



BUS/SUST/ENV 340 Global Sustainable Business

Course Syllabus
Fall Semester 2026

Instructor: Francesca Hansstein, PhD

Credits: 3

Contact Hours: 45

Prerequisites: None

Class Meeting Days & Time:

Office Hours: After class by appointment (FSE Office, First Floor)

Course Type: Course with a Service Learning component

Course Fee: USD\$140

Course Description

The role of sustainability in business has evolved over the past few decades from a fringe issue to one of central concern. This course has two objectives: first, to delve into the multifaceted challenges and opportunities that sustainability presents in business, and second, to equip students with the practical skills to apply their knowledge to real-world business scenarios. The course has a global dimension as students examine complex environmental, social, and economic factors that affect sustainability in business, also reflecting on the profound differences that exist between different social and economic contexts. Students will also explore the role of consumer behavior and its determinants to promote more sustainable practices. Through case studies and analysis of sustainability strategies, students will acquire the knowledge and skills necessary to assist companies in adopting more eco-friendly practices. In addition to researching business management tools and best practices, students will also learn to apply evaluation tools for assessing a company's sustainability performance and identifying areas for improvement.

Learning Outcomes and Assessment Measures

Below are the course's learning outcomes, followed by the methods for assessing students' achievement for each learning outcome.

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

- *Explain* how the business focus on sustainability has evolved and describe current challenges and opportunities faced by businesses committed to supporting sustainability efforts both locally and globally;
- *Develop* practical skills to apply tools for analyzing and supporting sustainable business strategies;
- *Describe* specific strategies and practices that businesses can employ to promote sustainability;
- *Examine* the advantages of utilizing specific sustainable KPIs and certification programs for assessing environmental performance in businesses, considering both local and global contexts;
- *Develop* a sustainable business idea and translate it into a structured business plan that demonstrates environmental, social, and economic value creation;
- *Compare* the efficacy and reliability of the different marketing strategies that businesses use to communicate with their stakeholders.

Course Materials

Readings

A course reader, including all the indicated readings, will be available. The course's Moodle site is the primary location for readings and assignments.

Textbook

Fischer, M., Foord, D., Frecè, J., Hillebrand, K., Kissling-Näf, I., Meili, R., et al. (2023). Sustainable Business: Managing the Challenges of the 21st Century, Springer Nature. [Open-access publisher](#).

Assessment

Attendance	10%
Course Journal	20%
Field assignment	20%
Service-Learning Project	20%
End of Semester CE Presentation	5%
Sustainable Business Plan	23%
Office hours	2%

Grading

Students are reminded that it is their responsibility to note the dates of exams and other assignments. No alternative exam dates will be offered, and professors are not required to give partial credit for any late work (they do so at their discretion: the Institute's default policy is no extensions and a zero for any work turned in late). Students who book travel when they have an exam or other assessment will have to change their plans or accept a zero. Letter grades for student work are based on the following percentage scale:

Letter Grade Range	Numerical Score Equivalent	Student Performance
A	93% - 100%	Exceptional
A-	90% - 92%	Excellent
B+	87% - 89%	Superior
B	83% - 86%	
B-	80% - 82%	
C+	77% - 79%	Satisfactory
C	73% - 76%	
C-	70% - 72%	
D+	67% - 69%	Low Pass
D	63% - 66%	
D-	60% - 62%	
F	59% or less	Fail (no credit)

Please note: decimal numerals between 1-4 are rounded down, while 5-9 are rounded up: e.g., expect 89.4 to be 89.0 while 89.5 to round up to 90.

Course Requirements

Grades are based on the following criteria.

Attendance (10%)

Attendance is an essential part of this course. You are allowed 2 unexcused absences per course without penalty, per Institute policy. If you attend all the other meetings, you will receive 10% for this part of your grade. There are no make-ups offered for attendance.

Course Journal (20%)

Students will be provided with a notebook at the start of the semester, which they will use as a personal space to reflect on course material and ideas. In-class journal entries (e.g., summaries of assigned readings, analyses of primary sources, mental maps, reflections, predictive exercises) will be regularly scheduled and graded twice throughout the semester, i.e., before the mid-semester break (in Week 6) and at the end of the course (Week 12). Each of these checks is worth 10% of your grade, for a total of 20%. See the full prompt on Moodle for more information.

