

Commerce 4SG3
Sustainability: Corporations and Society
Winter 2026 Course Outline

Strategic Management Area
DeGroote School of Business
McMaster University

INSTRUCTOR AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Carolyn Capretta

Student TA

Instructor

TBA

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Office Hours: after class

Course website: See Avenue to Learn

COURSE ELEMENTS

Credit Value:	3	Leadership:	Yes	IT skills:	No	Global view:	Yes
Avenue:	Yes	Ethics:	Yes	Numeracy:	No	Written skills:	Yes
Participation:	Yes	Innovation:	Yes	Group work:	Yes	Oral skills:	Yes
Evidence-based:	Yes	Experiential:	Yes	Final Exam:	No	Guest speaker(s):	Yes

COURSE INFORMATION

Lectures: 3-hour class once per week

Tutorials: N/A

Course Delivery Mode: In-person

Meeting details: The goal of this course is to familiarize students with a variety of sustainability related concepts including the triple bottom line, resilience, stakeholder engagement, the tragedy of the commons, sustainability and technology, and sustainable business models. Using cases, simulations, guest speakers, a group project and reflection, students will sharpen their ability to critically analyze and debate complex and systemic issues from an informed position. Students will emerge from this course understanding both the challenges and opportunities inherent in sustainability.

MEETING DETAILS

Punctuality is the sign of a true professional and shows self-discipline and respect for others. Please make whatever arrangements are necessary to begin work at 7:00 p.m.

IMPORTANT LINKS

- [Mosaic](#)
- [Avenue to Learn](#)
- [Student Accessibility Services - Accommodations](#)
- [McMaster University Library](#)

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this course, you will:

- Critically reflect on the motivations and integrity of corporate initiatives that target environmental and social issues.
- Evaluate the efficacy of corporate strategies for addressing environmental and social problems using robust external (verified) data.
- Apply specific tools and frameworks to assess how organizations contribute to sustainability challenges.
- Clarify and articulate your personal values and opinions on sustainability issues by writing an opinion piece.

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND TEXTS

Required:

Avenue To Learn eReserves – some of the required readings materials can be accessed from A2L in the eReserve module. \$ FREE

Custom-made: Commerce 4SG3 Corporations and Society at [CoursePack](#)

- Available for purchase at Ivey Publishing. \$ ~50
You must register and log in before purchasing the coursepack.
Contact cases@ivey.ca for any questions.

CLASS FORMAT

This is an in-person 3-hour course. The three hours will consist of rapid problem-solving, mini-lecture, case analysis, lengthier discussion, and more in-depth applied exercises (not necessarily always in this order). There will be a short break part way through at a convenient time based on what we are working on. Please use this time to take care of personal needs of various kinds.

COURSE EXPECTATIONS

Case studies for class discussion are included in the Courseware, which you are expected to get before the first class. All other required reading materials are provided in hyperlink in the Course Schedule Table below. These materials will also be made available Avenue.

During this course you can expect to prepare for each case study for about 2 hours. In addition, you should budget approximately 1 hour to read the additional reading material for each week. In other words, you can expect to prepare for 1 hour or more per hour of class time. In addition to this personal preparation time, the individual and group assignments will take a significant amount of time, and involve library research and online research, writing, discussing with group members, brainstorming, collaborating, and practicing.

COURSE EVALUATION

Evaluation in this course will be based on a combination of group and individual work.

	Assessment type	Contribution to final grade	Final deadline*
Individual	Participation	25%	Ongoing
	In-class reflections for each of two presentation weeks	10%	As indicated in course outline
Group Projects	Business model mapping	15%	February 13
	Written report (Interim + Final)	25%	February 27 & March 23
	Final presentation	25%	March 24
	Total	100%	

**All deadlines for group projects close at 11:59pm on the indicated date.*

COURSE DELIVERABLES

CLASSROOM PARTICIPATION (25%)

Classroom engagement represents a unique opportunity to develop and enhance your confidence and skill in articulating a personal position, reacting to new ideas, and receiving and providing critical feedback from a group of assertive and demanding colleagues. Much of your learning will come from these classroom experiences.

You are expected to come to each class, having read cases and assigned readings and with a readiness and willingness to contribute to the class discussion. During each class, the professor will ask questions from the case studies and content. Your responses will make up a part of your engagement grade in addition to in-class activities. Your contribution to the learning of others, through the experience and insights you share is a key part of this learning process. Contributions will be graded based on quality, quantity, and consistency. Some of the things that will determine a contribution include:

- ◆ Are you listening, not just for a few minutes, but the duration of the class?
- ◆ Are your contributions relevant to the discussion? Do your comments relate to the comments of others and to the themes that the class is exploring together? Do you build on the class discussion?
- ◆ Do your comments add to our understanding of the situation? Are you incisive? Do you cut to the core of the problem?
- ◆ Are you willing to challenge the ideas that are being expressed in the classroom?
- ◆ Do you bring in your own experience, personal or professional, to add value to the class discussion?

