

The Secret Lives of Corporations

KHC SM101

Spring 2012

Mondays/Wednesdays/Fridays 11:00-11:50 AM

Room: KHC 107

Associate Professor Stephanie Watts

Office hours: TBA

Office: SMG 617A

swatts@bu.edu

(617) 358-2330

Course description

Large corporations have and will continue to make great contributions to society, but also have wrought business scandals and global environmental and financial crises. The purpose of this course is to explore and understand the role that corporations and their structures are playing in the underlying economic, environmental and societal issues of our time. Historically, it has been the role of government to supervise the marketplace such that society's needs are not usurped by the profit motive. The growing corporate social responsibility (CSR) and socially responsible investment (SRI) movements are forging a new path to protecting the public good that does not rely on government regulation. They look to a new version of Adam Smith's invisible hand in which investors, consumers, employees, communities and others act to create a marketplace in which corporations are motivated to serve the public interest outside of government regulation. In this course, you will learn about these movements, their achievements and limitations, and work creatively to design mechanisms that enable us to participate and extend their vision.

This course is designed in two parts. In the first half of the semester we will study the structure of corporations and some of the more negative ramifications that this structure has had for civil society. During the second half of the semester, we will investigate solutions to these problems by reading from distinguished thinkers in this area, and also design our own solutions in areas that address each students' particular concerns. The informational content of the first half of the course does not bear good news. By actively participating in the creation of our own solutions, and by learning about the many others that are doing the same, we will turn the potentially depressing contents of the first half of the semester into the exciting possibility of engendering important and necessary future change.

It should be noted that Freshmen Seminars in the University Honors College are designed with the aim of having students engage actively in ongoing research. An important goal is to co-create new knowledge among the small class of students and the researcher/instructor. To this end, the final deliverable for this course is a self-designed and built website (with a corresponding presentation) that promotes an original idea, business proposal or similar initiative reflecting each student's passion for a solution to a problem identified in the first half of the course.

Required Texts

In addition to the various readings that are posted on Blackboard, the following texts will form the basis for the course:

- 1) The Bridge at the Edge of the World: Capitalism, the Environment, and Crossing from Crisis to Sustainability [Paperback], by Professor James Gustave Speth. ISBN-13: 978-0300151152; Yale University Press, 2010. \$12.24 at Amazon.

- 2) Prosperity Without Growth: Economics for a Finite Planet [Hardcover], by Tim Jackson. ISBN-13: 978-1844078943; Earthscan Publications Ltd., 2009. \$15.30 at Amazon.

- 3) The Divine Right of Capital [Paperback], by Marjorie Kelly and William Greider. ISBN-13: 978-1576752371; Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2003. \$12.71 at Amazon.

- 4) The Corporation: The Pathological Pursuit of Profit and Power [Paperback], by Joel Bakan. ISBN-13: 978-0743247467; Free Press, 2005. \$8.95 at Amazon.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory.

Academic Dishonesty

The School of Management and the University Honors College requests that I remind you that the University has a policy against plagiarism and other forms of academic misconduct. Students are expected to abide by both KHC and BU's Undergraduate Academic Conduct Code. The Academic Conduct Code can be found at <http://www.bu.edu/academics/resources/academic-conduct-code/>.

Also note that Incompletes will be given only in cases of serious illness, family emergencies, and other matters of sufficient gravity to render you incapable of finishing the course. SMG and CAS rules require that I make arrangements with you for the completion of coursework prior to the issuing of an Incomplete.

Grading

The overall course grade will be comprised of the following:

- 34% Class contributions and discussion
- 33% Deliverable I: Written Industry Report
- 33% Deliverable II: Website and presentation

Deliverables:

Deliverable I: Industry report

This individual written paper is due prior to Spring break. In it, students will report on an industry of their choice with regards to the Corporate Social Responsibility issues pertaining to that industry. It will identify the roles played by the major corporations, smaller corporations, private companies in the industry, and assess their relative influence on industry practices. It will describe the challenges and opportunities facing companies in the industry in working towards meeting the needs of all their stakeholders: employees, local communities, the environment, management and directors. Finally, it will present an assessment of the industry for the longer-range future: its ongoing resource needs and their identified long-term availability; its waste products and plans for disposal; its general viability in a limited-growth environment; and its societal contributions. Additional information about this deliverable will be distributed during class.