Field assignment (20%)

Students will submit a one-page document evaluating the sustainability of a product they recently purchased at a local supermarket, preferably from an Italian brand. They can select from various categories such as food,

FMCGs, or clothing. The student's task is to identify indicators of environmental friendliness through cues on packaging, labels, and other readily identifiable information. A prompt for this assignment will be made accessible on Moodle. The field assignment is due by the end of Week 5, and each student will present the work in Week 6.

Service-Learning Project (20%)

For the final projects, under the instructor's supervision and guidance, students will work in groups with a local business to perform real-world tasks such as sustainable reporting, assessment tools for sustainable practices, market research, or customer analysis. Students will complete a supervised project focused on a selected aspect of sustainability, culminating in a written report and in-class presentation. A prompt for this assignment will be accessible on Moodle. The overall assessment grade is composed of two components: class presentation (10%) and project report (10%).

End of Semester Community Engagement Presentations (5%)

During Special Academic Events Week, on **XXX**, the class will present a 15-minute summary of the project experience to the Umbra community. Students will receive the guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break. Participation in this event is MANDATORY and an integral part of the community engagement grade.

Sustainable Business Plan (23%)

Working individually, students will develop an innovative, sustainable business concept addressing a current environmental and/or social challenge. Using the instructor-provided template, students will prepare a presentation deck outlining the key elements of their business plan. At the end of the course, each student will deliver a concise 3–5 minute elevator pitch, presenting the core value proposition of the business idea as if addressing potential investors or partners. Following each pitch, classmates will ask questions and provide feedback.

Office Hours (2%)

Getting to know your professor makes you more comfortable with that person and, therefore, more likely to ask for help. It might also help you to ask questions about the various assignments or to discuss a paper idea. In this course, you get 2% of your grade for coming to office hours once before Week 9.

Extension & Submitting Late Work

Work submitted after the deadline will receive a grade of zero, not partial credit. Each student is allowed one extension of 24 hours over the entire semester. This can be used for any assignment but the final project. Students need to email the instructor before the deadline and inform the instructor of their use of the extension. Any work submitted after the 24-hour extension will be marked zero.

As for all policies, exceptions can be made by the Director for students with special accommodations or in case of medical emergencies, etc.

Attendance Policy

Attendance is expected and mandatory for classroom times and co-curricular activities. The first two absences per course due to illness will be considered excused "sick days" and do not require medical documentation. To receive additional excused absences due to illness, students are required to see a local physician or request a letter from an Institute-approved doctor documenting they should be excused from class for illness.

Unexcused absences will adversely affect a student's academic performance and will result in a reduction of the student's final course grade by 2% per absence up to a maximum of 10%. Excessive unexcused absences may result in a failing grade or disciplinary action. It is the student's responsibility to be aware of the number of absences or late arrivals for each course and to ask the instructor when in doubt.

If students miss class, they are responsible for obtaining class notes from other students and/or for meeting the professor during office hours. Any work missed in class because of an excused absence may be made up within one week of the return to the class. Any work missed that was a quiz or other test must be made up outside of class time and will, in the interest of intellectual honesty, be a slightly different test than the one given in class.

Presence during mandatory field trips is especially important. Missing a mandatory field trip for a course, unless for a very serious reason that is communicated to Umbra staff in a timely manner, will lower the students' grade by half a letter grade (i.e., a final grade of a B+ would be lowered to a B).

Legitimate reasons for an excused absence or tardiness include death in the immediate family, religious

observances, illness or injury, local inclement weather, and medical appointments that cannot be rescheduled.

Absences relating to illness may be excused by the Director, but only if a medical certification is provided.

Students who request an approved absence to observe a religious holiday must submit a formal request to the Institute's Director within one week after the add/drop period when course schedules, including any field trips, are finalized. No exceptions will be made after this deadline.

Except in the case of medical emergencies, absences are not accepted when tests are scheduled; tests cannot be made up. Furthermore, scheduled times and dates indicated for exams, quizzes, oral presentations, and any other graded assignments cannot be changed for any reason. Even if more sections of the same class are activated, students may only take exams during the scheduled times and dates for the section they are enrolled in.

Tardiness Policy

Students are expected to attend all classes punctually. Any student arriving up to 15 minutes late or leaving up to 15 minutes earlier than the scheduled class end time will be marked as tardy. Each incident of tardiness (late arrivals to or early departures from class) is 0.5% off the final grade. However, should a student arrive more than 15 minutes late or depart more than 15 minutes before the conclusion of the class, it will be recorded as an absence.

