Course Overview

Through sustainability reporting, a company conveys its sustainability strategy - how it’s environmental, social and governance (ESG) policies, practices and processes are helping the company to manage risk, to comply with regulations, to create value through efficiencies, and innovation. Over the course of the semester, students will learn how to successfully navigate this changing landscape of corporate sustainability reporting, and gain an understanding about how stakeholder collaboration, positive peer pressure and transparency are affecting corporate (sustainability) strategy.

Several factors are contributing to the rise in importance of sustainability reporting. The newly established Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), define sustainable development targets for the next 15 years, and should inform the context for corporate sustainability strategy. Reporting should evidence alignment with SDGs.

Implementation of the 2015 Paris Agreement will shape the landscape of climate change and carbon reporting in the years to come.

Today, 180 laws and regulatory standards exist in 45 countries calling for corporate sustainability reporting, with new EU-wide rules coming into effect in 2016. The need for mandated corporate transparency is becoming acknowledged in the US, with regulations and reporting guidance on the rise. In 2010, the US Securities and Exchange Commission created guidelines for companies to report on climate risks in their proxy statements, accelerating the integration of ESG factors in mainstream financial risk disclosures for US companies. SASB standards are now available for almost all industries. Investors and stock exchanges are also recognizing the need for transparency on corporate sustainability strategy too. So far, 4 exchanges have implemented guidelines for mandatory reporting for listed companies and the World Federation of Exchanges published new global guidance in 2015. While still largely voluntary in the US, ratings and rankings are an important driver for corporate sustainability reporting. Awards and high sustainability rankings can result in strategic advantages, such as, attracting and retaining the best talent. To reduce supply-chain risk, and achieve shared sustainability goals, long-term corporate and government contracts are increasingly evaluated based on sustainability criteria. Therefore, large revenue streams may be contingent on voluntary reporting as well.

While the class will focus on global sustainability reporting frameworks (GRI G4, CDP, Integrated Reporting, SASB, and more), rating and rankings, green marketing communications, and crisis management communications will also be covered. Students will learn tactics to effectively communicate the environmental and social impacts and benefits of business to a wide variety of stakeholders.

Designed for those who will hold positions in corporations with responsibilities for mapping and managing ESG issues relating to the business, setting sustainability goals, communicating progress towards goals, and engaging with a wide range of stakeholders, including civil society organizations, suppliers, customers and investors.
This course satisfies the M.S. in Sustainability Management requirements in **Area 1: Integrative** and **Area 5: General and Financial Management**. This course is also approved for the **Certificate in Sustainability Analytics** requirement.

**Learning Objectives**

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

- Apply the principles and theories of sustainability management as a frame for strategic planning towards organizational sustainability goals
- Identify and prioritize sustainability issues based on importance to internal and external stakeholders and impact on the environment and/or society
- Work collaboratively to develop strategies promoting sustainable solutions and to develop effective, professional communications for these plans
- Demonstrate working knowledge of how sustainability norms, rules and regulations are created by governments, NGOs, investors, companies and other stakeholder groups, and the processes needed for companies to measure, manage, and report on progress against sustainability targets

**Assignments and Grading**

1. **Attendance and participation – 10%**
   
   Attendance alone does not count towards your grade. Active participation is critical and will be tracked. Most classes will start with a 20 minute free-form discussion of news events relating to the course topics and challenges. Subscribe to at least two e-newsletters to inform this discussion and participate weekly (see ‘Recommended Readings’ section). You may also gain participation credit by making two comments per week on the discussion forum.

2. **Weekly postings on CourseWorks Discussions – 45%**
   
   For 10 classes, you will be asked to post a max 250-word posting related to the class topic and readings for the week. All postings should be submitted no later than Tuesday at Midnight before class. Grades for each posting will be assigned by:
   
   a) Point of view – did you answer the question and take a strong stance (45%)
   
b) Supporting evidence – did you use examples from your experience, readings, current events etc, to prove your point (45%)
   
c) Writing style and grammar – is it easy for the reader to grasp your main point (10%)
   
   You are encouraged to read your fellow students postings and comment (you may gain participation credit by making two comments per week on the discussion forum).

