

# Bachelor Seminar

## Winter Semester 2025/26

Welcome to this year's undergraduate seminar "Sustainability Management"! In a world increasingly shaped by environmental challenges, the role of companies in driving the sustainability transition is a focal point of public debate. The modern economy presents a stark contrast: on one hand, companies like Volkswagen, whose Diesel Scandal severely harmed its sustainability reputation; on the other, brands like Patagonia, praised for their commitment to environmental stewardship.

In this course, we will explore the strategies and practices that enable firms to operate sustainably. We will examine how companies can not only reduce their negative impact but also contribute positively to society and the planet. Through a detailed study of various subdisciplines in corporate sustainability literature, we will investigate how businesses can effectively design sustainable operations. Building on this theoretical foundation, you will apply your knowledge by identifying real-world examples of both exemplary and poor sustainability practices.

The course is structured as follows: After the opening session in October, you will be assigned a corporate sustainability topic to research and develop throughout the semester. Your findings will culminate in a written report and an oral presentation to be delivered to the class in January.

By the end of the course, you will have a comprehensive understanding of the diverse approaches to sustainability management and will have gained expertise in one specific subdiscipline. You will also be able to identify the key challenges businesses face and evaluate potential solutions. Additionally, this course will help you strengthen your presentation skills, enhance your English proficiency, and provide a solid foundation for writing a term paper, which will be valuable as you prepare for your bachelor's thesis.

## Course Prerequisites and Grading

- Attendance at the kick-off event is mandatory for successful completion of the seminar. During this event, you will not only receive important information about the course but also begin working on the various topics. Please remember to bring your laptop!
- This course is highly interactive, requiring full commitment to individual and group work on assigned topics and questions. Your group members and fellow students rely on your support! Therefore, after 21st of October when groups have been assigned, cancellation of course participation will no longer be allowed. Withdrawing from the course after the 21st of October will result in an official course failure.
- There will be several scheduled meetings, as outlined below, and your attendance is expected unless otherwise specified. Please ensure that you plan your schedule accordingly and inform me at the beginning of the course if there are any scheduling conflicts with other classes.
- Your final grade is based upon an essay and a presentation, which count
  - 4 / 2 credit points (66,6 %/33,3 %) for students who complete this course in the module "Seminar Sustainability Management" and
  - 3 / 3 credit points (50 %/50 %) for students who complete this course via the BSc BWL specialization modules).
- The seminar papers comprise 12 pages. The duration of the presentation depends on the final number of group members. Each person has to present between 15 and 30 minutes. Further information will be provided during the kick-off.

## Content of Examinations

You submit a seminar paper and presentation. Each student is assigned to a subdiscipline of sustainability research which, throughout the semester, you should become an expert in (see Part I). Additionally, you will apply your newly gained theoretical knowledge on real life cases by selecting a firm which works as best-practice example (see Part II). Make sure to explain why you chose the specific company, what and why you evaluate a measure as good and where – based on your new expertise – you see possibilities of improvement. Please note: The real-life case, as described in detail in Part II, is only part of your presentation, not of your term paper.

## Advanced Information: Literature List and Best-practice Guidance

The literature listed below shall offer you a first guidance to get an impression of your topic. This is not a complete reference list. For your presentations and term papers, make sure to include at least six different sources. Please use the VHB Ranking for finding appropriate journals. As discussed during the introduction class, please always first try to find relevant papers in A+, A and B journals. In case you think you don't find enough papers related to your topic: Don't panic! Try to use other keywords for your search prompts and check the reference lists of your assigned papers. Those give you a rough guidance on related works and buzzwords used in the titles.

### Part 1: Topics

#### 1. How to measure sustainability?

- Chatterji, Aaron K.; Durand, Rodolphe; Levine, David I.; Touboul, Samuel (2016): Do ratings of firms converge? Implications for managers, investors and strategy researchers. In: Strategic Management Journal 37 (8), S. 1597–1614. DOI: 10.1002/smj.2407.
- Barnett, M.L., Henriques, I. and Husted, B.W., 2020. Beyond good intentions: Designing CSR initiatives for greater social impact. Journal of Management, 46(6), pp.937-964.
- Eccles, Robert G.; Ioannou, Ioannis; Serafeim, George (2014): The Impact of Corporate Sustainability on Organizational Processes and Performance. In: Management Science 60 (11), S. 2835–2857. DOI: 10.1287/mnsc.2014.1984.

#### 2. Shareholder activism and the sustainable firm

- Chuah, Kevin; Desjardine, Mark R.; Goranova, Maria; Henisz, Witold J. (2024): Shareholder Activism Research: A System-Level View. In: Academy of Management Annals 18 (1), S. 82–120. DOI: 10.5465/annals.2022.0069.
- Flammer, Caroline; Toffel, Michael W.; Viswanathan, Kala (2021): Shareholder activism and firms' voluntary disclosure of climate change risks. In: Strategic Management Journal 42 (10), S. 1850–1879. DOI: 10.1002/smj.3313.
- Tindall, Greg; Cole, Rebel A.; Javakhadze, David (2024): Innovation Responds to Climate Change Proposals. In: Journal of Business Ethics. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-024-05808-7.