Your class participation score will depend on your performance from all classes. For each class, your participation will be evaluated with a score that ranges from zero to ten based on three factors: your full class attendance (10%), your verbal engagement during class and your in-class activities and non-presentation reflections (15%). Your overall performance will be based on the average value of your performance across all classes, which will be converted to a score of 25. **It is your responsibility to display a name card for each class to support earning participation marks.**

IN CLASS PRESENTATION REFLECTIONS (10%)

The in-class presentation reflections are not eligible for an MSAF. Late assignments will not be accepted as this is an in-class presentation project.

For two weeks, as indicated in the course schedule, you are expected to submit a written reflection in which you will reflect on one presentation (not your own) presented in each of the two classes. Time will be provided during class. A template will be provided for the **week's written reflection** should be submitted by the end of the class. Each reflection should be kept to a **maximum of 300 words** and should address the following four points.

- **The call to action.** Mention one specific sustainability-related problem discussed in the presentation. What, in your view, is the call to action? In other words, what measure should be taken to address the problem and by whom?
- **The surprising insight.** Reflect about something you found to be novel, interesting, or surprising from the material discussed in the presentation (to be assigned).
- **The connection.** How does the content of the presentation relate to the materials presented in the last classes? Make a clear connection with other themes or insights that you observed in the previous guest lectures or case discussions.
- **The dilemma or unresolved issue.** Not all sustainability related problems can be readily solved with current technologies or institutional arrangements. Reflect on a dilemma, or unresolved/unanswerable issue, that emerged from the presentation. Clearly explain why the issue or the dilemma is difficult to resolve.

See the course schedule for due dates.

GROUP PROJECTS (65%)

In groups of 5 - 6 students will work on real world problems facing a business organization. This will provide students with an exciting opportunity to apply the lessons from this course on current sustainability challenges faced by corporations. Please form a group and enroll on Avenue in the first week of class (well before Jan. 14).

Key deadlines and deliverables

1. Deliverable: Submit in Avenue two real world business cases you identified and would like work by 11:59pm on **Friday January 16**. Please include a short description (1 paragraph) of the practical sustainability challenge that needs to be addressed for each company, and how you want to approach it. The professor will suggest which one case is most relevant and offer guidance on how to approach the case. Once you form a group, you have to enroll your group on Avenue To Learn.

Since your project will rely on secondary data, make sure to select a company for which sustainability information is sufficiently available. The Global Reporting Initiative (GRI) maintains a database of sustainability reports --

<https://www.globalreporting.org/reportregistration/verifiedreports>. When selecting a company, make sure that it has sustainability reports either at the GRI database or on its own website.

2. Deliverable (15%). Business model mapping exercise though Avenue by 11:59pm on **Friday February 13**.

For this deliverable you map and analyze the business model of the company you selected for your group project using one of the frameworks introduced at class. These frameworks will also be made available on Avenue.

The purpose of this exercise is to provide a descriptive and evaluative analysis of sustainability processes and outcomes in your case company. In addition to providing a business model mapping using the selected framework, you are expected write a short summary of your analysis. In brief, reflect on the following two themes: (1) the core sustainability capabilities of your case company and (2) the major sustainability deficits of the case company, in terms of processes or outcomes. The length of your written analysis should be at most 500 words.

3. Deliverable (25%): Interim Project Report through Avenue by 11:59pm on **Friday February 27**.

The interim report should provide a high-level overview of the practical challenge that the student group aims to investigate over the semester. It should explicitly identify and elaborate on the sustainability issue – a problem or an opportunity – and critically

analyze the company's responses to them. You could conduct a research project that explicates the problem and outlines potential solutions, but you could also do something different such as devise a model, develop an innovative solution, or craft a business proposal.

Once you submit your interim report on Avenue, you will receive feedback from the professor/TA or, if applicable, the company in question. The instructor will also provide you with a provisional mark based on a rubric available on Avenue. You are expected to use this feedback for developing your interim report into a full, final report (see next deliverable).

A detailed template for the interim report, along with clarifications for individual parts, will be posted on Avenue.

Note: If your project requires primary research (i.e., interviews or surveys) you are expected to work with the professor to follow the guidelines set out by McMaster's Research Ethics Board. See here for resources <https://reo.mcmaster.ca/home>.

4. Deliverable (25%): Final Project Report is due for submission through Avenue by 11:59pm on **Monday March 23**.

The final project report is developed based on the feedback provided for the interim project report. It should provide analysis followed by detailed recommendations addressing the issue or question you outlined in your **interim report**. Pay special attention to addressing the feedback provided to you for the interim report. Ignoring or otherwise failing to address the comments suggestions, without providing a sufficient explanation for doing so, can have a poor effect on your marks. Because scope of work for each project differs, each report will be unique. A rubric on Avenue details how this will be graded; but the eventual "grade" associated with this project will depend on the practical and theoretical soundness of the proposed solutions.

The report will be at least 10 pages single spaced, 12 point in Times New Roman font. Due to the variation across different projects, there is no set format for the report. In some situations, it may be useful to include the following sections: Executive Summary, Scope, Background and Context, Research and Analysis, Options Considered, Recommendation, and an Implementation Plan.