   
   **Sustainability Report**, 20-25 page paper (Graded by lecturer – 25%)
   
   In groups of 5 you will develop a sustainability report for a real business or non-profit (to be selected by week 3) and make recommendations for specific communication strategies for two distinct stakeholder groups.
During the course of the semester, groups will gather information about the organization’s sustainability strategy from internal and secondary sources and through interviews with internal and external stakeholders. Using this information, each group will produce and publish a sustainability report in accordance with the GRI G4 guidelines.

The lecturer will grade the reports from A+ to F based on the following criteria (as defined in the GRI G4 Guidelines): Content (Stakeholder Inclusiveness, Sustainability Context, Materiality, Completeness) and Quality (Balance, Comparability, Accuracy, Timeliness, Clarity, Reliability)

**Communication strategy briefs**, two 1-pagers (Graded by lecturer – 10%)

In addition to the report, you will prepare two, 1-page briefs, each outlining a specific communication strategy for a particular aspect of your sustainability report that is specifically designed for a particular stakeholder group (employees, investors, vendors, consumers, etc). The lecturer will grade the reports from A+ to F.

**Group presentation with slides**, 20 mins (Graded by peers – 10%)

During the last two classes, each group will make a 20 minute presentation followed by Q&A. Student peers will grade the quality of the final presentations from A+ to C- using a rubric (to be provided). Each presentation should cover:

- High level overview of report
- Assessment of company strategy and performance
- Proposed communication strategies
- Proposed next-steps for next reporting cycle
- Lessons learned: challenges and accomplishments

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**Policies and Expectations**

**Attendance, Late Papers, Class Behaviors and Civility**
The class will be co-created by students through their discoveries, contributions - active participation is critical. 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. Students are responsible for all reading and homework assignments, and must post assignments on time. Late assignments will be marked down a grade.

**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

Reading Materials

Each week has assigned readings that follow the topics of the course. In addition to the readings listed below, additional required readings for each class are listed in the ‘Course Schedule’ section.

Internet and current business, popular, and environmental press will be a supporting resource for our exploration of sustainability reporting and green marketing issues. You may find additional, optional, readings and materials (links to relevant websites, articles, reports, and videos) on CourseWorks in the reading folder for each class.

Required Reading

During the course of the semester we will reference the following frameworks, manuals and book:

- Weekly readings listed in course schedule (Canvas> Files > WEEK 1, WEEK 2, etc…)
- Ottman, The New Rules of Green Marketing (Book)
  *Need to purchase
- GRI Pathways, Introducing the GRI Sustainability Process: A 'How to' Handbook for all G4 Reporters
  *Need to purchase
- GRI G4: Sustainability Reporting Guidelines & Sector Supplements (Canvas> Files > GRI Resources)
- AA1000 Standard (Canvas>Resources> AA1000 Resources)
  - Stakeholder Engagement Standard (AA1000SES)
  - From Words to Actions: The Stakeholder Engagement Manual Vol. 1 The Guide to Practitioners’ Perspectives on Stakeholder Engagement
  - From Words to Actions: The Stakeholder Engagement Manual Vol. 2 The Practitioner’s Handbook on Stakeholder Engagement
  - Ceres Roadmap for Sustainability

Subscribe to at least two newsletters from the following sites:
- http://3blmedia.com/
- http://wwwcsrwire.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
- http://www.greenerchoices.org/
- http://www.goodguide.com/#
- http://www.newdream.org/
- http://www.treehugger.com/
# Course Schedule

