SUMA 4025: Sustainability Communications Strategy and Reporting
Lecturer: Judy Sandford, MBA, GRI Certified
Spring 2014

Instructor Information

Judy is Senior Strategist, Sustainability Communications, at Addison—a brand strategy and communications design firm. She founded Addison’s sustainability practice in 2007, and consults with some of the world’s largest corporations on best practices in sustainability reporting and related communications. She has run corporate responsibility reporting workshops and webinars, and has co-presented on sustainability issues with SustainAbility, Pace Global and CSE in addition to teaching a sustainability reporting class at NYU Stern School of Business and the Earth Institute at Columbia University. She holds a BA degree in English from Trinity College in Hartford, and an MBA in Marketing with a focus on Corporate Social Responsibility from NYU Stern School of Business.

Course Overview

The purpose of this course is to provide an overview of trends and best practices in corporate communications relating to sustainability, with a particular focus on global sustainability reporting frameworks and green marketing communications.

It is designed for those who hold/will hold positions in organizations with responsibilities for communicating the sustainability goals, challenges and achievements, as well as accurately and honestly communicating the environmental aspects of an organization’s products and services. Increasingly, large corporations are creating c-suite roles or dedicated departments to oversee this function. More typically, multiple functions contribute information such as: Corporate Communications, Marketing, Community Affairs, Public Policy, Environmental Health & Safety, R&D, Facilities, Operations and Legal. Benefits of reporting range from building trust with stakeholders, and uncovering risks and opportunities; to contributing to stronger long-term business strategy, and creating new products and services.

At present, the US government does not mandate formal reporting on sustainability. However, there is a growing trend for non-financial issues (environmental, social and governance) to be included in financial risk discussions. In 2010, the US Securities and Exchange Commission created guidelines for companies to report on climate change risks in their proxy statements. Companies reporting globally may be required to report in countries (mandatory in at least 16), or by certain stock exchanges (4 have implemented mandatory guidelines and 7 are considering it). And some US states and companies require such reporting for procurement purposes.

Furthermore, given the enactment of The California Transparency in Supply Chains Act (SB 657) and proposal of similar laws protecting human rights, including Section 1502 of the Dodd-Frank Act and HR 2759, the Business Transparency on Trafficking & Slavery Act, it has become clear that the need for corporate transparency is becoming more widely acknowledged.

Communications is an important way for the company to convey to a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, suppliers, customers and investors, how its ESG policies, practices and practices are helping the company to reduce and manage risk. Good risk management can help companies avoid negative publicity, business interruptions, potential lawsuits, public protests, and a loss of consumer trust, all of which can impact shareholder value. Not only does transparency provide shareholders with confidence that companies are adequately managing such risks, but it can help to build trust with all stakeholders. Operating responsibly provides a corporation with a social license to operate.

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1 Sustainability Reporting Course - Administered by ISOS Group, New York, NY, May 31–June 1, 2012
In contrast, the US government regulates green marketing through the Federal Trade Commission, although rules are vague and updates are forthcoming. This course will outline what laws and best practices executives must be aware of in communicating the environmental impacts and benefits of products and services. Topics will include marketing as part of the problem and the solution: greenwashing and claim substantiation, eco-labeling, the psychology of communicating environmental issues, and the marketing of environmental causes.

This course satisfies the M.S. in Sustainability Management requirements in Public Policy and General and Financial Management. This course is also approved for the Certificate in Sustainability Analytics requirements.

**Learning Objectives**

At the end of this course, students will:

- Be able to analyze an organization’s work processes and operations in order to understand how it can reduce resource utilization and environmental impact in terms of analyzing and reporting/marketing
- Be able to demonstrate a working knowledge of the processes through which sustainability rules and regulations are created by governments and implemented by organizations
- Be able to clearly show an ability to apply their understanding of the basic principles and theories of sustainability management as a frame for strategic planning, and the management of people, finances and operations toward sustainability goals
- Display an ability to work collaboratively to develop strategies promoting wide ranging sustainable solutions and to effectively communicate these plans in a professional environment

**Reading (Required and Recommended)**

Required readings, which are indicated in the course schedule below, are selected from a broad range of relevant sources and will be listed in Courseworks. Any readings that are not available through Courseworks will be placed on reserve at the Library and/or made available for purchase.

