SUMA PS5700

ETHICS OF SUSTAINABILITY MANAGEMENT AND FINANCE

Course Overview

In the spring of 2017, the World Bank estimated that businesses and individuals pay $1.5 trillion in bribes annually, which does not account for additional billions of dollars of both humanitarian and development aid that pass clandestinely from public to private hands, in addition to further billions lost to tax evasion, and further billions funneled to and from illegal “trafficking”. It does not account for the billions enmeshed in conflicts of interest, ranging from campaign donations to regulatory loopholes and in general, “private gain from public office”. All such transactions occur in globally widespread arenas of corrupt practices. At the same time, “what is just” in the distribution of programmatic goods and services must be decided, and this itself entails decisions about whose participation will count in deciding any such distribution. Some voices are heard, and some are unheard, and the matter is often contingent upon the existing distribution of wealth, including the access wealth facilitates to core decision processes.

In this complex situation, which results significantly from unethical practices, the process and success of sustainability, including the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), depend upon the positive inroads and disruptions made by ethical practices. What are the features of these practices? What kinds of ethics are necessary and integral to the process and success of sustainability? Many new practical ethics, framed by scholars and practitioners since the 1980s, are promoted today by individuals and organizations, including national and international governmental organizations, civil society organizations (CSOs, also called NGOs), corporations and even loosely structured grassroots movements. In what forms and at what levels of sustainability management are the new ethics to be adopted and pursued? This course seeks to identify, explain and consider such “sustainability ethics” and the ways in which sustainability
managers can activate them, largely through issue-framing, agenda-setting, and policy, program and project design, inspection and review.

The course material is divided into three sections: challenges, pathways and practices. Challenges include the worldwide dimensionality of ethical problems today; and the three particular problems of corruption, conflict and climate, which undercut economy, society and ecology, the three pillars characteristically understood to support sustainability. Pathways, including common pools, regional equity, social responsibility and impact investment, are human dynamics that can lead us to remediating these problems. Practices include particularly those of production, transaction, distribution and development, the primary objects of sustainability management. Throughout the course, specific environmental ethics, including earth justice, environmental justice, and sectoral sustainability ethics, are discussed; and emphasis is placed on ethical issues of finance, including commodification, privatization, and financialization itself. This emphasis is reflected in the increasing concern for financing sustainability, including the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

While sustainability management requires the understanding and application of complex environmental science, the efficacy of science in producing human and environmental goods depends upon ethical evaluations of need, use and harm, together with ethical practice at all levels of management. Knowledge of relevant ethical expectations to be met throughout decision processes promotes the possibility of achieving such goods. Doing so is especially urgent today, since ethical issues have attained global proportions, and demands for their resolution are voiced with increasing concern, volatility and insistence.

Course Objectives

Students are expected to learn how to evaluate and manage the competing ethical claims of stakeholders regarding social, economic and environmental benefits and harms. On completing the course, students should be able to:

(1) identify and assess ethical claims concerning sustainability at various levels of sustainability management within a range of sectors;
(2) perceive and map conflict and its resolution or remediation among competing sustainability practices, or between these and unsustainable practices;
(3) discern and assess values within documents, organizations and standpoints;
(4) design incentives or disincentives to alter or maintain values-based claims;
(5) frame ethics provisions for sustainability project proposals;
(6) identify mechanisms for ethics training and monitoring in the practice of management;
(7) utilize corruption assessment tools and structure anti-corruption provisions;
(8) engage in public discourse in terms of sustainability ethics;
(9) apply sustainability ethics in the context of policy, program and project design, innovation and change; and
(10) utilize cases and case histories to inform, improve and ground decision making.

Course Topics and Readings

In advance of each class, students should become familiar with the relevant materials posted in the Files section of our Canvas site, reading at least 3 of the 6 scholarly articles listed. Each week, a relevant web page is also provided as a source of additional information and potential research.

During each class session, the various items listed will be discussed, and students will have the opportunity to express their thoughts on them.

Introduction

Week 1. Ethical Capital – Common Ground and Shaky Ground
September 6


Web Page: United Nations Sustainable Development Goals
https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/?menu=1300
Section I. Challenges

Week 2. “World Problematics” – Corruption, Conflict, and Climate
September 13


Web Page: Earth Charter Initiative – The Earth Charter
http://earthcharter.org/discover/the-earth-charter/

Week 3. “Utilities” – Commodification, Corruption, and Earth Justice
September 20


Web Page: Ethical Systems – Corruption
https://www.ethicalsolutions.org/content/corruption

**Week 4. “Rights” – Privatization, Conflict, and Environmental Justice**
*September 27*


Web Page: The World Justice Project – Rule of Law Index 2017-2018
https://worldjusticeproject.org/our-work/wjp-rule-law-index/wjp-rule-law-index-2017%E2%80%932018

