Course readings
[1] Case packet available at Rams Copy Center, 4144 University Way, phone: 632-6630

Course overview, philosophy, and approach
This course, as one of three core courses for the Graduate Certificate in Environmental Management, has been developed based on a fundamental precept: that the most important environmental problems of our era require that professionals in diverse fields have the motivation, perspective, and skills to engage in creative, multidisciplinary problem-solving. Specifically, the EM Program and this course seek to bring together graduate students from business, the sciences, and public policy to addresses some of the “great questions” of environmental management. While the substantive focus in this course is on frameworks from business disciplines, we believe that engaging the perspectives of other fields is essential to the course and is a model for how professionals must work together.

The course purpose is to address fundamental thinking and emerging ideas in the study of the relationship between business and natural environment. I take it as a given that all business activity (as does human activity in general) has the potential for negative impacts (e.g., pollution, resource depletion, and alteration of systems) on the natural world. From a broad perspective, these impacts are a controllable variable: altering or foregoing particular activities can reduce impacts. Yet often businesses (and individuals) are unwilling to do so. The reason is that there is a cost of not engaging in a given activity – or altering it to reduce its environmental impacts.

For many years, the dominant perspective on this type of situation was based on the concept of “externalities” from economics. That is, if a business activity generates externalities, eliminating these externalities is seen as an added cost to business. This thinking is still obvious in many public policy debates, such as the U.S. government’s rejection in 2001 of the Kyoto Protocol.

An emerging, contrary viewpoint is that understanding the natural environment represents profit opportunities for business. A straightforward example is that waste reduction is seen as both an environmental benefit and an economic benefit. At a more profound level, some argue (see McDonough & Braungart, 2002, Cradle to cradle: Remaking the way we make things, New York: North Point Press) that the greatest profit opportunities lie in redesigning products and processes to emulate natural systems.
In this course, these two views are starting points to examine the way in which business strategy responds to the natural environment. I do not feel that these alternative viewpoints, either in isolation or combination, capture the complete story. Therefore, in this course we will use fundamental models and concepts from business disciplines – accounting, marketing, and operations, as well as strategy – to gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between business and the environment. Where are the opportunities for profit? Under what conditions do markets fail? Is it possible for a business to achieve sustainable profits while its activities are sustainable for the environment as well?

Requirements, Expectations, and Grading
A detailed schedule identifies specific reading assignments. In general, students are expected to demonstrate the level of motivation, responsibility, and quality of work consistent with the explicit and implicit expectations associated with graduate study at a leading research university. Every student should be prepared to make high quality contribution at every class session based upon assigned material. This requires study, not simply reading, of these assigned articles and cases. Each written assignment (schedule to be announced) must be completed and submitted by the beginning of the class session at which it is due. Strict adherence to University of Washington standards with respect to academic integrity is expected implicitly by enrollment in this course. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to ask me.

I expect that each student will contribute and help others benefit from her/his particular background and expertise, including models and knowledge from specific disciplines. Nevertheless, some expectations cross all disciplines: thinking critically and systematically, writing clearly, and communicating ideas and arguments in a seminar format. I assume we are all familiar with arguments addressing business and the environment that devolve into empty rhetoric. I feel it is my duty to insist that all assertions will be supported by logic and facts, and I expect that students will hold me and each other to this standard as well. I desire and anticipate a vigorous exploration of alternative points of view, but this must be carried out with unwavering respect for others.

As we desire students from a variety of backgrounds, there are no specific business prerequisites. Familiarity with basic concepts of economics and statistics will be necessary to engage fully in the readings and discussion. By design, the course can serve as an advanced elective for students studying business and as a “business principles” course for students in the sciences, public policy, engineering, and other fields.

Each student will be assigned a grade that represents my judgment as to the student’s accomplishment and contribution in the course. The weighting in determining the grade will be split equally among three components: contribution to class discussion, individual written assignments, and a group research project. Details for each component will be provided. If it is clear to me that the contribution of an individual to the group research project is significantly above or below that of other group members, the grade for the individual will be adjusted accordingly, up or down from the grade assigned the group.
Schedule of class sessions

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I. The setting: Business and the environment

Week 1
January 6
Course overview, purpose, and introduction

January 8

Week 2
January 13

January 15

II. Business functions and the environment

Week 3
Environmental Accounting
January 20

January 22
“Green Marketing”

Week 4
Sustainable manufacturing and operations
January 27

January 29
Week 5
February 3

February 5
Mid-term reports on group research projects

III. Business strategy and the environment

Week 6
February 10
*Competitive advantage*


February 12


Week 7
February 17

February 19
*Managing corporate change*


Week 8
February 24

February 26

Week 9
March 2
*Achieving sustainable profits and environmental sustainability*


March 4

Week 10
March 9
Presentations: group research projects

March 11
Presentations: group research projects