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syllabus

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Business and Sustainability
EVPP 322 001 & 002 – Fall 2019

Instructor: Dr. Dann Sklarew	**Office**: David King Hall room 3019
Section 001: Innovation Hall 328 TTh 1:30pm–2:45pm	**Office Hours**: Tues./Thurs. 10:30–12:30 <u>in</u> <u>David King rm 3001</u>, by appointment made via <u>https://gmu.campus.eab.com</u>
Section 002: David King Hall 2054 TTh 3:00pm–4:15pm	**Email**: <u>dsklarew@gmu.edu</u> (preferred means for contact)
Skype: jendann	**Office Phone**: (703) 993–2012 (please leave message)

In this syllabus, you will find:

Course Background

"*To prosper over time, every company must not only deliver financial performance, but also show how it makes a positive contribution to society. Companies must benefit all of their stakeholders, including shareholders, employees, customers, and the communities in which they operate.*"

– Larry Fink, founder and CEO, BlackRock, Inc., in 2017 <u>letter to CEOs</u>

"*The green economy—one that is focused on more than just moving from fossil fuels to clean, renewable resources—is poised to become the fundamental economic catalyst of the 21st century. Its impact on how society will design, manufacture, sell, and even dispose of products will, in a very short-time, affect every industry and business around the world. But, are we ready for it? Do the leaders of today, or more importantly, tomorrow, have the foresight needed to fully understand the impending changes?*"

The push for shared benefits and green economy represents an enormous opportunity for business, both domestically and globally. Public support for social equity and a cleaner and safer environment is growing. Corporations are increasingly expected to consider the social and environmental aspects of their products and services. While evidence suggests that these expectations are beginning to be taken seriously, news sources report daily on environmental pitfalls demonstrated by corporations, and which have become the target of governments, activist groups, or simply the increasing demands of consumers for "greener" products. These stories illustrate that social and environmental awareness, sensitivity, and literacy are often lacking in the modern corporation. Still, as demonstrated by numerous participants in the Global Reporting Initiative's [Sustainability Disclosure Database](#), the Corporate Knights' [Global 100](#) and B Labs–[certified B Corps](#), sustainability is increasingly being internalized into business processes. How can we understand and foster this to help ensure our society's sustainability?

Course Purpose

The purpose of this course is to increase students' capacity
to promote sustainability in the private sector
and, by extension, across our society and world.

Course Goals

Specifically, we aim to:

1. Examine how private sector activity impacts societal and ecological sustainability, using perspectives from diverse backgrounds.
2. Learn principles and tools for firms to track and manage their way to better sustainability performance·
3. Develop skills and experience with analyzing and promoting business sustainability to develop a "green economy" locally, nationally and globally.

Learning Outcomes

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

1. Identify a set of widely recognized global ecological challenges which may arise, in part, from inadequate sustainability values and practices in the private sector.

2. Describe global norms, standards and frameworks for measuring and advancing sustainability in the private sector.

3. Describe and illustrate characteristics of sustainability in the business context (e.g., sustainable business practices).

4. Apply participatory case study methods and other tools to examine current status and means to improve business sustainability, from mere **compliance** to modest **corporate social responsibility** to bold **civic leadership** (in order to develop a more sustainable economy*), including:*
    i. incorporating sustainability principles into business processes, including incentives -- and disincentives -- for doing so;
    ii. characterizing the mindset of "green" product consumers (including **LOHAS** market segment);
    iii. assessing effectiveness of "green products;"
    iv. determining how to promote environment & sustainability without hurting business, productivity, economic efficiency or jobs;
    v. reaching common ground between corporate/economic and environmental/conservation interests;
    vi. ensuring markets succeed while incorporating (**triple bottom line**) sustainability
    vii. delivering sustainability–focused business to reform rural areas of developing nations (part of **bottom of the pyramid** strategy);
    viii. converting those inside corporations to become more sustainable (see **objection–handling clinic** in Russo);

5. Other "assessable" knowledge and skills, as identified by students:*
    i. [TBD]

* These outcomes incorporate students' expressed priorities up through the first day (week) of class.

