OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

The single question most commonly asked in business sustainability is: what is business sustainability? You will see in our first session that there is considerable debate over this definition. However, there is considerable agreement around the definition of sustainable development, which is industrial development that "meets the needs of today, without compromising the needs of tomorrow" (WCED, 1987). In other words, the resources business generates should be distributed equitably across people and over time to maintain the long-term integrity of those resources. If these conditions are not met, the needs of future generations will not be met, compromising the long-term viability of business and society.

This approach to industrial development and business is arguably one of the most significant challenges to the existing business model, which currently anchors on profitability and growth. This course, therefore, raises fundamental questions relevant to all business disciplines, including: for whom are profits generated? Can growth be sustained? And are there alternative ways of organizing to serve both business and society?

There are few topics in management studies that have garnered so much attention so quickly. Many special issues for journals are now dedicated to sustainability, including those led by your course facilitators. Tim is co-editing a special issue for the Academy of Management Journal that deals with the need for new theorizing for sustainability challenges. Oana is co-editing a double special issue for the Journal of Business Venturing focused on new forms and features of prosocial organizations. In spite of this explosion of interest, we are still grappling as a discipline because the concepts are so big, the problems so challenging, and the solutions so potentially disruptive.

Sustainability is sometimes seen as a new research context for existing theory; sometimes seen as calling for new theories, and sometimes seen as a new paradigm that calls for new ontological and epistemological assumptions.

Whereas the other general management electives (e.g. business economics and public policy, entrepreneurship, and international business) have a strong disciplinary focus, sustainability arguably cuts across all business disciplines and bridges into non-business disciplines, including ecology, geography, and sociology. Furthermore, the
insights drawn from the study of sustainable development form a business perspective can be applied not only to business, but to distant fields such as art, architecture, and agriculture.

This theoretical plurality provides fertile ground to push our own intellectual boundaries. This course should appeal to any scholar, who wants to engage in cross-disciplinary dialogue. If you are looking for neat, methodical answers, this is not the course for you. If you are interested in big ideas that sometimes leave you with more questions than answers, we encourage you to participate in this course.

Our objectives for this course include:

1) to garner a broad understanding of the topics that are being discussed in business sustainability

2) to challenge some of the deeply held assumptions of existing business theories

3) to ask important research questions

**APPROACH**

Tima will facilitate the first half of the course, positioning sustainability within the dominant business paradigm and opening up new theoretical perspectives. Tima’s research tends to focus on ecological issues in large corporations in the context of developed countries. Her sessions tend to focus on underlying paradigms and theories. Oana will cover the second half of the course. Her research focuses on social grand challenges, often in a developing country context. She is phenomenologically driven and thinks deeply about some of the most significant issues confronting society. These boundaries are not hard and fast. In fact, the two facilitators should provide interesting, often complementary, and sometimes even opposing perspectives, which should help to build your own ability to think critically and creatively.

The purpose of the course is not to provide a complete understanding of sustainability, but expose the possibilities that will, hopefully, inform your own research agenda. The boundaries surrounding this field are very porous, given its broad disciplinary span. Sustainability refocuses your attention not on extending existing theories, but on questioning the questions being asked. Through this course, we hope that you will start to ask research questions that will impact on both theory and practice. Your work, then, will be boundary spanning -- aiming to integrate across business and other disciplines to generate meaningful insights.

In keeping with this ambition, the class will be run in a ‘salon’ format. Initiated in the mid-1800s in revolutionary France, these social gatherings were intended to expand participants’ knowledge through polite conversation. We will facilitate this environment by seeding questions and probing for deeper insights (see below). We will encourage active debate and thoughtful reflection. We will encourage participants to draw not only on the readings, but also on their own experiences and materials outside of the class (e.g. different disciplines, different sources, and even different media). You are expected to come to class prepared and engaged to ensure not only that you learn, but that you contribute to the learnings of others.
COURSE REQUIREMENTS / EVALUATION

You will receive two grades, one from Tima and the other from Oana, which will be averaged to arrive at your final course grade. The breakdown is as follows.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Activity</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Classroom Contribution</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Every week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Post-class Reflections</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>Every week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Question Formulation</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Every week</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exams</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>Twice: Once after Tima’s 6 sessions and again after Oana’s 6 sessions</td>
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Classroom Contribution

All of the readings are available in the Bus9773 Sustainability dropbox to which you should have been invited. You are expected to complete the readings prior to class, and participate actively in every class by leveraging insights from those readings.

