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SEEK 915: Sustainability Lab

Spring 2012

Course Overview

Sustainability Lab is an experiential learning course in which Kellogg students work on a "real-world" sustainability project with a client organization, under the supervision of a mixed academic and business management team. Teams of 3-6 Kellogg students work with a client organization that has requested Kellogg's help in addressing an issue related to environmental sustainability.

The hallmark of S-Lab projects is the integration of sustainability and business goals through innovation. This can involve, for example, the design and marketing of green products, the development of metrics and management systems, the transformation of operations and supply chains, the development of investment strategies, entrepreneurship and business model innovation.

Sustainability, defined broadly to include environmental, social and economic practices that sustain the Earth's resources for future generations, has become an increasing concern for businesses and non-profit organizations alike. Through this course, you will develop practical know-how in transforming businesses for environmental sustainability or developing business opportunities related to sustainability. Each Kellogg student team works under the guidance of the faculty advisor, and in direct collaboration with a client project manager. During the term, you are expected to contribute 8-10 hr./week to the project. The class is structured around the project work. It includes weekly team meetings with the faculty advisor as well as three evening class sessions in weeks 1, 5 and 10 (Thursdays, 6:30-9:30pm). At the end of the quarter, students give presentations to the client and to the class.

By the time you complete this course, you will have gained skills in identifying and prioritizing green and social business opportunities for green businesses, and in implementing the changes to core business processes that are needed to sustain the lasting health of natural, social, and economic systems.

The course is ideal for students seeking:

- experience with managing business and sustainability in an integrated fashion
- an general introduction to sustainability issues in target industries or functions
- to build a marketable resume and contacts in sustainability management
- looking to work in a sustainability related industry or job after graduation

SEEK 915 can serve as an introduction or a capstone experience that integrates concepts and skills from a variety of courses in the MBA curriculum in the context of a business challenge centered on sustainability. The course is open to all students. Since each project team requires a variety of skills, there are no individual prerequisites to taking this class. It is advisable for at least some team members to have taken one or several courses in Kellogg's sustainability and social impact curriculum prior to S-Lab.

Format

SEEK 915 is an experiential learning course. The course is centered on a project with a corporate or non-profit client organization. Most of the work will occur in your own time, in team meetings and client calls. Occasionally, work may be carried out on the client site, but that is not normally required. In addition, you will have weekly meetings with your faculty advisors.

Within the first week of the quarter you will negotiate and sign an agreement of understanding with the client organization that defines the scope, timeline and deliverables of the project. A mid-term progress presentation to the class is due in week 5. At the end of the quarter you will present the results of your work to the class and to the management team of the client organizations. In most instances, the client presentation will be to members of the senior management team.

Weekly Team Meetings

The purpose of the team meetings with the faculty advisor is to review progress, share ideas and insights, solve problems, and review deliverables. The entire team is expected to participate in each meeting in a timely and prepared fashion. Lateness or absence will negatively affect your grade. The scheduling of these meetings is flexible. If no other time can be agreed, the default is during the designated class time, Thursdays, 6:30-9:30pm. It is your responsibility to schedule team meetings and to organize work as necessary.

The Role of Faculty Advisor

You are expected to manage the project independently in collaboration with the client project liaison. The faculty advisor's role is to help you structure and solve problems, to help avoid and remove roadblocks, to intervene in the case of conflicts within the team or with the client, and to suggest appropriate resources, such as experts and materials applicable to the project. The faculty advisor is not a project manager – you own the project and are ultimately responsible for progress and deliverables.

Full Class Sessions

In addition to the weekly meetings with the project team and faculty advisor, there will be three sessions with the entire class:

- Week 1: Introduction, overview, the business case for sustainability, implementation issues
- Week 5: Project update presentations, problem solving workshop
- Week 10: Final presentations

Project Clients 2012

The following clients sponsor S-Lab projects in 2012. Please see the course website [linked on the SEEK Program homepage](#) for further information.

Ambers & Co Capital Microfinanzas

Autodesk (multiple)

Baxter Healthcare

Caterpillar

Center for Neighborhood Technology

Illinois Tool Works / Signode

McDonald's

Solid Waste Solutions

Wal-Mart (multiple)

Watershed Capital (multiple)

Youth for Technology Foundation

Resources and Readings

There is no course packet for the class. A small number of background readings about sustainability and business will be available via the course home page on Blackboard: <http://courses.northwestern.edu>. Project related materials and resources will be distributed in the team meetings as needed.