The course is designed to help students grasp the complexity of our current environmental and socio–economic sustainability situation, and its opportunities and limitations for the modern corporate enterprise. The curriculum encourages students to critically assess taken–for-granted conceptions of basic products and processes and their relationship with the natural and human environment. We will examine both established industries and emergent companies employing cutting edge technologies, and consider both national and international implications. We will also meet with various sustainability practitioners and engage in a variety of activities (both assignments and "tasks") in support of students' knowledge and skills building.

The sorts of questions we will address include:

- How have business interactions with the natural environment and with other sectors promoting sustainability changed over time?

- Does the so-called "win-win scenario" really exist? Can production efficiency and bottom-line profits be increased through the introduction of new technologies and management systems that are sensitive to sustainability considerations?
- How does one evaluate the technical, financial, social and political aspects of corporate sustainability?
- What effects do sustainability concerns have on patterns of marketing, accounting, financial markets, international trade, public relations, product development and process design?

By the conclusion of the course, students should gain an understanding of roles they can play to assist organizations to respond proactively to the environmental imperatives that they face. In many cases, this response will lead to a "win-win" outcome, wherein companies can win in the marketplace *and* promote equity and environmental quality. Maybe you will conceive a career role for yourself promoting corporate sustainability as well!

All activities, assignments, readings and references will be posted to our course wiki site:

http://evpp322f19.pbworks.com

Access is restricted to course participants using your @gmu.edu email address and a new, site-specific password of your choosing. Please email your professor if you cannot access this site.

Readings
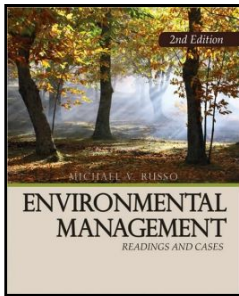
Two textbooks are required for this course:

1. *Environmental Management: Readings and Cases, 2nd Edition*, by Michael V. Russo, and

2. *Foundations of Sustainable Business: Theory, Function and Strategy*, by Nada Sanders and John D. Wood.

Russo contains an edited collection of classic environmental sustainability readings, well-recognized in the field of business and sustainability. Sanders and Wood provide a more strategic and contemporary focus for our study.

These free online books may also serve as useful references: *A Primer on Sustainable Business*, *Sustainability, Innovation and Entrepreneurship* and *the Sustainable Business Casebook*.
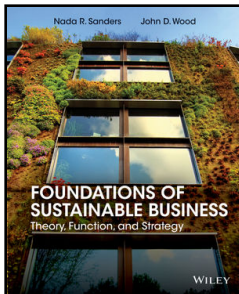
GMU Bookstore provides the textbooks buy/new ($100+) or rent/used (as low as $50?). If in stock at through **Better World Books'**, you *may* be able to purchase it more cheaply – and with societal benefit – via their Russo and Sanders & Wood pages. The books should also be on 2-hour reserve in the Johnson Center library (and available, at least in part, for browsing via Amazon Look Inside and Google Preview).

Access to additional required or optional readings should be linked from line for the associated class in our course schedule.

Readings, assignments, case preparation and tasks *are to be completed before* the class meets. Each session's reading assignments will present a variety of viewpoints. While reading these materials you should continually ask yourself: Do I understand the issue being discussed? Can I frame the issue in the perspective of both the environmental/sustainability critic and proponent? How might this affect my decision-making as a manager? Specific questions related to each case will be subjects for our in-class discussion, assignments and final evaluation. So, please keep up with the reading.

Course Requirements and Grading

1. Class Participation (56% of grade)

Environment and sustainability are topics about which everyone has an opinion. It is pervasively covered in the news, movies, TV etc. However, class discussion should be grounded in rational debate and avoid the tendency towards extemporaneous philosophizing. Excellent comments possess one or more of the following attributes:

   (a) they offer an original and relevant perspective on the issue,
   (b) they move the analysis forward by building on previous contributions or by revealing fresh insights,
   (c) they transcend the "I feel" syndrome by including evidence that is based on more than personal experience — in other words, your thinking should reflect and integrate examples from other contexts.