Students are also expected to remain in class during the time of instruction except for a reasonable amount of time to use the restroom. Students who leave class and do not return during the class session will receive an unexcused absence or late penalty.

Academic Integrity

All forms of cheating (i.e., copying during an exam either from a fellow student or making unauthorized use of notes) and plagiarism (i.e., presenting the ideas or words of another person, or an AI generator, for academic evaluation without acknowledging the source) will be handled according to the Institute Academic Policy, which can be found in the Umbra Institute Academic Policies and Conduct Guidelines.

Laptop & Classroom Policy

Students are expected to follow the policy of the Institute and demonstrate the appropriate respect for the historical premises that the school occupies. Please note that cell phones must be set to silent mode before the beginning of each class. Computers and other electronic devices (for example, ear buds) cannot be used during class lectures and discussions unless there has been a specific academic accommodation.

As an instructor and as a person, I am dependent on both my computer and my telephone. That said: An ever-increasing body of research shows that open laptops and telephones in the classroom create distraction (both visual and auditory) for those using them and those around them. You can type faster than you can write, and as a result, you end up processing less when you're simply typing notes. For this reason, I have a physical notebook policy: I ask you to leave your computers in your bags and phones in your pockets and use a regular notebook. There are four exceptions: 1) if you have an accommodation; 2) if you're using a tablet to take notes, 3) if you make an office hours appointment with me to discuss the use of a computer; or 4) if we have an in-class tutorial about online research tools.

U.N. Sustainable Development Goals

This course contributes to the achievement of one or more goals of the UN Agenda for Sustainable Development:



Schedule of Topics, Readings, and Assignments

WEEK 1

Course introduction: global sustainable business and community engagement

Meeting 1: *Course introduction, definitions, and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) framework.*

Meeting 2: *In-class presentation of the project partner (TBC) by Umbra staff.*

Readings for the week:

- Chapter 1, Why Sustainability? in Fischer, M., Foord, D., Frecè, J., Hillebrand, K., Kissling-Näf, I., Meili, R., et al. (2023). *Sustainable business: managing the challenges of the 21st century*, Springer Nature, pp 1-14.
- Chapter 2, The Concept of Sustainable Development in Fischer, M., Foord, D., Frecè, J., Hillebrand, K., Kissling-Näf, I., Meili, R., et al. (2023). *Sustainable business: managing the challenges of the 21st century*, Springer Nature, pp. 17-25.
- Neren Uri (2012). Patagonia's Provocative Black Friday Campaign. *Harvard Business Review*, 1-5.

WEEK 2

Business ethics

Meeting 1: *Different Ethical Motivations. The Patagonia Case Study.*

Meeting 2: *Mission, Vision, and Unique Value Proposition.*

Readings for the week:

- Chapter 4th, Corporate Sustainability in Fischer, M., Foord, D., Frecè, J., Hillebrand, K., Kissling-Näf, I., Meili, R., et al. (2023). *Sustainable business: managing the challenges of the 21st century*, Springer Nature, pp 35-59.
- Schaltegger, S., & Burritt, R. (2018). Business Cases and Corporate Engagement with Sustainability: Differentiating Ethical Motivations. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 147, 241-259.
- TEDx Talks. Defining Sustainability: Absolutely by Anjila Hjalsted, [available here](#)

WEEK 3

Solving Sustainability Challenges Through Entrepreneurship

Meeting 1: *From Problem-Solving to Decision-Making*

Meeting 2: *Nudging consumers towards Sustainable Choices: evidence from Italy*

Readings for the week:

- Chapter 6 Problem Solving and Need Recognition Techniques in Laverty, M., & Littel, C., et al. (2020). *Entrepreneurship*. OpenStax. Houston, Texas. , 227-257.
- Hardisty, and Rishad Habib (2019), The Elusive Green Consumer, *Harvard Business Review*, pages 1-11.

WEEK 4

Actions, policies, and programs in Italy and Europe

Meeting 1: *The EU Green Deal and the Corporate Sustainable Reporting Directive.*

Meeting 2: *The Case of Palm Oil and Group Activity.*

Readings for the week:

- Hereu-Morales, J., Segarra, A., & Valderrama, C. (2024). The European (Green?) Deal: a systematic environmental sustainability analysis. *Sustainable Development*, 32(1), 647-661.
- Baldassarre, F. F., Santovito, S., Campo, R., & Dilozenzo, G. (2024). Sustainable and healthy purchasing behaviors towards palm oil-based food in Italy. *British Food Journal*, 126(1), 156-172.