Draw on the library citation guide (<https://library.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/businesscitation.pdf>) paying particular attention to page 6 and page 15 for endnote and citation support.

For all group activities in this course, group members are expected to contribute equally. When that is not the case, individual grades may be adjusted to reflect individual efforts and contributions based on peer evaluations. To assess your peers, please use the peer evaluation form at the last page of this outline and submit the completed form to Avenue to Learn after your presentation, by 10:30pm.

To avoid paperwork, please submit the form only if your team members have different levels of contribution for the project. One copy of the evaluation for your group is sufficient. Please note that peer evaluation is only for assessing relative differences in contributions and cannot be used to exclude one or more members from the group. If you encounter a serious dysfunction in your group and you cannot resolve it by yourselves, please arrange an appointment with the instructor well before the end of the term. If you cannot agree between yourselves on the relative contribution of each member, also please send an email to arrange an appointment with the instructor.

5. Deliverable (25%): Final project presentation through Avenue by 11:59pm on March 24.

The in-class presentation is not eligible for an MSAF. Group members who show up late or who are absent from this class will receive a zero for this assignment.

On the final week(s) of the class, we will hold a final project presentation. In support of this, your group will prepare a 3 minutes-long pitch that will be made to the entire class and, if applicable, invited guests from the company. The purpose of the pitch is to draw attention to your project and begin your presentation. In addition, you will prepare a longer presentation supported by a PowerPoint presentation. This format will provide plenty of opportunity to discuss your solutions with clients and fellow students.

Presentations should be 20 minutes in length plus a 5 - 7 minute question and answer period. All group members need to present.

Please upload all files before the deadline on the appropriate folder on Avenue. Unjustified late submission can be penalized by up to 30% of the final marks at 10% per day or part day of lateness. Rubrics & templates are provided for components of the evaluation on Avenue To Learn or in the Course Outline. Please consult the template and rubrics at the start of the project!

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

In-class work cannot be submitted after the class is over. Make sure you upload/hand-in any papers, worksheets, and so on before you leave the classroom.

The Group components are not eligible for an MSAF. Late assignments will receive a 10% deduction per partial/full day up to a maximum of 3 days, after which the report will not be accepted. Assignment details discussed in class and on Avenue to Learn.

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

Students who wish to correspond with instructors or TAs directly via email must send messages that originate from their official McMaster University email account. This protects the confidentiality and sensitivity of information as well as confirms the identity of the student.

All students must receive feedback regarding their progress prior to the final date by which a student may cancel the course without failure by default.

- For Level 1 and Level 2 courses, this feedback must equal a minimum of 20% of the final grade.*
- For Level 3 courses and above, this feedback must equal a minimum of 10% of the final grade.*

Instructors may solicit feedback via an informal course review with students by Week #4 to allow time for modifications in curriculum delivery.

Students who have concerns about the course content, evaluation methods, or delivery should first reach out to the course instructor. If your concern remains unresolved after speaking with the instructor, you may then reach out to the relevant Area Chair for further consideration.

REQUESTING RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC WORK

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar [“Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”](#) and the link below;

<http://ug.degrote.mcmaster.ca/forms-and-resources/missed-course-work-policy/>

COURSE MODIFICATION

From time to time there may be a need to remove/add topics or to change the schedule or the delivery format. If these are necessary, you will be given as much advance notice as possible.

GENERATIVE AI

USE PROHIBITED

Students are **not** permitted to use generative AI in this course. In alignment with [McMaster academic integrity policy](#), it “shall be an offence knowingly to … submit academic work for assessment that was purchased or acquired from another source”. This includes work created by generative AI tools. Also state in the policy is the following, “Contract Cheating is the act of “outsourcing of student work to third parties” (Lancaster & Clarke, 2016, p. 639) with or without payment.” Using Generative AI tools is a form of contract cheating. Charges of academic dishonesty will be brought forward to the Office of Academic Integrity.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

AUTHENTICITY/PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g., Avenue to Learn, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software. **All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn, LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course. The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

ONLINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning, and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g., use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office *normally within 10 working days* of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar’s Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical, and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures or other methods of instruction **are strictly prohibited during this course except by your Instructor.** If your Instructor records the lectures, she has no plans to release these recordings. As a result, you are encouraged to attend the lecture so that you do not fall behind. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded during the class. Please speak with the Instructor if this is a concern for you.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, Avenue to Learn and/or McMaster email.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COURSE POLICIES

Your enrolment in Commerce 4SG3 will be considered to be an implicit acknowledgement of the course policies outlined above, or of any other that may be announced during lecture and/or on A2L. **It is your responsibility to read this course outline, to familiarize yourself with the course policies and to act accordingly.**

Lack of awareness of the course policies **cannot be invoked** at any point during this course for failure to meet them. It is your responsibility to ask for clarification on any policies that you do not understand.

COURSE SCHEDULE

**Commerce 4SG3
Sustainability: Corporations and Society
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See Avenue to Learn