

ENVIR 502
Business Strategy and the Natural Environment
Spring 2016

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“office hours” by appointment

Please see website <http://faculty.washington.edu/lavery/ENVIR502/> for the following:

Schedule of course readings
Details on written assignments and research project
Access to Harvard cases
Archive of emails to class

Course readings are on Canvas
(excluding web links and Harvard cases)

Course overview and purpose

This is a core course for the Environmental Management Graduate Certificate offered by the Program on the Environment. The course is open to all University of Washington graduate students who are interested in “sustainable” or “green” business.

In this course we will address one of the most important challenges facing contemporary business: how firms can address the variety of pressures to become more “sustainable”—that is, reducing negative ecological and social impacts—while still meeting the needs of customers and achieving traditional indicators of success such as profit and return on invested capital.

The subject matter is as wide as is the field of business. We will draw upon research and practice in marketing, manufacturing/operations/technology, finance, accounting, organizations, and strategy, and foundational theory from economics, sociology, psychology, and political science. Topics will be drawn from current major concerns such as climate, water, toxics, and food.

The class is designed as a seminar. I use the term *seminar* to capture two related objectives: [1] each participant will be a contributor, and [2] class sessions will involve thoughtful and critical discussions of the assigned readings and cases. This is not a lecture class with one-way information flow.

I encourage an analytical approach in class sessions, written work, and presentations. The term *analytical* indicates seeking to identify underlying problems and issues, evaluating the theories and evidence presented, and comparing and contrasting across different readings and perspectives. An analytical approach contrasts both with descriptive (compiling facts, definitions, and lists) and argumentative (mustering evidence in support of a pre-established position) approaches. While these other approaches (descriptive and argumentative) certainly have their roles, in my opinion the analytical approach is the ultimate purpose of the university.

Expectations

Students are expected to demonstrate the level of motivation, responsibility, and quality of work consistent with the explicit and implicit expectations associated with study at a leading research university. Quality work requires thinking critically and systematically, writing clearly, and communicating ideas and arguments in a seminar format.

Every student should be prepared to make high quality contributions at every class session based upon assigned material. Studying (not just simply reading) assigned readings and cases is necessary for students to meet expectations for contribution.

Grades

Grades will be based on three equally weighted requirements: contribution to the class, a research project (typically a group project), and individual written work. There are no quizzes or exams.

• *Contribution to class*

In a seminar class, we benefit collectively from the contributions of everyone, and thus a relatively high percentage of the grade is from contribution to class discussion. (I am open to other ideas — such as discussion boards, blogs, etc. — that might supplement class discussion that thus enhance the benefits of individuals' contribution. to class. Please let me know if you have ideas in this regard.)

Because of the relatively high importance of this element in determining the grade, you should know my thoughts about and how I evaluate contribution to class. Both quality and quantity are important and are distinct considerations. Quality of contribution is not “airtime.”

The best contributions to discussion demonstrate:

1. Identification of issues and competing ideas
2. Application of facts, models, and analysis
3. Responsiveness to the contribution of others

I have these suggestions for preparing for class discussion and making valuable contributions:

1. For each assigned reading, be prepared to offer a brief (one minute) oral summary. What is its purpose? What are its major points? How would you compare and contrast it with other readings?

2. Be prepared to describe and discuss what the reading contributes to addressing the course's fundamental questions. What are the models, theories, and/or principles presented?

3. For cases on specific companies, be prepared to address the situation that the managers of this firm face: if you had two minutes of their time, what would you recommend that they do, and why?

Although I emphasize an analytical approach, there certainly is room for individual opinion. Recognizing/acknowledging pre-conceptions and personal opinions is an important step in thinking critically about important ideas, but is not a substitute for logic or evidence.

• **Research project**

The research project (typically this will be a group project) will involve a proposal, an interim/progress presentation, and a final report and presentation. The subject of the research project can be an individual firm, an industry, or a current issue in sustainable business. Any of these will provide the opportunity to explore the challenge of being both profitable and sustainable. I encourage you to work with people who have different backgrounds in terms of major/option/concentration and experience. The ideal project will both be valuable to you as an individual (e.g., of inherent interest and/or contributing to other work you are doing) and be valuable and interesting for the rest of us to hear and think about. Application of coursework is essential for this project.

Details of each requirement will be posted on the course website and discussed in class.

• **Individual written work**

There will be three required individual written assignments. Details of each requirement will be posted on the course website and discussed in class.

As a side note, I think it is good practice to be writing down ideas on a regular basis. For example, the suggestions I have offered (above) on preparation for class discussion/contribution for class could be basis of your notes about each assigned reading.

Policies

1. Strict adherence to University of Washington standards with respect to academic integrity is expected implicitly by enrollment in this course.
2. If I suspect that a student or group has committed plagiarism, I will follow established UW procedures for addressing the matter. If a student or group has committed plagiarism, I will assign a grade of zero for that project or assignment. Instances of plagiarism will not be excused due to a professed lack of understanding or claims that you did not mean to plagiarize. If you have any questions, PLEASE ASK!
3. E-mail sent to your UW account is considered by the University to be official communication. I will send notices, information, and updates regarding the class to an automatically generated list of currently enrolled students, and it is your responsibility to receive these e-mails.
4. Late assignments will receive a substantial penalty.

Schedule

Assignments for individual class sessions and key dates (including due dates for research project components and individual assignments) will be posted on the course web page.