Internet and current business, popular, and environmental press will be a supporting resource for our exploration of sustainability reporting and green marketing issues. You will find links to relevant websites, articles, reports, and videos on Courseworks and in the schedule:

Subscribe to at least one newsletter in each of the following categories:

Corporate sustainability news/sustainability reporting:
- http://3blmedia.com/
- http://www.csrwire.com/
- http://www.corporateregister.com/
- http://www.environmentalleader.com/
- http://www.greenbiz.com/
- http://grist.org/
- http://www.sustainablebrands.com/
- www.responsible-investor.com/
- www.socialfunds.com
Green marketing websites:
http://environment.nationalgeographic.com/environment/green-guide/
http://www.biggreenpurse.com/
http://www.greenerchoices.org/
http://www.goodguide.com/
http://www.newdream.org/
http://www.treehugger.com/

Resources
Unless communicated otherwise, Columbia University's platform Courseworks will be used to distribute reading materials, lecture slides, and to turn in assignments.

Course Requirements and Evaluation/Grading (Subject to Change for 2014)

Attendance and participation -- Weighted 10%.
At the opening of each class, there will be a 15-20 minute free-form discussion of relevant news events relating to the course topics. Students are asked to subscribe to at least two e-newsletters to inform this discussion and participate weekly. Students may also raise questions about, and discuss challenges they encounter with, the reporting exercise. There will also be an opportunity to participate in role-plays and group breakout sessions. Teaching assistant(s) will track student attendance and participation in each class.

Postings on our Courseworks webpage at Discussions – Weighted 45%.
For 11 classes, students are required to complete a short posting in response to that week’s reading assignment (see following schedule). All postings are required to receive full points. The posting, approximately one paragraph in length, should provide a viewpoint on the readings, or use the information from the readings to judge corporate communications. All entries should be posted by midnight before the day of class the week they are assigned. Students are encouraged to comment on each other’s posts. Grades will be assigned according the strength of the viewpoint, including supportive evidence, which may come from readings, real-life experience, or current events.

A final sustainability report (graded by lecturer – Weighted 30%); and related team presentation (graded by peers –Weighted 15%).
Students will break into consulting teams of 3-4. Optimally, teams should include a variety of career/experience backgrounds in sustainability (such as environment, social issues, communications, finance). By the third class, each team should select a small business or non-profit organization for which to develop a sustainability report. The organization should have a reporting year-end December 31. If students have trouble identifying an organization, the lecturer/SUMA program can assist. An in-class role-play exercise will prepare students for conducting stakeholder engagement with their chosen organization.

Over the next ten weeks, the teams will interview internal and external stakeholders, gather information from internal sources and records, review any external media coverage, and publish a report using the GRI "Let’s Report” template Level C (2008). Final report should be 17-20 pages long, single-sided and single spaced with sources footnoted within the template. The lecturer will grade the reports from A+ to F based on the following criteria (as defined in the GRI G3.1 Guidelines):

- Content: Materiality, Stakeholder Inclusiveness, Sustainability Context, Completeness (50%)
- Quality: Balance, Comparability, Accuracy, Timeliness, Clarity, Reliability (50%)
In our last two classes, each team will make a 20-minute presentation with 5-10 slides on their challenges and accomplishments in the reporting process, and what lessons they learned. Students should take equal responsibility in preparing the report and participating in the presentation. The class will be encouraged to ask questions. Student peers will grade the quality of the final presentations with grades from A+ to C for each of the following criteria:

- How well team addressed challenges in collecting information and created benchmarks (20%)
- How well team was able to gather data, and explained omissions if data unavailable (20%)
- How well team explained low sustainability performance, and discussed organization's plan to improve (20%)
- How well teams helped the organization set short- and long-term goals (20%)
- Clarity of oral and visual presentation (20%)
Policies and Expectations: Attendance, Late Papers, Missed Tests, Class Behaviors and Civility

The class will be co-created by students through their discoveries, contributions, and active participation. Students are expected to arrive on time, attend all classes, and to stay until the end of class unless they have notified the instructor at the beginning of the session that they will be leaving early.