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<tr>
<th>Session</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Readings</th>
<th>Assignments (due)</th>
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<tr>
<td>Week 1</td>
<td><strong>Sustainability Strategy and Reporting</strong></td>
<td>*Sustainable Development Goals [SDGs] [WEBSITE]</td>
<td>Subscribe to at least 2 sources of sustainability news (see 'Recommended Reading' section)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Thurs 21-Jan</td>
<td>Topics: Sustainability Context Reporting Process Frameworks &amp; Guidelines Laws and Regs</td>
<td>*AA1000 SES</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Activities: Intros Syllabus Review Lecture Term Project Discussion</td>
<td>*Ceres Roadmap for Sustainability (Stakeholder Engagement and Disclosure sections) [WEBSITE]</td>
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<td>*Baue and Murninghan, The Accountability Web</td>
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<td>*Zadek, The Five Steps to Corporate Responsibility</td>
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<td>Week 2</td>
<td><strong>Shareholder Approach vs. Stakeholder Approach</strong></td>
<td>*AA1000 SES</td>
<td>250-word posting on the level of alignment between a company’s corporate strategy and its sustainability strategy.</td>
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<td>Thurs 28-Jan</td>
<td>Topics: License to Operate Shareholder Theory Unintended Consequences Stakeholder Engagement Investor Engagement</td>
<td>*CorporateRegister.com - aggregator site for csr reports [WEBSITE]</td>
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<td>Activities: Current Issues Discussion Lecture</td>
<td>*Governance and Accountability Institute, Analysis of S&amp;P500 Companies’ ESG Reporting Trends and Capital Markets Response</td>
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<td>*Model Guidance on Reporting ESG Issues to Investors</td>
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<td>*Porter and van der Linde, Towards a New Conception of the Environment-Competitiveness Relationship</td>
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<td>*R. Edward Freeman on Stakeholder Theory</td>
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<td>*The Stakeholder Engagement Manual Vol. 1</td>
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<td><strong>Session</strong></td>
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| **Week 3**  | **Stakeholder Viewpoints** | *AA1000 SES*  
*CDP S&P 500 Report, 2014*  
*Ceres SEC Climate Disclosure Search [WEBSITE]*  
*Integrated Reporting <IR> Framework*  
*IRCC's Shareholder Resolutions*  
*Praxair Inc. Sustainable Value Report 2014 and other 2014 Reports*  
*The Stakeholder Engagement Manual Vol. 1*  
*Optional: UN Global Compact* | 250-word posting on the quality of a corporation's environmental sustainability stakeholder engagement process (as presented in their sustainability report)*.  
1. Briefly explain the process. How does it compare with best practice?  
2. With which stakeholders does the company engage? Anyone missing?  
3. How authentic does the stakeholder engagement process feel?  
*Use the same company report as previous week (GE, Merck, Shell, Bloomberg, PepsiCo, Unilever, IKEA)* |
| **Week 4**  | **Principles of Strong Reporting** | *AA1000 SES*  
*Carrots and Sticks – Sustainability Reporting Policies Worldwide –Today’s Best Practice, Tomorrow’s Trends*  
*GRI G4 Reporting Guidelines*  
*Integrated Reporting <IR> Framework*  
*Redefining Value – The New Metrics of Sustainable Business*  
*Report on Sustainable and Responsible Innovation Trends in the US (2012)*  
*The Stakeholder Engagement Manual (Volume 2)* | 250-word posting evaluating whether or not a company's sustainability report adheres to the principles of strong reporting.  
1. After reading through the company's sustainability report* make an overall assessment of how strong you feel the report is.  
2. Evaluate and discuss the report vis-a-vis each of the principles of strong reporting.  
*Use the same company report as weeks 2 and 3 GE, Merck, Shell, Bloomberg, PepsiCo, Unilever, IKEA* |
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| Week 5 Thurs 18-Feb | **Materiality: What to Report On**  
**Topics:** Sustainability Context Arriving at Material Issues  
**Activities:** Current Issues Discussion Lecture Materiality Workshop  
*GRI Pathways p. 3-18 [BOOK]*  
*Business and Human Rights Resource Center [WEBSITE]*  
*Elks, Building a Frame of Reference: The Importance of Sustainability Context [WEBSITE]*  
*GRI Sector Supplements [WEBSITE]*  
*Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility [WEBSITE]*  
*McElroy, Sustainability Context - What Is It?*  
*SASB.org - Standards Navigator [WEBSITE]*  
*Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) [WEBSITE]*  
*The Forum for Sustainable and Responsible Investment*  
**AS A GROUP:**  
Prepare an overview of your company for the materiality workshop. Post 1 write-up per team.  
Use the **attached template in the discussion board** and include the following:  
1. Describe your company in 100-200 words, include info about type of business, business model, approx. annual revenues, size, location(s), key suppliers, and any other relevant information.  
2. Identify key stakeholders  
3. Research possible organizational ESG impacts and rank them from the company perspective: high, medium or low  
4. Anticipate any reporting challenges you might encounter  