Comments should be inquisitive, thoughtful, insightful, and respectful. To make such comments, you will have to prepare well for class and listen carefully to the discussion. You are encouraged to challenge ideas, not individuals. Classroom discussions should be fun, provocative and enlightening.

As well, only emergencies should keep you away from class. If you know you cannot make one of the class dates, then please let us know in advance. We will try to shift the timing of class, but failing that, there will be a grade penalty.

Your contribution grade will be made based on the thoughtfulness of the comments and your ability to engage the readings and other materials. You are not being judged on quantity of contributions, only quality. No single comment will determine your grade; rather a gestalt of your ability to contribute meaningfully and positively to the classroom environment. Given the size of the class, it’s important that all students participate actively.

Post-class Reflections

By 6:30 pm on the day of class, you will email to the facilitator your learnings or reflections on the day’s readings and the class discussion. You can speak to your learnings and surprises from the readings or the class discussion, new connections you made, or any other interesting insights. This post-class reflection should be no longer than 500 words. You will be graded on the thoughtfulness of your analysis. This process will help to cement the class discussion in your mind and it will also help to develop your analytical skills.

Question Formulation

By 11 am on the day of class, please email to the facilitator an exam question that you would write to test someone’s understanding of the material being covered in that class.
The first part of the question describes a real-world issue. The second part articulates a question related to that issue, but draws on the theories discussed that day. The question should not exceed 500 words. All questions will be shared with the class. You will be graded on your ability to connect the ideas to issues of the day. This grading element is to encourage you to think actively and critically about the readings, by connecting them to real world phenomena. It will also help you understand what is unique about sustainability research.

Below are two illustrations of such questions. They are lightly edited versions of the questions that appeared in the 2016 comprehensive exams.

**Question 1**

The sustainability literature sensitizes us to paradoxes, cross-level and systemic issues, and differences in time and spatial scales between corporate actors and the natural and/or social environment they inhabit. At times the short-term economic interests of corporate actors are pitted squarely against the long-term balance of critically sensitive eco-systems.

For example, when US president Donald Trump signed an executive order aimed at reducing restrictions on oil drilling in the Arctic and Atlantic, suggestively called the America-First Offshore Energy Strategy, he justified it as a way to "unleash American energy" and create "thousands and thousands" of jobs. "Our country's blessed with incredible natural resources, including abundant offshore oil and natural gas reserves, but the federal government has kept 94% of these offshore areas closed for exploration and production [...] This deprives our country of potentially thousands and thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in wealth," 1 President Trump proclaimed, honouring one of the key promises he had made on the campaign trail.

The executive order caused uproar. Greenpeace mounted a customized campaign “to fight back” against what it dubbed the new "oil rush" in the Arctic Ocean. "When we drill, we spill", Greenpeace reminded us, and cleaning stations are thousands of miles away. 2 The campaign used unambiguous language to advocate against any and all drilling in the arctic: “Here’s why we can’t let ANY drilling in the Arctic continue”; “It’s critically important that the region is closed to ALL new oil drilling forever”; “Say no to ALL Arctic drilling, now and forever”. Within Trump’s own conservative parties, dissenters like David Jenkins, president of Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship, a non-profit conservation group, called the move “hasty”, “as reckless as it is unnecessary” and “defying market realities”.

Applying a paradox perspective, explain how Trump’s and Greenpeace’s position on offshore drilling can be harnessed to create a sustainable solution. Be sure to make it clear if you are describing a causal explanation or processual. Are there any counterfactuals worth noting?

