

BUS 295f (2)
FIELD PROJECTS: SUSTAINABLE BUSINESS
Spring 2013 Module 2
Wednesdays, 6:30 – 9:20 pm

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Office: Room 11B
Office Hours: Wednesdays 5:20 – 6:20 or by appointment

Overview

This course will give students experience interacting with a specific business on issues related to addressing sustainability in a business setting. Not only will the students see how the business tries to translate the concept of sustainability into practice but they will apply their skills and knowledge to help the business solve an actual problem. They will increase their knowledge of “green” business while improving their skills in making presentations to clients and carrying out research projects in a business setting.

The students will be divided into groups of three to five. Each group will be assigned a different company and will be given a specific project by that business. The course will culminate in each student group making a presentation and delivering a report to its assigned business. Because of the short amount of time in the module, the projects will be narrowly defined and small enough to be accomplished during a single module, but will still be challenging. To allow the students to hit the ground running, the instructor and client will identify the first work tasks for the team to carry out.

All the businesses that the students will work with will have offices within an hour distance of Brandeis by car. The students will visit the company’s offices during the first week of the module to learn about the company and receive a briefing from the company on the particular assignment. They will return to the company to make their presentation at the end of the module. The instructor will serve as advisor to all of the groups and will accompany them on their initial visit to the company and on their final presentation.

Most of the sponsoring organizations for the projects will be businesses, but there could also be a trade association, government agency, or NGO. The projects will include a range of topics and might include such topics as:

- Assessing the potential to sell a clean-energy-related product into a particular global market
- Developing priorities and a specific plan for cost effectively reducing a business’s energy use and carbon footprint
- Analysis of business opportunities related to specific World Bank and International Finance Corporation initiatives related to sustainability
- Recommending mechanisms for measuring and communicating a company’s progress towards its sustainability goals.

The student teams' work will consist primarily of independent research. The nature of that research will vary with the project, but will generally include identification of relevant resources, collection of information, interviews with internal and external parties, and analysis of data. Depending upon the nature of the project and the location of the company, some of the research may need to take place on-site at the business.

An early assignment after the initial visit to the company will be the production of a research plan, including specific materials, data sources, interview targets, and research strategies. The professor may assign specific readings to a team in order to provide context or research strategies for its project, but there will not be any other assigned readings for the course.

Learning Objectives

From this course, you will:

- Learn how different businesses try to translate the concept of sustainability into practice.
- Observe the internal operations and strategies of a business that is seeking to operate as a sustainable business.
- Develop skills useful in consulting, such as:
 - Client relationships
 - Teamwork
 - Making effective presentations
 - Conducting interviews
- Increase knowledge of sustainable business practices.
- Improve skills in business research and analysis.
- Develop experience working with a business client in the real world.

The Role of Classes in the Course

Class time will be used to help each team advance its project, as well as to enable the students to hear about the other projects and provide suggestions to the other teams. That will allow them to learn about all the different businesses and issues that the class is collectively addressing.

Activities in class will include:

- Progress reports from the teams.
- Critiques of team work plans.
- Discussions of common challenges and issues faced by the teams.
- Presentations by the professor on research strategies, project management tools, presentation techniques, and relevant green business topics.
- Practice sessions for presentations to the companies.
- Individual team meetings.

Attendance and Participation

Attendance and active participation in class is required. Active participation is also necessary in team meetings, either in class or at other times and places, including at the client's offices. Collaboration and interaction with team members is essential to a successful consulting experience and project.

Academic Honesty

Students are expected to be honest in all of their academic work. This includes the proper citation of the work of others in papers and presentations. Instances of alleged dishonesty will be forwarded to the Office of Campus Life for possible referral to the Student Judicial System. Potential sanctions include failure in the course and suspension from the University. For the University policy on academic honesty, please see section 5 of *the Rights and Responsibilities Handbook*.

Disabilities

Students with a documented disability on record at Brandeis who wish to have reasonable accommodations made for their disability should see me immediately. Reasonable accommodations will not be provided retroactively.