| Week 6 Thurs 25-Feb | **Effective Strategy & Quality Reporting**  
**Topics:** Ratings and Rankings What makes a good report?  
**Activities:** Current Issues Discussion Term Project Q&A  
Guest: Keith Littlejohns, Sustainability Communications Strategist at Addison  
*Rate the Raters Phase Four*  
*ClimateCounts.org [WEBSITE]*  
*CSRHub.com (browse free section) [WEBSITE]*  
**OPTIONAL: AA1000SES**  
**OPTIONAL: The Stakeholder Engagement Handbook (Vol 1)**  
250-word posting evaluating a company’s sustainability performance based on three different ratings or rankings (for the same company).  
1. Based on the three rankings, how sustainable is the company? Are the rankings with your own assessment of the company (based on its sustainability report)?  
2. How consistent are the rankings with each other? What does this tell you about the ranking systems?  
3. What does this tell you about corporate sustainability reporting?  
*Use the same company report as weeks 2, 3, and 5 (GE, Merck, Shell, Bloomberg, PepsiCo, Unilever, IKEA)* |
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<tr>
<td>Week 7</td>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>*AccountAbility: The Future of Sustainability Assurances</td>
<td>250-word posting on the pros and cons of different types of report assurance</td>
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<td>Thurs 3-Mar</td>
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<td>*Assure View - The CSR Assurance Statement Report</td>
<td>1. Describe each type of assurance</td>
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<td>*Corporate Register.com [WEBSITE]</td>
<td>- Independent Org (Audit)</td>
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<td>*Watson, Integrated Reporting Requires Integrated Auditing</td>
<td>- Commentary/NGO</td>
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<td>- Panel Review</td>
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<td>Week 8</td>
<td>Crisis Management</td>
<td>*Capstick, 5 Digital PR Lessons from BP’s Oil Spill Response</td>
<td>250-word posting on best practices for crisis communications and risk management.</td>
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<td>Thurs 10-Mar</td>
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<td>*Gertz, Lessons in Crisis Communications: An Analysis of BP’s response to the Gulf Oil Disaster</td>
<td>1. What are the top three lessons you learned about what not to do for crisis communications based on BP’s response to the oil spill in the gulf.</td>
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<td>*Winston, Five Lessons From the BP Oil Spill</td>
<td>2. How could BP have used the sustainability reporting process to improve risk management at the company?</td>
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<td>3. What effects did this crisis have on the BP brand?</td>
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<td>Thurs 18-Mar</td>
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<td><strong>SPRING BREAK - No Class</strong></td>
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<td>Session</td>
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<td>Readings</td>
<td>Assignment – due Tuesday</td>
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| Week 9    | **Impacts of Consumerism**                      | *Connecting on Climate: A Guide to Effective Climate Change Communication*  
*Gentner, Why isn't the Brain Green?*  
*Hiskes, Climate Psychology in Cartoons: Clues for Solving the Messaging Mystery*  
*Watch: The Story of Stuff Project [WEBSITE]* | 250-word posting about the global impacts of your lifestyle based on your ecological, carbon, water and slavery footprint (use calculators provided).  
1. What are the impacts of your lifestyle? Any surprises? How do you compare to others?  
2. Include suggestions for reducing your personal impact. Are they practical? How much control do you have over your impact?  
3. Discuss pros and cons of the calculators and whether or not they are useful to consumers. |
