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Corporate Sustainability *Summer Semester 2026*

Welcome to Corporate Sustainability! This course is designed to explore the multifaceted challenges and opportunities companies face when integrating sustainability into their strategies, operations, and stakeholder relationships. By examining real-world case studies, and engaging in interactive activities like simulations and group projects, you will develop a nuanced understanding of the strategic, ethical, and operational dimensions of corporate sustainability. The course aims to equip you with critical thinking skills and practical tools to analyze corporate sustainability challenges and propose actionable solutions for driving transformative change in businesses. Through a combination of case discussions, simulations, guest lectures, and collaborative group work, this highly interactive course emphasizes active participation, teamwork, and the application of theoretical concepts to real-world scenarios. By the end of the semester, you will have honed your ability to assess corporate sustainability challenges through a strategic lens and articulate innovative approaches to align business practices with global sustainability goals.

Session 1 – Kick-off & Introduction

16.04.2026

What are the fundamental principles and frameworks that underpin corporate sustainability? In this session, we introduce key concepts and theories in corporate sustainability, focusing on its strategic, ethical, and operational dimensions. We explore the role of businesses in addressing global challenges, the interplay between corporate responsibility and profitability, and the importance of aligning sustainability practices with stakeholder expectations.

This session sets the stage for the course by establishing the analytical frameworks and 'rules of the game' that will guide our case discussions and critical evaluations throughout the semester.

Session 2 – The Trade-off Game

23.04.2026

The "Tradeoff Game" invites you to step into the shoes of a tech startup CEO in an immersive business simulation. You become the CEO of FlexBird, a rapidly increasing tech startup. As the founder and CEO, your challenge is to "balance profit and purpose," navigating limited resources to satisfy both investors and stakeholders. This experience will serve as a steppingstone for developing deeper case analyses throughout the remaining course.

Session 3: Tata Motors: Corporate Social Responsibility in India

30.04.2026

What is the role of business in addressing social challenges in emerging markets? This session discusses Tata Motors' response to India's unique CSR mandate under the Companies Act of 2013. We examine the company's efforts to align its longstanding philanthropic legacy with measurable social impact, such as its skills development programs. The case highlights the balance between corporate profitability, legal compliance, and the moral imperative to address

pressing societal needs in one of the world's most inequitable markets.

Session 4 – Tesla, Inc.

07.05.2026

How does visionary leadership drive innovation and reshape industries? This session explores Elon Musk's leadership approach and its role in positioning Tesla as a transformative force in the automotive sector. We will analyze Tesla's contributions to advancing sustainable mobility through electric vehicles and renewable energy solutions, as well as the strategic challenges and ethical considerations the company faces.

Session 5 – Merck: Managing Vioxx

21.05.2026

What happens when a company's product, once seen as a groundbreaking innovation, becomes the center of a global controversy? In this session, we analyze Merck's decision-making during the Vioxx crisis, focusing on the ethical, strategic, and reputational risks faced by the company. Through the lens of CEO Ray Gilmartin's leadership, we explore the complexities of balancing corporate values, patient safety, and financial considerations in a high-stakes environment. The case highlights the challenges of managing risk, maintaining trust, and making decisions amidst conflicting evidence and public scrutiny.

Session 6 – Pepsi Inc.: Establishing a Role in a Sustainable Society

28.05.2026

What responsibilities do corporations bear when their products contribute to societal challenges? This session examines the role of PepsiCo in the obesity epidemic, focusing on the ethical and strategic

implications of its product offerings. We will evaluate the company's responses to stakeholder pressures, and discuss the effectiveness of these efforts in addressing public health concerns while balancing corporate performance objectives.

Session 7 – Fairphone: Commercializing Radical Sustainability

11.06.2026

Can sustainability be a core driver of competitive advantage in a highly competitive industry? In this session, we examine Fairphone's mission to disrupt the smartphone industry by embedding radical sustainability practices into its business model. We evaluate its attempts to balance commercial viability with its environmental and social goals, including challenges in its supply chain, marketing strategies, and product design. The case invites discussion on the complexities of operationalizing sustainability in a competitive landscape and the potential of transforming industries through sustainable innovation.