Grading

Grades will consist of:

- ***Team work product*** (40 percent). This grade will be based in part on input from the client and in part on the instructor's assessment of team performance. It will consider the value of the final product to the client, the quality of interim work products for the client, the quality of the group's performance in interactions with the client, and whether the team met the client's deadlines for the project.
- ***Team work process*** (20 percent). This grade will be based on the instructor's assessment of the team's ability to work efficiently and effectively together. It will consider whether the group demonstrated diligence, teamwork, and good organization.
- ***Individual performance*** (40 percent). This grade will be based on the instructor's assessment of the individual student's role in class discussions and team meetings, and the ability of the individual to work effectively with the other team members,

Students will be asked to comment on the roles of their colleagues in their group. In a case where it is apparent to the instructor that a student did not carry out an appropriate share of the group's work at a quality comparable to group expectations, grades on team work product and process will be adjusted accordingly.

If a team does not submit a copy of its final presentation and report to the client and the instructor, the members of that team will receive an Incomplete or Failing Grade in the course.

Think about What You Are Getting Into

(adapted from course notes by Professors William Sherden and Edward Chazen)

This class differs from conventional courses in ways that will create challenges. For one thing, you will need to deal with multiple human relationships—with your teammates, with the client, and with me. Your success in this course will depend on your ability to cooperate with, motivate, and otherwise work with all of these people as opposed to working independently as in a traditional course.

Your team members may have different ideas and work styles than you, but you will need to figure out how to work with them collaboratively and effectively. Ultimately, you and your teammates will need to meet your client's expectations and serve as effective ambassadors of the Brandeis International Business School, demonstrating to the client that our students are competent, talented professionals. My role is more of a project manager than a traditional lecturer. Depending on how well the project is progressing, I will have anywhere from moderate to heavy involvement in your project.

It is possible that you and your teammates may experience real-world frustrations, such as delays in getting data from the client, delays in setting up interviews, changing project scopes, or a client who is unsure what the firm wants from the project. That is the reality of consulting. Even when a consulting project is important to the firm's success, other competing demands on the client's time may prevent the project from receiving adequate attention. This course will expose you to such real-world challenges and frustrations, and more importantly, teach you how to deal with them. For example, you will learn how persistence and diplomacy are needed to get others to cooperate with you, especially when they do not have a strong incentive to do so. You will also learn how to deal with frustrating impasses and seeming dead ends in research by finding alternative approaches for working around the impasse.

To be successful in this course, here is what you will need to do:

- **Produce error-free work.** The client should not become the quality control department. Consistent errors in work will lead to a loss of client confidence.
- **Act professionally.** Teams must maintain a high level of professionalism, including maintaining client confidentiality, responding quickly to client inquiries, showing up for meetings on time, dressing appropriately, and fulfilling commitments.
- **Work at a steady pace.** Because there is a short amount of time in the module, you will need to start work on the client's project immediately and sustain a steady work pace throughout the module. Cramming at the end of the semester will not give your team the opportunity to maintain regular contact with the client and produce interim work products. You should budget your time so that you have at least seven hours each week for your project in addition to time in class.
- **Carry out wide-ranging and creative research.** Teams should collect and analyze data that sheds new light on the client's issues and opportunities. This may include conducting interviews, creating databases, preparing comprehensive analyses, and finding valuable reports. Google searches alone will not lead to a satisfactory product for the client.
- **Be self-motivated.** If you do not come to this course motivated to work steadily and produce a professional work product, you will hold back your team. As instructor, I will grade you harshly if I feel you are not carrying your weight as part of the team.

- ***Be an effective team member.*** Teamwork is an essential aspect of consulting work and is crucial to completing the project for this course. You need to be prepared to work with your team members cooperatively, to build good working relationships within the team, and to divide the work among team members fairly and in a way that maximizes your individual strengths.
- ***Listen to the instructor and client.*** The team will need to keep in mind that your ultimate goal for the project is to meet the client's needs and desires. To do that, you need to listen to the client's recommendations. You also need to listen to the instructor, who will serve as project manager.