| Thurs Mar-24 |                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| Week 10   | **Marketing Strategies and Communications**     | *Ottman, Chapter 2 [BOOK]*  
*GoodGuide.com (or download the free app)*  
*Kamal, The Not-At-All-Distant Future of Green Gamification*  
*Makower, Earth Day Polling of America 2015 (read a few previous year’s too)*  
*No Impact Man Trailer - Watch the whole movie if you have time!*  
*Ogilvy Earth Study, Mainstream Green*  
*The Corporate Sustainability beauty Contest: Making Room for Full Product Transparency* | 250-words posting about using GoodGuide to review a product you currently use.  
1. Before using GoodGuide, explain what you like about the product and brand. What benefits do you derive from it?  
2. Look up your product on GoodGuide. What are some pros and cons from an ESG perspective.  
3. Did the results surprise you? Explain whether or not you will alter your purchasing habits based on the results of GoodGuide. |
<p>| Thurs 31-Mar |                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |</p>
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<td>Week 11 Thurs 7-Apr</td>
<td><strong>Establishing Credibility</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Topics:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Greenwashing, FTC Green Marketing Guidelines, Certifications&lt;br&gt;<strong>Activities:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Current Issues Lecture, Green Advertisements Discussion</td>
<td>*Ottman, Chapters 7, 8, 9 [BOOK]&lt;br&gt;*FTC Green Marketing Guidelines&lt;br&gt;*Futerra, Engage Campaign Book&lt;br&gt;*UNEP &amp; Futerra, Communicating Sustainability&lt;br&gt;*Quraishi, Fiji Water Sued for Greenwashing</td>
<td>250-word posting assessing whether a green advertisement is greenwashing or not.&lt;br&gt;1. Select a print or digital ad (no video) for a green product/service. Attach your ad to the posting.&lt;br&gt;2. Assess the product on its benefits to consumers and on its environmental merits. What issues does it aim to address? Explain if/how credibility is being established and which communication strategies are used. Is the ad green washing?&lt;br&gt;3. Who is the target demographic? Would you buy this product?</td>
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<td>Week 12 Thurs 14-Apr</td>
<td><strong>Team Presentations Q&amp;A</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>All Term Project Presentation Slides due on CourseWorks no later than midnight</td>
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<td>Week 13 Thurs 21-Apr</td>
<td><strong>Team Presentations Q&amp;A</strong></td>
<td>n/a</td>
<td>n/a</td>
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<td>Week 14 Thurs 28-Apr</td>
<td><strong>Opportunities</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Topics:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Assessing investment opportunities for profitability and positive impact&lt;br&gt;<strong>Activities:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Guest: Anton Ljunggren, Director of Design BioLite&lt;br&gt;VC Workshop&lt;br&gt;<strong>Course Wrap-Up</strong></td>
<td>*Ottman, Chapter 5 [BOOK]&lt;br&gt;*State of Green Business Report 2012 and 2015&lt;br&gt;*World Resources Institute, Tomorrow’s Markets</td>
<td>250-word posting on a sustainable business opportunity you have identified based on two or more of the trends outlined in Tomorrow’s Markets.&lt;br&gt;1. Briefly summarize the trends you selected to capitalize on.&lt;br&gt;2. Explain how your business idea aims to further the sustainable development agenda.&lt;br&gt;3. Why you believe this a viable (profitable) business idea.</td>
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<td>8-May</td>
<td><strong>Deadline for Term Project submission</strong></td>
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<td>All Term Project GRI Reports and Communication Briefs due on CourseWorks no later than midnight</td>
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