WEEK 5

Designing Your Sustainable Business Idea

Meeting 1: *Human-Centered Design for Sustainable Innovation*

Meeting 2: *From Empathy to Innovation: Define & Ideate*

Readings for the week:

- Bocken, N. M., Short, S. W., Rana, P., & Evans, S. (2014). A literature and practice review to develop sustainable business model archetypes. *Journal of Cleaner Production*, 65, 42-56.
- Chapter 5, Social Innovation in Fischer, M., Foord, D., Frecè, J., Hillebrand, K., Kissling-Näf, I., Meili, R., et al. (2023). Sustainable business: managing the challenges of the 21st century, Springer Nature, pp 77-87.

Assignments:

Field assignment: upload to Moodle.

WEEK 6

Learning from the Field: Assignment presentations and Meeting with the project partner

Meeting 1: *Fieldtrip Assignment: in-class individual presentations and discussion*

Meeting 2: *Meeting with the project partner: a deep-dive into sustainable fashion*

Assignments:

Upload course journal activities up to W6 (included). Choose the format you prefer: PPT, Word, or PDF.

Readings for the week:

- Niinimäki, K., Peters, G., Dahlbo, H., Perry, P., Rissanen, T., & Gwilt, A. (2020). The environmental price of fast fashion. *Nature Reviews Earth & Environment*, 1(4), 189-200.
- Tebaldi, L., Brun, A., & Bottani, E. (2022). Evidence on sustainability issues in the Fashion Supply Chain: An empirical study in Italy. *Sustainable Production and Consumption*, 33, 651-663.

Semester Break

WEEK 7

Segmenting, Targeting, and Positioning

Meeting 1: *Recap and next steps. Plan for final and group definitions.*

Meeting 2: *From Segmentation to Targeting: who is your sustainable consumer?*

Readings for the week:

- Balderjahn, I., Peyer, M., Seegebarth, B., Wiedmann, K. P., & Weber, A. (2018). The many faces of sustainability-conscious consumers: A category-independent typology. *Journal of Business Research*, 91, 83-93.
- Zhao, X., Fan, L., & Xu, Y. (2025). An investigation of determinants of green consumption behavior: An extended theory of planned behavior. *Innovation and Green Development*, 4(1), 100198.

WEEK 8

Market Research for Sustainable Products

Meeting 1: *An Intro to Market Research: methods and tools*

Meeting 2: *Product Analysis for the Project Partner*

Readings for the week:

- Chapter 7th, Sustainable Consumption, M., Foord, D., Frecè, J., Hillebrand, K., Kissling-Näf, I., Meili, R., et al. (2023). Sustainable business: managing the challenges of the 21st century, Springer Nature, pp 105-115.
- Chapter 9th, The Future of Sustainable Business: The Circular Economy in Fischer, M., Foord, D., Frecè, J., Hillebrand, K., Kissling-Näf, I., Meili, R., et al. (2023). Sustainable business: managing the challenges of the 21st century, Springer Nature, pp 129-139.

WEEK 9

Funding Opportunities for Sustainable Businesses

Meeting 1: *Midterm Check-in with Partner (TBC)*

Meeting 2: *Growing Sustainable Businesses: an Introduction to Funding Opportunities and Challenges*

Readings for the week:

- Chapter 6, Policy Instruments and Financial Systems in Fischer, M., Foord, D., Frecè, J., Hillebrand, K., Kissling-Näf, I., Meili, R., et al. (2023). Sustainable business: managing the challenges of the 21st century, Springer Nature, pp 91-103.

WEEK 10

Competing Through Sustainability: Pricing and Positioning

Meeting 1: *Designing a Sustainable Pricing Strategy*

Meeting 2: *Analyzing Competitors and Market Positioning*

Readings for the week:

- Dangelico, R. M., Nonino, F., & Pompei, A. (2021). What are the determinants of green purchase behaviour? A study of Italian consumers. *Business strategy and the environment*, 30(5), 2600-2620.