Assignments and Grading

The grade in this course is heavily weighted to the quality of the final team report delivered to the client. The team's performance will be evaluated based on the depth and comprehensiveness of research and analysis, skillful application of business tools and concepts, practicality of the findings and recommendations, and the overall quality of deliverables. Deliverables will be evaluated by the faculty advisor and by the client companies via a confidential project assessment survey. Client relationship management is part of the client survey. Each group also performs a peer evaluation of members' contribution and individual grades are adjusted accordingly.

<u>Grade Component</u>	<u>Weight</u>	<u>Due</u>
Signed off LOU & work plan	10%	April 5 (week2)
Mid-term progress review	15%	April 26 (week 5)
Final recommendations report	60%	June 1/8 (week 10/11)
- Faculty advisor grade	30%	
- Client assessment	30%	
- Peer evaluation adjustment* +/-10%		
<u>Team meeting and class participation</u>	<u>15%</u>	continuous
Total	100%	

** Note: 10% is equivalent to a full letter grade. Project teams evaluate the quantity and quality of each team member's contribution at the end of the quarter. The default is equal contributions, and the group average adjustment is 0, hence upward adjustments for one member lead to automatic downward adjustments for the others.*

Letter of Understanding, Work Plan: Developing a focused and well-structured letter of understanding and work plan early on is crucial to the team's success. The letter of understanding outlines the project charter, scope and success criteria. It is finalized with the client based on the project abstract, and hence allows for some fine tuning at the start of the project. Work plans must clearly state the questions that the team is trying to answer, and disaggregate the issues to be explored in answering that question. Each issue should be associated with a set of activities (e.g.: research, interviews, modeling), and with a primary responsibility and a deadline. The work plan needs to be signed off by the client and the faculty advisor.

Progress Review: Each team will prepare a progress review presentation that can be presented to the class and the clients in week 5. This is the chance for teams to share their initial findings with management and remind the client of what work remains. Initial hypotheses and preliminary recommendations can also be floated for client reaction at this time. It is important to use this opportunity to get specific feedback from the clients on how things are going. Are they satisfied with the results so far? Do they wish to focus the remaining time on one or two specific things you've identified? Are there issues that need to be addressed?

Final Recommendations Report: The final project presentation to the class should be a concise, well-structured PowerPoint document which synthesizes the team's research and analysis and answers the client's core questions with logical, well-supported arguments and a set of actionable recommendations. Detailed documentation of research, analyses, recommendations and other deliverables referred to in the presentation can be documented either in the PowerPoint document or in a supplementary detailed report. Client deliverables may take additional formats. The advisor grade is based on the presentation submitted to the class and the client deliverables. The client feedback is based on an evaluation survey after the final deliverable is turned in to the client. The in-class presentation is on May 31, 6:30-9:30pm. The final presentation and deliverables to the client are due at the latest on June 6.

Team meeting and class participation: Regular and high quality participation in team meetings is an important learning channel. While the project team is free to organize and divide work as needed, team members are expected to show up and contribute to the overall project in weekly team meetings. In addition, everyone is expected to provide feedback and suggestions to other project teams in the three class sessions.

Adding and Dropping the Class

Due to the project-based and client-facing nature of S-Lab, students should bid and apply only if they are 99% certain they will take the class and work on a project. If students drop out during the quarter, not only do they leave their teammates under-resourced for the project, they also disappoint corporate client expectations and damage the Kellogg brand with potential recruiters. For these reasons, students will be asked to sign a "Commitment Letter" on the first day of class promising to work together throughout the term and to drop the course only in the event of a significant, unforeseen personal or professional obligation. If you are unsure about your commitment to the course when applying, please clearly indicate so in the application letter.

Kellogg Honor Code

All students are expected to adhere to the Kellogg honor code which can be found at http://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/stu_aff/policies/honorcode.htm. In particular, students are reminded to provide complete citations for all research, data, graphs and quotations taken from other sources. This includes documenting sources on PowerPoint presentations as well as other written reports and client correspondence. Remember – plagiarism is a serious breach of the Kellogg honor code. For more information on how to avoid pitfalls, please visit <http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html>.

Client Confidentiality and Conflict of Interest

The information you will receive from client companies is considered proprietary and strictly confidential. Students are expected to sign confidentiality agreements requested by the client organization, and to make all reasonable efforts to protect non-public client information and to destroy or return all information at the conclusion of the course if the client so requests. If team members wish to share confidential information among them, it is recommended that they use a shared workspace that is password protected. In addition, students are required to disclose upon applying or whenever it arises, any conflict of interest due to past or future employment for competitors or other reasons.