Mobile devices must be turned off during class. Students are responsible for all reading and homework assignments, and must post assignments on time. Late assignments will be marked down a grade.

Policies and Expectations:

Academic Integrity

The School of Continuing Education does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Those students who violate the Code of Academic and Professional Conduct will be subject to the Dean’s Disciplinary Procedures. The Code of Academic and Professional Conduct can be viewed online: http://ce.columbia.edu/node/217

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. The School provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research:
http://library.columbia.edu/help/howto/endnote.html

Violations of the Code of Academic and Professional Conduct will be reported to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

Accessibility Statement

Columbia is committed to providing equal access to qualified students with documented disabilities. A student’s disability status and reasonable accommodations are individually determined based upon disability documentation and related information gathered through the intake process. For more information regarding this service, please visit the University’s Health Services website:
http://health.columbia.edu/services/ods/support
## Course Schedule
(Subject to changes that will be announced in class)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics &amp; Activities</th>
<th>Reading (due on this date)</th>
<th>Assignments (due on this date)</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week 1</strong></td>
<td><strong>Course Introduction</strong></td>
<td><strong>Pre-Course Prep</strong></td>
<td><strong>Post Student Information Form (Appendix A)</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>OVERVIEW: CORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY REPORTING</strong></td>
<td>- <em>The Ceres Roadmap for Sustainability</em> (Stakeholder Engagement &amp; Disclosure sections)</td>
<td><strong>Subscribe to at least two sources of sustainability news to support participation</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Sustainability Reporting 101</strong></td>
<td>- GRI G3.1 <em>summary sheet</em></td>
<td>in Current Issues discussions and weekly posts (see Recommended Reading)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>GRI Guidelines</strong></td>
<td>- GRI “Let’s Report” Template and Explanation Summary</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Reporting Process (Prepare, Connect, Define, Monitor, Report)</strong></td>
<td>- <em>Pathways: The GRI sustainability reporting cycle:</em> A Handbook for small and not-so-small organizations (GRI)(approx. $60 per copy unless getting group discount)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Reporting feedback loop—ongoing comms</strong></td>
<td>- UN Global Compact</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Stakeholder Dialogue Role-Play Preparation and Team Assignments</strong></td>
<td>- <em>Corporate Register</em> ( aggregator site for reports)</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>- Baue and Murninghan, <em>The Accountability Web</em> (“The Progression from Accountability 1.0 to Accountability 2.0”)</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Week 2</strong></td>
<td><strong>Current Issues Discussion</strong></td>
<td><strong>“R. Edward Freeman on Stakeholder Theory”</strong></td>
<td><strong>One paragraph posting on a corporation’s environmental sustainability stakeholder engagement process as presented in their sustainability report online. How does it compare with best practice?</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Good and Bad Reports</strong></td>
<td><strong>Rate the Raters Phase Four:</strong> The Necessary Future of Ratings (SustainAbility, July 2011); scan key points</td>
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<td><strong>Rankings and Ratings (video)</strong></td>
<td><strong>CSRHub.com</strong> (review high level)</td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Stakeholder Theory &amp; Stakeholder Engagement Overview</strong></td>
<td><strong>AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard (AA1000SES)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td><strong>Potential Guest: Michael Sadowski, SustainAbility</strong></td>
<td><strong>AccountAbility &amp; UNEP: From Words to Action: The Stakeholder Engagement Manual (Volumes One &amp; Two)</strong> (review high level)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Week 3</td>
<td>Current Issues Discussion</td>
<td><strong>AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard</strong> (<a href="#">AA1000SES</a>)</td>
<td>One paragraph posting on your stakeholder position for the in-class Role Play. Submit <strong>Team List</strong> and <strong>Selected Organization</strong> for Final Report.</td>
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</table>
|  | Shareholder Resolutions | **AccountAbility & UNEP: From Words to Action: The Stakeholder Engagement Manual** ([Volumes One & Two](#))  
**2012 Shareholder Resolutions**, Trucost | |
|  | In-class stakeholder Role Play in teams | **AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#))  
**AccountAbility & UNEP: From Words to Action: The Stakeholder Engagement Manual** ([Volumes One & Two](#))  
**2012 Shareholder Resolutions**, Trucost | |