**Week 5. “Values” – Financialization, Climate, and Sustainability Ethics**
*October 4*


Web Page: The World Happiness Report 2018

**Section II. Pathways**

**Week 6. Common Pools – Community Stakeholder Dynamics**  
*October 11*


Web Page: Our Common Home – Encyclical
http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si.html
**Week 7. Regional Equity – Metropolitan Stakeholder Dynamics**

*October 18*


Web Page – United Nations Global Land Outlook 2017
https://www.unccd.int/actions/global-land-outlook-glo

**Week 8. Social Responsibility – Organizational Stakeholder Dynamics**

*October 25*


Web Page: Ethisphere – The World’s Most Ethical Companies 2018  
https://www.worldsmostethicalcompanies.com/

**Week 9. Impact Investment – Vanguard Stakeholder Dynamics**  
*November 1*


https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/bitstream/handle/10986/27986/9781464811197.pdf?sequence=2&isAllowed=y

**Section III: Practices**

**Week 10. Ethical Issues in Production Processes: Economic Resources**  
*November 8*


http://whc.unesco.org/en/list

**Week 11. Ethical Issues in Transaction Processes: Economic Regulation**

*November 15*


Web Page: Transparency International – Corruption Perceptions Index 2017
https://www.transparency.org/country

**Week 12. Thanksgiving Holiday**

*November 22*

**Week 13. Ethical Issues in Distribution Processes: Economic Opportunity**

*November 29*


Web Page: International Union for Conservation of Nature – Species
https://www.iucn.org/theme/species

**Week 14. Ethical Issues in Development Processes: Economic Growth**

*December 6*


Week 15: Student Presentations
December 13

Course Materials

Required reading materials are indicated under weekly topics in the Files section of our Canvas site, typically as PDFs. They have been selected from a broad range of highly contemporary relevant literature. To access a reading, simply click on the title in the Files section. It usually takes significantly under a minute for the article to appear fully, depending upon the strength of internet connectivity and the type of browser used.

In addition, for the purpose of review, PPTs used in class will be posted weekly in the Files section of our Canvas site.

Course Requirements

Course requirements are listed below, together with their grade point values.

1. **Class Attendance:** Attendance will be given a maximum weight of 13%. One grade point will be given for each attended class session. Attendance should be timely and regular. An absence is excused only with (a) prior e-mail notification for a critical documented purpose, or (b) emergency verification. Attendance should be professionally “attentive”, or without distractive use of electronic or other equipment.

2. **Class Participation:** Participation will be given a maximum weight of 26%. Two grade points will be given for active participation in each class session. Active participation includes both (a) raising questions and offering comments connected meaningfully to ongoing discussion; and (b) introducing readings by sharing highlights and considerations pertaining to them.

3. **Discussion Entries:** Discussion entries posted on our Canvas website in the Discussion section will be given a maximum weight of 26%. A maximum of two grade points will be given for the timely preparation and posting of an informative, perceptive, coherent and cogent essay-style statement pertinent to the reading material assigned for a class session. One such statement should be prepared in advance of each class session. The statement is due by Wednesday, 2 p.m. before the Thursday class to which it pertains. Students should consider the possibility of accomplishing their readings and posting their statements over the weekend prior to any class.

4. **A Report:** A report focusing on a clearly framed, specific case of innovation in or deviation from sustainability management in a public, civic or private organization will be given a maximum weight of 35%. The report should explain why the relevant conduct or policy is ethical or unethical, with reference to the sustainability ethics addressed in the course. The report should explain how the conduct or policy demonstrates “best practices” or “corrupt practices”. The report should be submitted both online and in paper copy by Tuesday, December
Informal presentations on student reports will be scheduled for Thursday, December 13, during the usual class time framework.

Additional details regarding course requirements will be posted, as needed, in the Assignments section of our Canvas site.

Each student’s points for all requirements (class attendance, class participation, discussion entries and the report) will be totaled, and a class curve will be established. Final grades will be provided on a letter grade scale.

**Statements of University Policy**

**Academic Integrity Statement**

The School of Professional Studies does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Those students who violate the Academic Integrity and Community Standards will be subject to the Dean’s Disciplinary Procedures. The standards can be viewed online at:

http://studentconduct.columbia.edu/

http://ce.columbia.edu/node/217

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. Columbia provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research:

http://library.columbia.edu/research/citation-management.html

Violations of the Academic Integrity and Community Standards will be reported to the Associate Dean for Student and Alumni Affairs.

**Facilities Accessibility Statement**

Columbia is committed to providing equal access to qualified students with documented disabilities. A student’s disability status and reasonable accommodations are individually determined based upon disability documentation and related information gathered through the intake process. For more information regarding this service, please visit the University’s Health Services website at:

http://www.health.columbia.edu/disability-services