**Question 2**

Inequality remains a global concern, polarizing societies along ethnic, religious and cultural lines and raising the threat level on future financial instability. While the gap between the rich and the poor has been narrowing somewhat, as “the poor of the world have seen their incomes rise by 60 and 80% - it’s us in the rich world that have seen income growth slowing,” a Forbes review article 4 concludes. A recent report by the World Economic Fund further warns that:

> It is difficult to identify routes that will lead back to robust global rates of economic growth. [...] Concerns over income and wealth distribution are becoming more politically disruptive, and much greater emphasis

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2 http://www.greenpeace.org/usa/arctic/issues/oil-drilling/
3 https://ssir.org/articles/entry/climate_science_as_culture_war
is needed on the increasing financial insecurity that characterizes many people’s lives.

The question of growth has long been central to sustainability – with earlier pro-environmental arguments suggesting de-growth as one key way to relieve pressure on world’s commons or balanced growth that takes more fully into account planetary limits. Pro-poor agendas advocated uneven growth, with redistribution of income favouring the “last mile”, the 4 billion living under US$1.90 a day. Despite concerted efforts and a rising global middle class, the reality at the very bottom of the income pyramid remains dire, with real-time hunger games that not only hinder the well-being of the current generation but also threaten the human development of the young. Environmental change amplifies these challenges, with billions tethering one drought or flood away from starvation and displacement. The resulting “rapid increase in climate refugees”, the National Geographic Society warns, “will put an economic and social strain on the regions that offer them asylum.”

The slowing down of global growth compounds the decades-old grand challenge of inequality in multiple ways. Not only is there less excess to be charitably redirected from the rich towards the poor in-situ, but the geographic flows of the many poor being forced out of their homes by natural or man-made crises and heading to richer hosts extols a significant, direct, and immediate burden for relocation and reintegration. While some suggest that the migration patterns of these economic refugees might eventually benefit their generous hosts, there is political backlash, with moves to control the burden by capping or even stopping such inflows.

The sustainability literature sensitizes us to the absolute environmental, social and human downsides of excessive growth. It also informs the ongoing debate concerning the relative or comparative distribution of pain and gain once planetary boundaries have been trespassed.

Taking the viewpoint of economic refugees, elaborate on the effect of stalling growth on human well-being (at any level or scale). Choose one specific dimension from institutional complexity or cross-sector collaboration to formulate a testable proposition concerning the effect of the slowing down in global growth on inequality for the next generation. Outline an approach that can help decision makers in different sector assess in which direction the growth-inequality debates might be heading and suggest measures to either prevent or mitigate human suffering.

Exams

At the completion of Tima’s classes and again at the end of Oana’s classes, you will be given a question written by one of your classmates to answer. The question may even be one that you submitted, in which case consider it a gift. This element of the course will motivate you to review the materials learned in class and also prepare the business students for their comprehensive exams.

PLAGIARISM / ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:
http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the

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5 https://ourworldindata.org/extreme-poverty/
7 https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/climate-refugee/
licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (http://www.turnitin.com).

HEALTH AND WELLNESS

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western’s Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Please check out the Faculty of Music web page http://www.music.uwo.ca, and our own McIntosh Gallery http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca.

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.

To help you learn more about mental health, Western has developed an interactive mental health learning module, found here: http://uwo.ca/health/mental_wellbeing/education/module.html. This module is 30 minutes in length and provides participants with a basic understanding of mental health issues and of available campus and community resources. Topics include stress, anxiety, depression, suicide and eating disorders. After successful completion of the module, participants receive a certificate confirming their participation.
### OVERVIEW OF SESSIONS (DRAFT)