Our discussions will be guided by specific questions designed for each class session (and detailed in the pages that follow). You are expected to have reviewed those questions in advance of each class and be prepared to discuss your responses.

Certain "tasks" are not graded, but serve as inputs into a subsequent class session. If you do not due these on schedule, you will not be able to participate as effectively as your peers will.

Daily participation grades will be assessed at the end of each class. Unexcused non-attendance earns 0 points. **Three or more unexcused absences will result in a 0 for your participation grade overallm resulting in an "F" for the course.** Excused absences consist of those that include a notice from the dean, your doctor, the police, or another emergency official indicating that you were incapacitated and therefore unable to attend class. Pre-arranged absences for religious, familial, work or other reasons may be excused on a case-by-case basis, by prior discussion with your instructor. (It is the student's responsibility to speak to the instructor in advance should these impact their participation in class activities and assignments.)

Each session, you can earn a maximum of 2 participation points per day (4 per week) based on the following breakdown:
> 0.0 = non-attendance (unexcused)
> 1.0 = attended without oral or written participation (or excused absence without timely contribution)
> 1.5 = correctly answered at least one assigned question and/or participated at least once substantively in class discussion(s) or, if unable, through same-day post in comments at bottom of our schedule page or
> 2.0 = demonstrated leadership and/or scholarship, e.g., served as team spokesperson, correctly answered multiple questions and participated repeatedly and poignantly in class discussion(s) or in same-day post in comments at bottom of our schedule page.

For those unable to attend a given session, or unable to participate actively due to time constraints, you may "make-up" participation by submitting your contribution(s) in the comments section of our schedule page. Excused absences have until start of the session after absence to submit make-up post.

So if you attend each class and offer no commentary, your participation grade will be 1/2 or 50%. This translates into earning only 28 of the 56 possible percentage points towards your final grade. I want this to be clear so that you can prepare for the accordingly. Of course, my goal is to get you all involved in an active way in the classroom and to think critically about the readings.

2. Written Assignments (24% of grade)

There will be three assignments (8% each) that are **due at the beginning of class on the specified day**. Late papers are not accepted without an excused pre-arranged or emergency absence (see above).

1. The first is an individual corporate sustainability profile. The deliverable is a 3-4 page single-spaced paper (double-spacing between paragraphs), based on the model presented in Chapter 1.
2. The second, an individual or group analysis assignment, is a review and gap analysis of one corporation's sustainability reporting. Option to present in class will be encouraged.
3. The third will be an individual cover letter for a sustainability-related job, demonstrating the skills you gleaned from this course.

(Or, if a set of students agree and clear with me by the end of Session 10, the third assignment can be an individual or group case study assignment from Russo, answering the questions posed in the provided sheet OR a lean business plan for a sustainability-focused social venture. That deliverable for either is a 6-8 page, single-spaced paper (double-space between paragraphs) answering the questions that will be on our wiki. Your preference?)

3. Final Examination (20% of grade)

The final exam will be *comprehensive*, covering the entire course, including readings and lectures. Areas of emphasis on the exam will have been discussed in class during the course of the semester and keyed to course learning outcomes (above) and sessions' learning objectives. The structure of the exam will be short answer/essay and analysis of case-based situations. See our evolving study guide for guidance on what to review for this exam.

4. Grading Scale

Scores from course requirements will be summed to a 0-100 scale, then converted to grades as follows:

98 – 100 **A+**	88 – 89.99 **B+**	78 – 79.99 **C+**	60 – 69.99 **D**
92 – 97.99 **A**	82 – 87.99 **B**	72 – 77.99 **C**	0 – 59.99 **F**
90 – 91.99 **A-**	80 – 81.99 **B-**	70 – 71.99 **C-**	(Please don't fail.)

