

AP/ADMS 4970 3.00

MANAGING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

School of Administrative Studies, Faculty of Liberal Arts & Professional Studies, York University

Winter 2023: Section M, Tuesday 08:30, HNE 032

Instructor: Dr. Joel Marcus, marcus@yorku.ca

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:30

Course Website: <https://eclass.yorku.ca>

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Sustainability issues are a central and defining feature of the environment within which managers currently operate. The interrelated effects of climate change, social unrest and market instability impact organizations of all types and sizes, in virtually all industries and geographic locales, and across all levels of operations. Because these stressors are projected to intensify, the search for new ways of doing business and new economic models that appropriately balance ecological, social, and economic interests over the long term is arguably the major management challenge of our time. Adopting a sustainability mindset involves reassessing traditional management objectives, and reframes organizational vision, strategy, products and processes as a rich opportunity for multi-form value creation.

This course focuses on management practices designed to advance environmental, social, and economic sustainability within an ethical framework. Sustainable management concepts, models, and methods are explored within the context of global trends (climate change, resource constraints, population growth, inequality, market instability, etc.) shaping the managerial environment. We employ systems thinking to highlight the dependency of economy and society on nature, and seek to identify emerging practices and future opportunities that align economic actors, entities and systems within vibrant societal and ecological systems. Using a variety of media (cases, videos, group discussions/debates, assignments, etc.) and with attention to real-time current events, the course adopts an applied, forward-looking, and solutions-oriented perspective, and aims to equip upper-level students with the critical thinking and reflective management practice skills necessary to respond effectively to the widespread sustainability challenges facing managers today.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

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

- Describe how global environmental, social, and economic trends are shaping the context for management practice
- Demonstrate familiarity with a range of sustainability concepts, models, practices, and measures
- Comprehensively evaluate current sustainability efforts within organizations along the dimensions of vision, strategy, products, and processes
- Apply integrative systems thinking in a creative manner to identify opportunities and develop practical managerial solutions that foster sustainable outcomes

COURSE READINGS

Course readings are listed in the course calendar along with other media content used in this course, including video, websites, podcasts, etc. *There is no required text for this course that you need to purchase.* The majority of materials are freely available online or through the York library system. You may need to purchase some materials (e.g. streaming videos) for a nominal fee.

This course has a strong focus on current affairs and the real-time events we are living through. Subsequently, you can expect materials to be added, dropped, modified throughout the course with some regularity, and I welcome student contributions to these materials as we go through the course. In essence, the reading list is not fixed, but rather a launch pad for exploring the key themes, concepts, and real-world activities within the broad realm of management and sustainability.

ORGANIZATION OF THE COURSE

This is an in-person course that meets weekly during the term at the time and place designated.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS FOR TAKING THE COURSE

eClass is the online learning platform used in this course for posting course materials, announcements, assignment submissions, grades, etc.

Computing resources:

[Student Guide to eClass](#)

[Computing for Students Website](#)

[Student Guide to eLearning at York University](#)

COURSE COMPONENTS & EVALUATION

Learning log & reflective assessments	35%
Book review & presentation	20%
Sustainable enterprise case study (Group project)	30%
Class contribution / Participation	15%

Learning log & reflective assessments (35%)

You will maintain a learning log throughout the semester as an ongoing record of your work in the course. The log is a place to record and synthesize key ideas, themes, concepts, and so on. You can think of it as a detailed set of class notes. Inspiration for the log can come from a wide variety of sources including course readings, lecture content, conversations with classmates and/or instructor, the nightly news, or even a social media feed. Learning logs will be submitted for grading in weeks 4 and 12 along with a reflective assessment detailing what you have learned and how your thinking has developed over the term.

Book review & presentation (20%)

This assignment gives you the opportunity to explore and analyze a book of your choosing that relates to course themes. I will provide a list of books to choose from including many recent texts and even some older classics. You are free to examine a book not on the list – just be sure to discuss it with me first for approval. Be prepared to share a short presentation and to participate in a book-club-style panel with the class – this allows us to learn from each other and cover a very broad range of material.