| Week 4 | Current Issues Discussion | **GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines**  
**AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#)) | One paragraph posting on kick-off meeting with organization/small business you will be conducting GRI report for. Assess internal and external stakeholders viewpoints and reporting challenges. |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Stakeholder Inclusivity & Corporate Responsiveness | **GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines**  
**AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#)) | |
|  | Social License to Operate | **AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#)) | |
|  | Communicating Sustainability to Investors | **AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#)) | |
|  | Potential Guest: **Julie Tanner**, Christian Brothers Investment Services; Board Member, ICCR | **AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#))  
**GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines** | |

| Week 5 | Current Issues Discussion | **GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines** (Part I: Defining Content, Quality and Boundary, pp. 7-19)  
**AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#))  
**Sustainability Context—What is it?**, by Mark McElroy (SustainableBrands.com, July 18, 2011)  
**Building a Frame of Reference: The Importance of Sustainability Context**, by Jennifer Elks (Sustainable Brands, July 30, 2012)  
**Business and Human Rights Resource Centre**  
**Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility**  
**The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment** | One paragraph posting on the quality of materiality and sustainability context in a corporate sustainability report. Is the materiality process explained? Easy to understand for a lay reader? Is data provided in a way that its significance is clear? List examples. How could the company improve? |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Arriving at Material Issues; what to include in a report | **GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines** (Part I: Defining Content, Quality and Boundary, pp. 7-19)  
**AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#))  
**Sustainability Context—What is it?**, by Mark McElroy (SustainableBrands.com, July 18, 2011)  
**Building a Frame of Reference: The Importance of Sustainability Context**, by Jennifer Elks (Sustainable Brands, July 30, 2012)  
**Business and Human Rights Resource Centre**  
**Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility**  
**The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment** | |
|  | Expressing material issues | **GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines** (Part I: Defining Content, Quality and Boundary, pp. 7-19)  
**AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#))  
**Sustainability Context—What is it?**, by Mark McElroy (SustainableBrands.com, July 18, 2011)  
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**Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility**  
**The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment** | |
|  | Sustainability Context—the next hurdle for corporate reporting | **GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines** (Part I: Defining Content, Quality and Boundary, pp. 7-19)  
**AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#))  
**Sustainability Context—What is it?**, by Mark McElroy (SustainableBrands.com, July 18, 2011)  
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**Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility**  
**The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment** | |
|  | Potential Guest: **Bill Baue**, Open Eye World | **GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines** (Part I: Defining Content, Quality and Boundary, pp. 7-19)  
**AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard** ([AA1000SES](#))  
**Sustainability Context—What is it?**, by Mark McElroy (SustainableBrands.com, July 18, 2011)  
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**Business and Human Rights Resource Centre**  
**Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility**  
**The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment** | |
| Week 6 | Current Issues Discussion | Principals of Strong Reporting *(Responsiveness, Completeness, Balance, Comparability, Accuracy, Timeliness, Clarity, Reliability, Boundary-Setting)* | **• **GRI G3.1 Sustainability Reporting Guidelines  
**• **AccountAbility AA1000 Stakeholder Engagement Standard *(AA1000SES)*  
**• **The Sustainable Investor Research Analyst Network (SIRAN) *Statement on Corporate Responsibility Reporting* 2011  
| | Sustainability Context Break-out groups by assigned company | One paragraph posting evaluating the principles of strong reporting used in a corporate sustainability report (to be assigned to break-out groups). |
| | Report Publicity | | |
| | Post Report Engagement | | |