WEEK 11

Sustainable Reporting: the B-Corp Movement and GRI reporting standards

Meeting 1: *An Introduction to Sustainable Reporting: the B-Corp Movement and GRI Framework*

Meeting 2: *Groupwork for the Service Learning Project*

Readings for the week:

- Diez-Busto, E., Sanchez-Ruiz, L., & Fernandez-Laviada, A. (2021). The B Corp movement: A systematic literature review. *Sustainability*, 13(5), 2508, pages 1-17.
- Stellantis (2024). Expanded Sustainability Statement, Report, 1-131 (selected parts).

WEEK 12

Groupwork for the final project

Meeting 1: *Final Group Presentations with Partner*

Meeting 2: *Final Review and In-Class Groupwork for the Final Community Engagement Event.*

Assignments:

Upload course journal activities from W7 to W11 (included). Choose the format you prefer: PPT, Word, or PDF.

WEEK 13

Final Group Presentations

Meeting 1: *Business Plan Pitch and Discussion*

Assignment

- Submission of the Community Engagement Presentation on Moodle.
- Upload course journal activities from W7 to W12 (included). Choose the format you prefer: PPT, Word, or PDF.



BUS/SUST/ENV 340: Global Sustainable Business

Service Learning Project

Syllabus Appendix

Spring 2026

What is service learning?

Service learning is an important type of experiential education integrated into a course in which:

- Students engage in an organized activity or project aimed to address a community need that is identified in collaboration with the community partner;
- Students critically reflect on the link between the experience in the community, course content, and the learning goals; and
- There is reciprocal learning both by the students and by the community partners.

Students will need a certain degree of flexibility, creativity, and self-initiative to realize a service learning project. Organization and open communication in class with the instructor and team members will be key to student success.

Service Learning Project Overview

Community Partner

TOOitaly is a boutique Italian fashion brand founded in Orvieto by designers Alessia Stendardo and Giovanna Gentili, later joined by Ciro Schiaroli. The brand specializes in creating stylish, cruelty-free, vegan bags and accessories using innovative, sustainable materials such as upcycled PVC, apple-based bio-leather, recycled PET bottles, and reclaimed linoleum. Each piece is handcrafted in Italy, combining traditional craftsmanship with a strong commitment to sustainability and ethical production. TOOitaly has earned the highest VVV+ rating from LAV's Animal Free Fashion ranking and has expanded its presence internationally, participating in events like the G7 Summit in Tokyo, Italian Fashion Week in Texas, and AltaRoma. With over 100 retail points across Europe and a growing online customer base, the brand blends environmental responsibility with modern digital marketing to reach a global audience.

Website: <https://www.tooitaly.it/>

Project Description and Goals

By conducting thorough research on Too Italy—including interviews with the founders, an analysis of company materials, and a focus group on selected products—students will gain a deep understanding of the company's unique challenges and opportunities. Building on this knowledge, students will select and carry out one of the following projects: a comprehensive sustainability assessment, the design of a Customer Satisfaction survey, the identification of potential retail locations, or a sustainability-driven business plan.

Organization, Expectations, and Roles

Student teams will be chosen by the instructor. Teams will be responsible for deciding how to divide the various tasks to ensure members contribute equally throughout the course of the project. An important amount of time will be dedicated to the service learning project's progress in class. If necessary, teams will also be required to meet outside of class each week for approximately 1-2 hours.

In-Class Presentation for Community Partner

Each team will create and present a final detailed presentation based on its findings and recommendations to a company's representative, accompanied by a PowerPoint presentation. Audience members will be expected to ask questions to the other teams presenting to promote a community of learning and support.

Guidelines:

- PowerPoint or Google Slides (spell-check!).
- 10-15 minutes.
- Each team member contributes to the preparation and delivery of the presentation.
- Rehearse presentation as a group for content, length, and transitions.

Final Report

Students are to assume the role of a sustainability manager/consultant to Too Italy. Students have been asked by the management to complete a sustainability report and to prepare a strategy to become more sustainable in the future. Students will apply analytical methods and concepts developed in class to provide an original report and set of recommendations.

Community Engagement Final Presentation

During Special Academic Events Week, the class will present a 15-minute summary of the project experience to the Umbra community during the Community Engagement Presentations on **Thursday, April 23**. Students will receive the guidelines and presentation order after the mid-semester break. Participation in this event is **MANDATORY** and an integral part of the community engagement grade.

Grading Rubric

The service learning project is worth a total of 33% of the final course grade, which will be divided into three categories:

1. Sustainability report (23% of the final course grade)
2. In-class presentation for partner (5% of the final course grade)
3. End of Semester Community Engagement Presentations (5% of the final course grade)