Sustainable enterprise case study. Report & presentation (30%)

This group project is an opportunity for students to discover, research, and report back to the class on an enterprise that has made a firm commitment to managing-for-sustainability. The purpose of the project is to use the concepts and tools learned in the course to conduct an in-depth case study and critical analysis of a real-world organization or industry. We aim to understand the sustainability merits of the enterprise, along with a clear-eyed assessment of the shortcomings relative to the benchmark of 'truly sustainable.' Ideally, as a class we will discover promising examples of business models and initiatives that meaningfully address global sustainability challenges.

Class contribution / Participation (15%)

This class rests heavily on discussion-based learning - engaged class discussions are essential to individual and group learning in this course. All present are expected to actively participate by asking relevant questions, contributing novel insights, providing provocative (and respectful) critique, etc. Given the nature of the course design and the focus on applied, experiential learning, class attendance is particularly important.

COURSE POLICIES**Late Assignments**

You are expected to submit assignments on time.

Grade Reappraisals

Students may, with sufficient academic grounds, request that a grade in the course be reappraised. A written request for reappraisal must be submitted to the course director within one week of receiving your grade, and must specify (a) what the student would like re-graded (i.e. specific questions, entire exam, etc.) and (b) a clear justification for why re-grading is necessary. The course director may refuse to reappraise if sufficient academic grounds are not demonstrated. Students need to be aware that a request for a grade reappraisal may result in the original grade being raised, lowered or confirmed. For further information see:

<http://calendars.registrar.yorku.ca/2014-2015/policies/petitions/index.htm>

IMPORTANT UNIVERSITY/LA&PS/SCHOOL REGULATIONS

There are a number of important policies that apply to all ADMS courses. As a student in this course it is your responsibility to carefully review, understand, and follow these regulations. These policies cover the following topics:

- Deferred exams
- Academic Honesty
- Grading Scheme and Feedback Policy
- In-Class Tests and Exams – the 20% Rule
- Reappraisals
- Accommodation Procedures
- Religious Accommodation
- Academic Accommodation for Students with Disabilities (Senate Policy)

Complete details can be found here: <http://sas.laps.yorku.ca/students/>.

COURSE CALENDAR & READINGS

Note: The detailed calendar/readings will be posted on eClass in the form of a 'living document.' To maximize the applied and experiential aspects of the course, the schedule will be flexible to allow for in-depth explorations of emergent issues and/or to take advantage of timely opportunities for engaged and immersive learning. Specification of class content and assigned readings (etc.) will be provided in an ongoing manner throughout the term. Changes, modifications, additions should be expected.

ACT I: PANORAMA (Weeks 1-4):

A high-level overview of the current context and status of sustainability management and introduction of key concepts, themes, and tensions. The gap between mainstream sustainability practice and a truly sustainable future will be highlighted.

ACT II: DIGGING IN (Weeks 5-10):

We will take a topical approach to explore select sustainability management issues in greater depth, including environmental and social breakdown, sustainability frameworks and metrics, design and the circular economy, leading exemplars in corporate sustainability, and alternative economic models. These topics will be paired with and facilitated by book review presentations and panels.

ACT III: PATHS FORWARD (Weeks 11-12):

In the final two classes groups will present their sustainable enterprise case studies.

Sample materials:

- . Video: [The Corporation – Feature, Documentary](#)
- . Marcus, Joel, Elizabeth C. Kurucz, and Barry A. Colbert. 2010. "Conceptions of the Business-Society-Nature Interface: Implications for Management Scholarship." *Business & Society* 49(3):402–38.
- . 2020. *Corporate Knights Magazine* 19(1)
- . [Wu, Tim. 2020. "That Flour You Bought Could Be the Future of the U.S. Economy." NYTimes.Com Feed, July 24.](#)
- . Video: [The Ebony Project \(Taylor Guitars\)](#)
- . [Global Reporting Initiative](#)
- . [Sorensen, Chris. 2016. "Peåk Stüff." Maclean's 129\(5\):36–38.](#)
- . [Sustainable Development Goals \(United Nations\)](#)
- . Chouinard, Y., Ellison, J., & Ridgeway, R. (2011). The Sustainable Economy. *Harvard Business Review*, 89(10), 52–62.
- . [IPCC website](#)
- . [Planetary Boundaries](#)