General Course Policies

1. Use of Technology

With the exception of the final exam (which will feature paper and pen), you are encouraged to make use of information technology (laptops, smartphones, translation software, etc.) to whatever extent it can contribute to our learning in class and outside of class. Please do not use any of these technologies in class in such a way that distracts your instructor from teaching or others from learning. If you do so, you will be asked to desist and, if not respectful thereafter, to leave the classroom.

2. Academic Integrity

Academic integrity is crucial to the effectiveness of learning and its assessment in this class. In particular, students are required to be familiar and comply with the requirements of the GMU Honor Code:

> Student members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work. (see https://oai.gmu.edu/mason-honor-code)

I strictly enforce Mason's Honor Code. Students must NOT collaborate on assignments or exams without explicit prior permission from the instructor.

What is plagiarism? Booth, Colomb, and Williams (1995) state in their book, *The Craft of Research* (University of Chicago Press):

> "You plagiarize when, intentionally or not, you use someone else's words or ideas but fail to credit that person. You plagiarize even when you do credit the author but use his exact words without so indicating with quotation marks or block indentation. You also plagiarize when you use words so close to those in your source, that if you placed your work next to the source, you would see that you could not have written what you did without the source at your elbow" (p. 167).

I HAVE A ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY FOR CHEATING. If you are caught cheating, you WILL be brought before the Honor Committee. (Latest infraction: Fall 2013)

If you are unsure about whether a given activity might be considered plagiarism, please ask before you submit the assignment or exam. Thank you.

3. Accommodation for Students With Disabilities

If you are a student with a disability and you need academic accommodations, please communicate such to your professor and contact the Disability Services (DS) at 703.993.2474. All academic accommodations must be arranged through that office.

4. Sick Policy

If you are too sick to come to class, have high fever, etc., please inform your professor via email ASAP. Insofar as no assignment is due that day, you will generally be offered option to attend via [skype] webinar or provided with a make-up opportunity (see class participation above plus and "optional" items on our schedule). Assignments which are not submitted on-time on sick days will still be marked according to "Late Work" criteria above, unless medical excuse is provided by your doctor's office.

5. Email Policy

GMU faculty and staff may only correspond with students through the students' GMU assigned email accounts. Emails sent from other accounts will not necessarily be answered nor will lack of checking gmu.edu email be considered legitimate reason for missing communication from your professor or peers.

6. University Norms and Resources

Mason's Diversity Statement emphasizes that diversity and inclusion are vital to creating a learning and living community for outstanding personal and professional growth. This includes both diversity of identity and diversity of perspective. Thus all participants in this course – instructor and students alike – should expect to respect, be respected, and learn from the diversity we embody, in all activities and relations associated with this class.

Here is a link to other resources to support your learning and success at Mason (e.g., Counseling and Psychological Services, Learning Services, University Career Services, the Writing Center): http://ctfe.gmu.edu/teaching/student-support-resources-on-campus. Resources for support (beyond the academic stuff) are also available via University Life's Student Support Advocacy Center: https://ssac.gmu.edu .

Additional details on university academic and non-academic policies can be found, respectively, at:

- University Catalog: http://catalog.gmu.edu
- University Policies: http://universitypolicy.gmu.edu

Finally, this 1-page George Mason University Title IX Resources sheet may benefit those of you seeking resources to prevent, address &/or recover from gender-based discrimination – including sexual harassment, sexual assault, stalking, domestic violence, and sexual exploitation. It includes 16 on- and off-campus sources of assistance, including confidential ones.

Semester Schedule and Deadlines:

Semester Overview

I Why Business & Sustainability?
Their Mutual Materiality, Norms,Principles & CSV (Sessions 01–09)

II How do Businesses Advance Sustainability?
Measuring and Managing Sustainable Business Practices (Sessions 10–20 [approx.])

III Who Can Make Businesses More Sustainable?
Sustainability Change Agent Roles and Skills (Sessions 21–28 [approx.])

PLEASE [SCHEDULE](#) ON OUR WIKI FOR UP–TO–DATE SESSION PLANS

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