| Week 7 | Current Issues Discussion | Accountability: Assurance & Auditing  
Integrated Reporting Trend—bringing together financial and “non-financial” reporting  
GRI G4—the next edition  
Extensible Business Reporting Language (XBRL) | **• **CorporateRegister.com, *Assure View - The CSR Assurance Statement Report*  
**• **Eccles, Krzus & Watson, “*Integrated Reporting Requires Integrated Auditing*”  
**• **IntegratedReporting.org  
**• **G4 Developments (GRI)  
**• **GRI XBRL Taxonomy  
| | Potential Guest from Business for Social Responsibility, or AccountAbility | One paragraph posting on the pros and cons of different types of report assurance. Or  
| | | Critique an integrated report against best practices. |
### Week 8

**Current Issues Discussion**

Lessons learned in crisis communications from BP Oil Spill

In-class crisis Communications Role Play on Product Responsibility at Apple

- **Five Lessons From the BP Oil Spill** by Andrew Winston (HBR Blog Network, June 3, 2010)
- **Lessons in Crisis Communications: An analysis of BP’s response to the Gulf oil disaster**, by Stacey Getz, April 18, 2011, Taproot Creative
- **5 Digital PR Lessons from BP's Oil Spill Response**, by Ian Capstick, July 12, 2010
- Media Shift, PBS.org.
- **Case study** on the BP Oil Spill from experts in Business Continuity, Risk Management, Incident Management and Crisis Communications. (Lootok)

One paragraph posting on top three lessons learned in crisis communications from the BP Oil Spill.

### Week 9

**Current Issues Discussion**

OVERVIEW: GREEN MARKETING

Rules of Green Marketing

Levels of green consumerism

Greenwashing vs. claim substantiation

Role of Companies

Eco-labeling

ISO14024

- **New Rules of Green Marketing, by Jacquelyn A. Ottman** (Berrett-Koehler, 2011) Chapters 1, 6, 7 (downloadable on iBooks, etc, $9.99)
- GreenMarketing.com/blog (Ottman)
- Greenwash Guide, Futerra
- **Greenwashing Report 2010**, (Terra Choice)
- EcoPromising, (Forum for the Future, 2008)
- **Signed, Sealed... Delivered?: Behind Certifications and Beyond Labels**, SustainAbility, 2011.
- Federal Trade Commission Green Guide
- **Proposed revisions to FTC Green Guide**

Optional:

- **ISO14024** (Optional: International Standards Organization, best practices on Environmental Labels and Declarations, cost approx. 75 USD)

One paragraph posting on why a certain product is greenwashing according to the criteria in the readings.
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<tr>
<th>Week 10</th>
<th>Current Issues Discussion</th>
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</table>
| Week 13 | Team Oral Presentations, Q&A, and Peer reviews | Final Written GRI Reports Due  
Selected In-Class Presentations Due |
|---------|-----------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Week 14 | Team Oral Presentations, Q&A, and Peer Reviews  
Course Wrap-Up | Selected In-Class Presentations Due |
APPENDIX A

Student Information Page

Please complete this information page and post to the Courseworks site before the first class meeting. I will use this information to plan the semester, to get to know you, and to contact you by email or phone if the need arises. I will not share this information with anyone without your consent.

Name_______________________________ Student ID# _____________

Contact me by phone at: Home:_______________
                          Work:_______________
                          Other:_______________

My UNI email address: __________________________

Identify the degree program or certificate program you are in:

Explain why you are you taking this course and how it fits into your degree or certificate program.

What are your expectations for the course?

Briefly describe related experiences or courses that are relevant to this course:

If you require special accommodations, please indicate that below and be sure to discuss them with me soon.