Deliverable II:

This individually designed and developed live website is to be formally presented to the class during the final week of class. The website will present, explain and promote each student's original idea for solving a part (however small) of one the problems studied during the first half of the semester. It will apply the website development, promotion, search engine optimization and social networking concepts taught in the second half of the semester. It will be graded on the basis of the originality of the idea, the quality of the writing, the technical implementation, and the visibility achieved through application of search engine optimization and social networking tools. Further information about this deliverable will be distributed in class.

Class contribution and participation:

For most of the reading assignments, students are asked to bring three questions to class (on the day the reading is due) that pertain to that reading. These can range from small specific factual questions, to bigger-picture questions about the content area, to questions about students' reactions to the content and how to integrate their emotional responses. These questions will form the basis for our discussions of the readings. Grading in this area will be primarily based on the quality of students class participation, but will also take into account the extent that their questions bring insight and depth into class discussions.

Course Outline & Readings

The following excerpt is from the corresponding Excel spreadsheet that is posted on the course Blackboard site. It is designed to be read online in Excel format. Please refer to the course Blackboard site to do so.

Date	Topic	In-class	Due for class
Wed. 1/19	Introductions/Administration		
Fri. 1/21	Corporations	History & structure of Corporations	Bakan - pp. 1-59 Ch
Mon. 1/24	"	Impacts of Externalization	Bakan - pp. 60-110
Wed. 1/26	"	Impacts on Culture; Solutions	Bakan - pp. 111-167

			Which won't?
Fri. 1/28	Databases	Researching Corporate behavior	
Mon. 1/31	"	"	Industry Selection -
Wed. 2/2	CSR	History of the CSR movement	How to read a CSR
Fri. 2/4	"	Current state of CSR movement	Matt McGuire CSR
Mon. 2/7	Labor issues	Employer practices	Emma Eaders' Qua
Wed. 2/9	"	Corporate aristocracy	Kelly - pp. ix - 50 C
Fri. 2/11	"	"	Kelly - pp. 51 - 92 C
Mon. 2/14	Social Justice	Economic Democracy	Kelly - pp. 95 - 143
Wed. 2/16		"	Kelly - pp. 145-207
Fri. 2/18	Agricultural practices		Emily Heusted's Fo
Tues. 2/22	"	Monday schedule - no Monday classes this week - Food Inc.	
Wed. 2/23	"	Food Inc.	
Fri. 2/25	Product Hazards	Can we protect ourselves?	Emily Heusted's Pro
Mon. 2/28	Creating culture	Advertising practices	Arielle Sharma's Ac
Wed. 3/2	"	PR practices	in.
Fri. 3/4	Sustainability	Environmental Impacts	Arielle Sharma's PR
Mon. 3/7	"	Corporations & sustainability	Speth - pp. 1-45 Ch
Wed. 3/9	Research	Industry research	Speth - pp. 46 - 86
Fri. 3/11			Work on your indus
		SPRING BREAK	Industry Reports du
Mon. 3/21	Envisioning solutions	The great transformation	Speth - pp. 89-106
Wed. 3/23		Capital structures	Speth - pp. 165-195
Fri. 3/25		Consciousness & Politics	Speth - pp. 199-237
Mon. 3/28		Share causes/solutions	Identify the cause/
Wed. 3/30	Building Websites to promote our causes		2 pages of research
Fri. 4/1		Building websites in Wordpress	2 pages of research
Mon. 4/4		Search engine optimization	2 pages of research
Wed. 4/6		Social networking links	
	Economics for a finite planet		
Fri. 4/8		Redefining prosperity	Jackson - pp. 1-47 C
Mon. 4/11			Jackson - pp. 49-111
Wed. 4/13			Jackson - pp. 121-161
Fri. 4/15		Class cancelled	Jackson - pp. 172-201
Wed. 4/20		Home, by Arthus Bertrand	Work on your "cau:
Thurs. 4/21		Monday schedule - no Monday classes this week	Work on your "cau:
		Corporate Social Conscience Index & Kamuu.com	Watts' Corporate S
Fri. 4/22	Watts' cause		hand in.
Mon. 4/25	IT & CSR	Ethical consumptions and IT apps	Watts' Ethical Cons
Wed. 4/27		Other CSR Websites & Smartphone apps	Read both Eaders a
Fri. 4/29	Final Presentations	Presentations - 3 students, 10-15 minutes each	
Mon. 5/2		Presentations	

Wed. 5/4
Fri. 5/6

Presentations
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