

# AP/ADMS 4970 3.00

## MANAGING FOR SUSTAINABILITY

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

**Winter 2025:** Section M, Tuesday 08:30, Ross South 105

**Instructor:** Dr. Joel Marcus, [marcus@yorku.ca](mailto:marcus@yorku.ca)

**Office Hours:** Tuesday 11:30-12:30, 205 Atkinson Building

**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. magazine issue, streaming video) for a nominal fee (total cost estimate < \$20).

This course has a strong focus on current affairs and the real-time events. 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 general, 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 for posting course materials, announcements, assignment submissions, grades, etc. In addition, this course will require a substantial degree of pen-and-paper written work and physical paper submissions.

### COURSE COMPONENTS & EVALUATION

Component	Type	%
Learning log	Individual	25%
Reflective assessments	Individual	15%
Quizzes	Individual	10%
Book review	Pairs presentation	15%
'Truly sustainable' pitch competition	Group presentation	15%
Class contribution / Participation	Individual	20%

Detailed guidelines for each course component will be provided during the term.

#### Learning log (25%)

You will maintain a learning log throughout the semester as an ongoing record of your work in the course – in essence, a detailed set of course notes. The log is a place to record course material, synthesize and integrate key concepts/themes, and to work out your own thinking on the issues. Learning logs will be submitted for grading in weeks 4 and 12.

#### Reflective assessments (15%)

Reflective assessments are a summative component of the learning log. They represent a higher-level, integrative analysis detailing *what* and *how* you've learned in the course. These will be written during class in weeks 4 and 12 in response to prompt questions provided by the instructor.

#### Quizzes (10%)

Regular, short quizzes will be completed throughout the term to assess familiarity with assigned materials and class content.

#### Book review (15%)

This assignment gives you the opportunity to explore and analyze a book of your choosing that relates to course themes. Students will work in pairs (formed by the instructor) and present their reviews in class. Book reviews promote shared learning and allow us to survey a broad range of sustainability-related content.

#### 'Truly sustainable' pitch competition (15%)

This course-end activity advances our class quest for pathways to truly sustainable outcomes. Groups will compete for the prize of 'most sustainable' using the concepts and principles learned

in the course, against a benchmark of fit in a truly sustainable future. The focal topic of the competition will change each term and will draw from a wide range of potential subjects (e.g. organization, industry, product category, production methods, supply chain, development initiatives, government policy, etc.). Pitches will be judged by the instructor and students alike.

### **Class contribution / Participation (20%)**

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. Class attendance is necessary, but not sufficient, for engaged class participation.

## **COURSE POLICIES**

### **Submission Deadlines**

Submission deadlines are firm.

### **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:

### **AI and Turnitin**

In this course students are required to submit work containing only their own (i.e., self-generated) ideas, analysis, and writing with full and proper citation of any external content. The use of AI tools to generate submissions is not permitted. The instructor may request and review working notes and drafts for any submission at any time.

In this course all electronic submissions to eClass dropboxes will be screened using turnitin prior to evaluation. turnitin is a plagiarism detection service that faculty use on a voluntary basis.

Additional student information can be found at [https://lthelp.yorku.ca/assignments-students/submit-turnitin-assignment?from\\_search=58566697](https://lthelp.yorku.ca/assignments-students/submit-turnitin-assignment?from_search=58566697)

## **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: <https://www.yorku.ca/laps/sas/academic-resources/common-course-policies/>

<b>COURSE CALENDAR &amp; READINGS</b>
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*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 facilitated by book review presentations.

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

The 'Truly sustainable' pitch competition and final reflections will take place.

**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](#)