaped his teaching approach to be practical, real-life oriented and student centred.

Aims of the course:

We see the word "sustainability" everywhere, but what does it really mean? How important are bamboo socks? Will electric cars save the world? There is a strong awareness that fundamental transitions within key societal sectors such as energy, transport, water and food are required to cope with global sustainability challenges. Increasingly, rather than treating environmental initiatives as unavoidable costs due to public pressures, businesses are strategically rethinking their sustainability strategies.

Nonetheless, businesses are struggling to meet their environmental goals. Keeping up with customer demands and with evolving regulations is increasingly challenging, as is marketing of environmental efforts in an authentic manner. Perhaps more concerning, a decline in managers' understanding of sustainability in the recent years coincides with their increasing boldness when communicating about it.

The course offers a foundation for understanding the main issues related to ecological sustainability and their influence on global business strategy. Students will become familiar with the main frameworks and current debates such as the climate change, competition for water and other natural resources, the energy transition or greenwashing, which need to be taken into consideration for sustainability goal-setting, measurement and reporting. Because ecological sustainability is inherently an interdisciplinary concept, the course integrates a variety of critical perspectives from different industries, practice areas, fields of research and geographical regions. Given the somewhat ambiguous nature of sustainable efforts expressed through the “triple bottom line” (TBL) idea of balancing economic, environmental and social value of investment yet without major trade-offs or conflicts of interest, it takes into account the needs of multiple stakeholders. The course addresses the issues related to the government, intergovernmental organizations, consumers, nonprofits and the public. It also incorporates voices and perspectives from the non-Western world, addressing the growing criticism about sustainability objectives set primarily by the Western countries and according to their standards.

Aimed learning outcomes:

- Obtain the knowledge needed to define, interpret and operationalize the concept of ecological sustainability in a business context
- Understand the major themes and issues related to ecological sustainability efforts
- Understand limitations and challenges with environmental efforts
- Critically reflect on the main sustainability issues influencing business strategy

Aimed skills:

- Synthesize relevant materials from a range of relevant areas
- Apply theoretical concepts in a real business context
- Evaluate “green” or “eco” claims made about products or policies
- Create a blueprint for sustainability planning and reporting
- Communicate ecological sustainability efforts in an authentic manner

Prerequisites:

There are no pre-requisites for this course. Students that have not previously attended business courses will be provided with the necessary assistance and supplementary information as needed.

Course content:

DATE	DAILY TOPIC/SESSION
Monday, 8 July	Introduction and course overview
Tuesday, 9 July	Key themes and concepts <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Eco-literacy, definitions and pillars of sustainable development ○ Global trends underpinning sustainability strategy needs ○ Climate, biodiversity and ecosystem conservation Case example: Scandinavia as global sustainability leader
Wednesday, 10 July	Businesses in context: main actors and challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Key global stakeholders and decision-makers ○ The role of governments and intragovernments ○ Celebrities and popular culture: from Greta Thunberg to Prince Harry
Thursday, 11 July	Business strategy perspectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Marketing and production: green product claims ○ Supply chain and logistics: Fair Trade and 4As of sustainable logistics Operations and business models: the systems theory perspective
Friday, 12 July	Sustainability goal-setting <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sustainability, ESG and CSR ○ Environmental goals vs. KPIs ○ Net zero, climate and carbon neutrality: realistic perspectives In-class discussion: scope 3 and 4 emission targets
Monday, 15 July	Reporting and evaluation <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Sustainability reporting standards ○ Main global indices ○ Challenges with global sustainability standards and metrics In-class discussion: The Happy Planet Index
Tuesday, 16 July	Global development issues <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The backdrop of globalization: challenges and opportunities ○ Developed versus the developing world ○ Global poverty and the "resource curse" Case examples: e-waste dumping in Africa, global trash trade in Asia
Wednesday, 17 July	Sustainable marketing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Deconstructing eco-rhetoric: the convoluted eco-lexicon ○ Greenwashing disguised: greenshifting, greenlighting and greenrinsing ○ Public perception challenges and eco-activism: say "no" to everything? Case examples: Ikea, H&M, Coca Cola
Thursday, 18 July	Consumer perspectives <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Changing consumer preferences ○ Consumer action and activism: mindful consumption, boycotts and buycotts ○ Ideological perspectives: greenhushing and under-reporting Case examples: Apeel, Mud Jeans and Tata Power
Friday, 19 July	<i>No lectures (day off)</i>
Monday, 22 July	Industry-specific challenges <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ FMCG, food and retail sectors

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Energy transition and decarbonization: fossil fuels vs. alternatives ○ Sustainable tourism <p>Case examples: BP and Ryan Air In-class discussion: GMO food and solar panels</p>
Tuesday, 23 July	<p>Course wrap-up</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ The influence of multiple factors on business sustainability strategy ○ Financing of sustainable efforts: institutional, retail and impact investors <p>The role of start-ups and disruptive innovation</p>
Wednesday, 24 July	<i>Final examination (Presentations/Exams)</i>

Course materials / List of readings:

Power point slides, PDF documents with the course content, report templates, and reading materials will be distributed by the instructors. Source materials are derived from the forthcoming book edited by Ivana Beveridge (2024) Sustainability Strategies: Global Perspectives, Routledge Publishing, with a number of chapter contributions from Ljubljana Summer School Professors.