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<tr>
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<th>Topic</th>
<th>Facilitator</th>
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<td>Key Concepts and Classics</td>
<td>Tima</td>
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<td>2. Sept 22</td>
<td>Mainstream Business</td>
<td>Tima</td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Sept 29</td>
<td>Criticisms to the Mainstream</td>
<td>Tima</td>
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<td>4. Oct 6:</td>
<td>Paradoxes: Real and Constructed</td>
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<td>6. Oct 20</td>
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<td>Oct 22</td>
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<td>Grand Challenges</td>
<td>Oana</td>
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<td>8. Nov 3</td>
<td>Inequality</td>
<td>Oana</td>
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<td>PhD Sustainability Academy Events</td>
<td>Oana &amp; Tima</td>
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<td>9. Nov 17</td>
<td>Poverty</td>
<td>Oana</td>
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<td>10. Nov 24</td>
<td>Prosociality</td>
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<td>11. Dec. 1</td>
<td>Morality</td>
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<td>12. Dec 8</td>
<td>Governance</td>
<td>Oana</td>
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<tr>
<td>Dec 10</td>
<td>Exam 2</td>
<td>Oana</td>
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TIMA’S SESSIONS

WEEK 1: Key Concepts and Classics

This week’s readings speak to the origins of sustainable development, which was a reaction to the more conventional approaches to economic development. We start with conventional approaches to economics (Friedman), which puts into stark relief the purpose of business from a neoliberal perspective. We then move into conventional approaches to economics. The Pearce and Costanza et al readings are a bit long, so you don’t have to know details. But, you should be able to speak to the basic assumptions of environmental economics, ecological economics, and sustainable development.

Neoliberal Economics

Environmental Economics

Ecological Economics

Sustainable Development

WEEK 2: Mainstream Business

In this week’s readings, the readings move towards mainstream business. It was a very difficult set of readings to choose, as the bulk of research in sustainability lies in this week’s readings. I wanted to give you a taste of how management researchers are approaching this topic, from various different paradigms, methods, and levels of analysis. The Flammer and Barnett & King readings are very much in the economics traditions from last week. Crilly, et al and Schussler et al take a more sociological perspective. Wright is relatively theory free, but puts into light how sustainability is put into practice.

Overview
Bansal, P & Song, H (2017), Similar but not the Same: Differentiating between Corporate Sustainability and Corporate Responsibility, Academy of Management Annals: 11(1): 105-149.

Organizational Level


**Stakeholder Theory**


**Industry Self-Regulation**


**Institutional Theory**


**WEEK 3: Criticisms to the Mainstream**

This week’s readings are relatively light, in that the first three readings (Gladwin et al, DesJardins, and Banerjee) offer a relatively fringe view of business sustainability. I feel it is necessary, however, to recognize that mainstream approaches to sustainability in business are incomplete and call for new theorizing. The last two readings are not taken from business, and offer a more social perspective of risk. They too are critical, but not in the same way as are the first three.

**Mainstream Business**


**Mainstream Risk**


WEEK 4: Paradoxes: Real and Constructed


Industrial Ecology


The Anthropocene and Planetary Boundaries


WEEK 5: Systems Approaches

Systems Theory


Resiliency


**Sustainability Transitions**


**WEEK 6: Improving Dimensionality: Time, Space, Place & Scale**

This week indulges me. It reflects my stream of research, which I believe can break the logjam in mainstream business. I argue centrally that the reason why mainstream business is unable to accommodate sustainability is because there are missing dimensions to both constructs and theorizing. Once we incorporate these dimensions into our theorizing, we can provide the motivation for organizations, within the business paradigm, to meet the needs of business and society, today and tomorrow.


**OANA’S SESSIONS**

**WEEK 7: Grand Challenges**


**WEEK 8: Inequality**


**WEEK 9: Poverty**


Tobias, J.M., Mair, J., Barbosa-Leiker, C. 2013. Toward a theory of transformative


**WEEK 10: Prosociality**


**WEEK 11: Morality**


Moore, C., Gina, F. 2015. Approach, ability, aftermath: A psychological process


**WEEK 12: Governance**


