



Master of Business Administration in Sustainability

MBA Course Descriptions: 36 credits

Sustainability & Systems Thinking

Principles of Sustainable Systems

This course will introduce foundational scientific laws that govern sustainability in all complex systems and then take students through a process to investigate how such paradigmatic principles apply to any business organizational structure and operation. Specific laws to be examined will include the law of limits to growth, the second law of thermodynamics, and the law of self-organization. An aspect of complexity will be the treatment of the emergence of limits as one increases both temporal and spatial scales of inquiry. The students will be asked to consider efficacy of current approaches to organizational sustainability within this context.

Earth Systems & Climate Change

This course employs a systems approach to understanding earth's physical and biological environment by examining the large-scale components and processes of the earth system. Understanding the interaction of these elements and their natural variability in space and time is critical for assessing the rates, drivers, and consequences of environmental change. Content will emphasize climate change dynamics, biogeochemical cycles, and land use patterns and their feedback relationships with the atmosphere, hydrosphere, lithosphere, pedosphere and biosphere.

Ecological Economics, Public Policy & Social Change

Ecological economics addresses the complexity inherent in the process of determining how we decide, utilize, and prioritize resources in a way that does not jeopardize the future well-being of natural and human systems. This course will focus on how economic and political systems interact to generate varied outcomes in relation to the goals of sustainability, justice, and economic well-being. Alternative measurement systems will be compared to neoclassical tools for their ability to measure progress and students will consider private and public sector approaches for creating a transition toward a more sustainable and just society. Throughout the course, we will focus on what "works" and place significant emphasis on relating the material to students personal and career goals.

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Business Fundamentals

Financial Management Fundamentals

The overall goal of the course is to introduce students to the principles of financial management as applied to the management of for-profit businesses, non-profit organizations, or governmental agencies. In this course, students will become familiar with the language and system of finance, understand the framework of Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP), develop skills in the creation, interpretation, and analysis of financial information, develop skills in preparing annual and capital budgets, understand the key components of internal control systems and financial audit, and become familiar with the concept of time value of money. In this course, students will develop the financial skills needed to effectively manage at the project, program, business unit, or organizational level. In addition, exploring best practices in managing and measuring within the context of the triple bottom line will include an examination of emerging standards developed by the CDP, the Global Reporting Initiative, the Sustainability Accounting Standards Board, among others. Students will build proficiency with spreadsheets through practice sets, interactive exercises, case studies, and team activities. For their final project, students will develop and present a Business Case.

Sustainable Finance for Positive Impact

Expanding the foundations established in Financial Management Fundamentals, this course pushes the boundaries of managerial and financial accounting, analysis, and reporting to examine emerging measurement systems of sustainability accounting and the emerging concept of Integrated Reporting. In addition, this course focuses on the evolving paradigm of corporate social responsibility (CSR) and investigates the growing number and type of mission-centric organizations (also called “hybrid” organizations), including, but not limited to, nonprofits, cooperatives, ESOPs, L3Cs, benefit corporations, and B Corps. Discussion includes the increasingly important role of business as a “force for good” and of entrepreneurial ventures that are created not only to generate a favorable return but also to solve social or environmental challenges. Finally, this course explores the role of capital, its creation, management, and use to drive strategic triple bottom line results; the power of divestment and impact investing to influence large-scale change; and the complexities social return on investment (SROI). For their final project, students will develop and present a comprehensive Business Plan.

Operations & Value Chain Management

Managing operations is a highly underrated business activity. This course challenges the preconception that marketing, finance, and strategy rule. Indeed, the design, production, and delivery of a product or service is where both manufacturing and service firms create true value. In this course, students explore traditional aspects of operations and value chain management including new product development, process design and analysis, forecasting, inventory management, production planning and management, logistics, supply chain and information management, cost control, lean, and quality. Beyond that, students analyze case studies to understand how organizations both fail and succeed in achieving social justice, ecological stewardship, and operational excellence.

Marketing & Communication Strategy

This course explores marketing as an essential component of an organization’s broader communication strategy in the context of organizational sustainability - defined through the triple bottom line. Specifically, sustainability marketing initiatives will be addressed through the lens of authenticity, driven by an organization’s mission and purpose. The course combines both theoretical and practical elements and is intended to facilitate students’ understanding of specific marketing strategies and tactics as nested within a broader organizational marketing strategy and communication strategy. Students will read a variety of literature and will work with an organization in a consulting capacity, while simultaneously developing a marketing plan.

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Leadership & Change

Teamwork & Diversity

Skillful teamwork and collaboration are essential to addressing sustainability goals and other complex challenges that face today's organizations. Working effectively with human diversity is at the heart of successful teamwork. Students learn and apply conceptual models and behavioral skills that enable them to be skillful team leaders, facilitators, and members. Areas of focus include conditions for successful teamwork, facilitation skills, group structure and dynamics, the dynamics of diversity and inclusion, self awareness, interpersonal communication, task productivity, and collaborative decision-making.

Developing People & Performance

How can organizations support both human well-being and successful performance - including the achievement of sustainability goals - at individual, unit, and organizational levels? Skillful managers foster workplace culture, practices, and relationships that support learning, satisfaction, and strong performance among employees. Employees in turn commit their knowledge, skills, and energy to the organization's success. Students learn principles and models for effective and sustainable human resource practice for managers. We then focus on specific aspects of that practice, including hiring, onboarding, performance development, and dealing with unsatisfactory performance. Students conduct individual research on human resource topics of interest.

Leadership, Ethics & Change

For organizations to thrive, business leaders and sustainability champions must be adept at navigating change in complex systems. This requires an understanding of leadership concepts and theory, ethical decision making frameworks, and change management models to address adaptive challenges and effect systemic change. Knowledge of self as leader - the leader one aspires to be to do the work that makes a difference in the world, a self-assessment of current abilities, and a development plan to bridge the gap - is also an integral part of the course work.

Capstone Courses

Strategy, Innovation & Resilience

In today's dynamic and disruptive organizational environment, sustainability leaders must be adept at leading others in effective strategic thinking and execution and in fostering innovation and resilience. In this capstone course, students study contemporary and emerging theories of strategy, innovation, and resilience. Drawing on content from this and previous courses, they develop approaches to address adaptive strategic challenges faced in the promotion of integrated environmental, human, and financial sustainability. Additional competencies addressed include decision making, use of metrics, communication, collaborative processes, and strategic execution.

Practicum

The practicum is a facilitated, independent, self-designed project that students may use as an opportunity to explore a chosen topic in depth, to gain expertise in a particular area for career advancement. Each student identifies learning goals and guiding questions; conducts research including a review of the relevant literature; designs and implements a project to meet the learning goals; utilizes project management tools in the process; and presents their project to the community as a culmination of the program. Students work independently, with an advisor, and in small advisory groups with other students.