Further readings

Allen, T., & Prospero, P. (2016). Modeling Sustainable Food Systems. Environmental Management, 57, 956-975. Available at: <https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00267-016-0664-8>

Corporate Citizenship (2022). A Sustainable Business Future: The 7 Challenges. Available at: <https://corporate-citizenship.com/2017/03/13/sustainable-business-future-7-challenges/>

EastWest PR (2020). Why do the 17 UN SDGs matter so much to your reputation, and how can you demonstrate your sustainability credentials? Available at: <https://www.eastwestpr.com/blogs/post/un-sdgs-sustainability>

Elliott, J., (2013). An Introduction to Sustainable Development. Routledge Publishing: London and New York, Fourth Edition. Available at: www.ru.ac.bd/wp-content/uploads/sites/25/2019/03/408_01_Jennifer-An-Introduction-to-Sustainable-Development-2012.pdf

Gibson, L., Wilman, E. N., & Laurance, W.F. (2017). How Green is 'Green' Energy? Trends in Ecology & Evolution, 32 (12), 922-935. Available at: <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.tree.2017.09.007>

International Institute for Environment and Development (2022). Conservation and discrimination: case studies from Nepal's national parks. Available at: <https://www.iied.org/conservation-discrimination-case-studies-nepals-national-parks>

Söderholm, P. (2020). The green economy transition: the challenges of technological change for sustainability. Sustainable Earth 3(6). Available at: <https://sustainableearth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/s42055-020-00029-y>

The Guardian (2023). The problem with sustainability marketing? Not enough me, me, me. Available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/sustainable-business/behavioural-insights/2015/mar/09/problem-sustainability-marketing-not-enough-me>

The Washington Post (2023). 'Greenhushing': Why some companies quietly hide their climate pledges. Available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/climate-environment/2023/07/13/greenhushing-climate-trend-corporations/>

Toyota (2022). Four Rs for a Better Earth. Available at: <https://www.toyota-europe.com/world-of-toyota/feel/environment/better-earth/better-earth>

Upton, E. (2017). A Sustainable Business Future: The 7 Challenges. Corporate Citizenship. <https://corporate-citizenship.com/2017/03/13/sustainable-business-future-7-challenges/>

Helpful sources

Corporate Watch (2023). www.corporatewatch.org

Earth Charter (2023). www.earthcharterinaction.org

EPA - United Nations Environmental Protection Agency (2023). Sources of Greenhouse Emissions. www.epa.gov/ghgemissions/sources-greenhouse-gas-emissions

European Commission (2023). A European Green Deal. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/european-green-deal_en

Global Reporting (2023). www.globalreporting.org

Green Climate Fund (2023). www.greenclimate.fund

International Institute for Sustainable Development (2023). Responsible Business. www.iisd.org/topics/responsible-business

The Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (2023). www.ipcc.ch

United Nations (2022). Sustainable Development Goals Indicators.

<https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/>

United Nations Environment Programme (2023). Global Environment Facility. <https://www.unep.org/about-un-environment/funding-and-partnerships/global-environment-facility>

UN Environment Programme (2023). Green Economy. <https://www.unep.org/regions/asia-and-pacific/regional-initiatives/supporting-resource-efficiency/green-economy>

United Nations (2023). Climate Justice.

<https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/climate-justice/>

Teaching and examination methods:

Interactive sessions include group work, case discussions and group presentations.

Every class will incorporate group discussions and offer flexi time to enhance student wellbeing. A number of templates and checklists will be offered to guide student projects and help the students learn how to translate and apply theoretical concepts in business and managerial situations.

The course will be delivered through the following didactic elements:

- Lectures covering theoretical concepts and guidelines for their application
- Mini-cases and examples from business practice
- Classroom discussions and brainstorming sessions
- Group project (written report and presentation)

Group homework assignment: the group assignment will be based on the course concepts discussed during the class up to that point. They will focus on application of class concepts to analyze a real-life business challenge. The assignment will be related directly to the lectures, and the students will be given enough time to complete it. Detailed instructions and guidelines will be provided.

Group project: the main deliverable of the course is a group effort to create a sustainability strategy blueprint for a company of choice based on the recommended templates and guidelines. The self-formed teams will submit their written report and deliver a short presentation introducing the key findings. The teams will work on the report during each class.

Individual homework assignment: individual homework assignment will be based on the course concepts. The students will choose a company and analyze their sustainable efforts using the templates and frameworks provided during the course.

Class participation: active class participation and contribution to class discussions will count as 5% of the grade.

Grading scale:

DEFINITION	%	LOCAL SCALE	ECTS SCALE	Grade (USA)
exceptional knowledge without or with negligible faults	92-100	10	A	A+, A, A-
very good knowledge with some minor faults	85-91	9	B	B+, B
good knowledge with certain faults	77-84	8	C	B
solid knowledge but with several faults	68-76	7	D	C+, C, C-
knowledge only meets minimal criteria	60-67	6	E	D+, D
knowledge does not meet minimal criteria	<60	5	F	