Session 8 - Levi Strauss & Co.: Driving Adoption of Green Chemistry

02.07.2026

How can companies lead systemic change in their industries to address sustainability challenges? This session examines Levi Strauss & Co.'s Screened Chemistry Program, a pioneering effort to reduce hazardous chemical use in the apparel industry. We explore the strategic and operational challenges of scaling sustainability initiatives across global supply chains, the role of industry collaboration, and the tensions between competitive advantage and collective action. The case encourages critical thinking about leveraging innovation and partnerships to drive transformative change.

Sessions 9 & 10: Final Presentations

09.07. & 16.07.2026

In these sessions, students will present their group work, showcasing their analysis of a selected company and its sustainability challenges or opportunities. Each group will apply the frameworks and concepts explored throughout the course to assess how sustainability issues impact corporate strategy, operations, and stakeholder relationships. Presentations will include actionable recommendations for addressing the identified challenges or capitalizing on opportunities.

This session provides an opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the course material, your ability to conduct in-depth analysis, and your skills in developing strategic recommendations. Presentations will be followed by a Q&A session, encouraging active engagement and critical feedback from peers and the instructor.

Course Prerequisites and Grading

- Attendance at the kick-off event and the final presentations is mandatory for successful completion of the course. During this event, you will not only receive important information about the course but also begin forming your working groups.
- This course is highly interactive, requiring full commitment to individual and group work on assigned topics and questions for every session. Your group members and fellow students rely on your support! Therefore, please review the syllabus carefully and make use of the kick-off session to clarify any doubts you might have. Dropping out of the course mid-way is a waste of your time and the time of your fellow student.

Organizational Remarks

- This course is designed as a highly interactive learning experience. Sessions combine instructor-led inputs on key sustainability concepts with student-led components in a flipped classroom format, as well as case discussions conducted in a roundtable setting.
- Sessions take place on Thursdays from 8:15 to 11:45. The time from 8:15 to 9:30 is intentionally reserved for you to prepare pre-assigned materials. Unless otherwise specified, we will begin our joint in-class session at 9:30.
- We use ILIAS as our main communication platform. All course materials and submission folders will be available there.
- Please check your emails regularly. Any short-notice changes or important updates will be communicated via email.

Grading

Based on the applicable examination regulations, the overall grade will be determined by calculating a weighted average of the following components:

Assignments:

To deepen your understanding of the cases and prepare for class discussions, you will be assigned specific questions for each session. These must be answered in advance and submitted via ILIAS prior to class. Over the course of the semester, you are required to successfully complete at least six assignments to pass this component. However, submitting additional assignments can positively impact your grade, as it demonstrates consistent effort and engagement with the material. Thoughtful and well-prepared responses are essential, as they form the basis of both your individual learning and the collective class discussion.

Case leadership:

Case discussion sessions begin with a short presentation of the case by the group designated as “case leaders” for that class. Throughout the course, you and your group will be responsible for presenting 1-2 cases, depending on the schedule. These presentations are a critical component of the course, as they serve as the foundation for the in-class discussion. Effective preparation and presentation are essential—not only to engage your peers but also to develop key skills such as critical thinking, public speaking, and the ability to synthesize complex information. Case leadership provides an excellent opportunity to demonstrate your understanding of the material and to contribute meaningfully to the collective learning experience.

Final Presentations:

Each group is required to select a company and conduct an in-depth analysis of a specific sustainability challenge or opportunity the company faces. The goal is to apply the frameworks and concepts explored in the course to assess how sustainability issues impact corporate strategy, operations, and stakeholder relationships. Groups should also propose actionable recommendations for addressing the identified challenge.

Groups are free to select any company, with the following restrictions:

- No companies covered in class: You cannot choose any of the companies discussed in the course sessions (e.g., Tata Motors, Tesla, Merck, PepsiCo, Fairphone, Levi Strauss & Co.).
- For-profit companies only: The company must be privately or publicly owned and operate for profit. NGOs or government-owned entities are not permitted.
- To ensure diversity in the presentations, each group must select a unique company and challenge/opportunity. Groups should communicate their selected company and topic to me by **Session 7** to avoid duplication.
- If you do not select a company on time, I will assign a company.

If you are uncertain about your chosen company or topic, I encourage you to reach out to me early for feedback. The earlier you consult with me, the more detailed advice I can provide.