### 3. Sustainable performance: the role of employees

- Flammer, Caroline; Luo, Jiao (2017): Corporate social responsibility as an employee governance tool: Evidence from a quasi-experiment. In: Strategic Management Journal 38 (2), S. 163–183. DOI: 10.1002/smj.2492.
- Bhattacharya, C. B.; Sen, Sankar; Edinger-Schons, Laura Marie; Neureiter, Michael (2023): Corporate Purpose and Employee Sustainability Behaviors. In: Journal of Business Ethics 183 (4), S. 963–981. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-022-05090-5.
- Pellegrini, Chiara; Rizzi, Francesco; Frey, Marco (2018): The role of sustainable human resource practices in influencing employee behavior for corporate sustainability. In: Business Strategy and the Environment 27 (8), S. 1221–1232. DOI: 10.1002/bse.2064.

### 4. Pay structures and sustainability outcomes

- Flammer, Caroline; Hong, Bryan; Minor, Dylan (2019): Corporate governance and the rise of integrating corporate social responsibility criteria in executive compensation: Effectiveness and implications for firm outcomes. In: Strategic Management Journal 40 (7), S. 1097–1122. DOI: 10.1002/smj.3018.
- Deckop, John R.; Merriman, Kimberly K.; Gupta, Shruti (2006): The Effects of CEO Pay Structure on Corporate Social Performance. In: Journal of Management 32 (3), S. 329–342. DOI: 10.1177/0149206305280113.
- Lenox, Michael; King, Andrew (2004): Prospects for developing absorptive capacity through internal information provision. In: Strategic Management Journal 25 (4), S. 331–345. DOI: 10.1002/smj.379.

### 5. The role of executives in shaping sustainable performance

- Aguilera, R.V., Aragón-Correa, J.A., Marano, V. and Tashman, P.A., 2021. The corporate governance of environmental sustainability: A review and proposal for more integrated research. Journal of Management, 47(6), pp.1468-1497
- Lewis, Ben W.; Walls, Judith L.; Dowell, Glen W. S. (2014): Difference in degrees: CEO characteristics and firm environmental disclosure. In: Strategic Management Journal 35 (5), S. 712–722. DOI: 10.1002/smj.2127.
- Manner, Mikko H. (2010): The Impact of CEO Characteristics on Corporate Social Performance. In: Journal of Business Ethics 93 (S1), S. 53–72. DOI: 10.1007/s10551-010-0626-7.

## 6. Sustainable innovation

- Stilgoe, Jack & Owen, Richard & Macnaghten, Phil. (2013). Developing a Framework for Responsible Innovation. *Research Policy*. 42. 1568–1580.
- Berrone, P., Fosfuri, A., Gelabert, L. and Gomez-Mejia, L.R., 2013. Necessity as the mother of 'green' inventions: Institutional pressures and environmental innovations. *Strategic Management Journal*, 34(8), pp.891-909.
- Kesidou, E. and Demirel, P., 2012. On the drivers of eco-innovations: Empirical evidence from the UK. *Research Policy*, 41(5), pp.862-870.

## 7. Environmental sustainability and financial firm performance

- Eccles, Robert G.; Ioannou, Ioannis; Serafeim, George (2014): The Impact of Corporate Sustainability on Organizational Processes and Performance. In: *Management Science* 60 (11), S. 2835–2857. DOI: 10.1287/mnsc.2014.1984.
- Hawn, O., Chatterji, A.K. and Mitchell, W. (2018). Do investors actually value sustainability? New evidence from investor reactions to the Dow Jones Sustainability Index (DJSI). *Strategic Management Journal*, 39(4), pp.949-976.
- Sarkis, Joseph; Cordeiro, James J. (2001): An empirical evaluation of environmental efficiencies and firm performance: Pollution prevention versus end-of-pipe practice. In: *European Journal of Operational Research* 135 (1), S. 102–113. DOI: 10.1016/S0377-2217(00)00306-4.

## Part 2: Apply real-life case studies

For each of your topics, there are several ways to find relevant best-practice examples for your presentations and seminar papers. Many companies share their sustainability efforts in their sustainability reports or annual reports, which are typically available on their websites. Sustainability networks (e.g. Klimaschutz-Unternehmen, B.A.U.M. e.V., Bund für Nachhaltiges Wirtschaften) and databases (e.g. CDP) are another useful source to find inspiring firm examples. Further, national and international newspapers can offer another helpful source of inspiration. Exemplarily, the Financial Times has an entire online section dedicated to climate, where they discuss firms' climate approaches.

Please note: While using all of these sources, please keep in mind to critically reflect what you read. It is your task as a researcher to assess information from a fact-based perspective.

## Important Dates

Deadline for course registration	14.10.2025	Marvin
Kick-off	16.10.2025 14:00 – 16:00	Room 00/0130, Gutenbergstraße 29a, Institutsgebäude (G   02)
Deadline for cancellation of course participation in Marvin	21.10.2025	Marvin
Individual Discussion of Project Outlines	tbd	Meeting room of our research group
Final presentations	22.01.2026, 12:00 – 18:00	Room 00/0230, Gutenbergstraße 29a, Institutsgebäude (G   02)
	23.01.2026, 09:00 – 18:00	00011 (AP 2), Am Plan 1 und 2, Institutsgebäude (U   07)
Submission of seminar paper	06.02.2026	Submission via ILIAS