Course Syllabus
ISEN 472 Climate Activism and its Business Impacts (0.5 credit)
Northwestern University

Instructors: Sarene Riley Marshall, https://www.linkedin.com/in/sarene-marshall-41559927/ (Links to an external site.)

Faculty Sponsor: Dr. Brayden King, https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/directory/king_brayden.aspx (Links to an external site.)

Guest Lecturers: TBD

Office Hours: By appointment

Class Assistant: TBD
Classroom: TBD
Class Timing: TBD

Course Synopsis:
This course will offer an overview of climate activism and its business impacts over time. It will analyze the way in which consumer behavior, public policy and corporate practices are interrelated and affected by activism of different types. Students will gain an understanding of how today’s activism has built on the past and will investigate what has changed — demographics, consumer attitudes, global messaging and social media. Students will learn about different components of activism that are impacting businesses, and the variety of ways companies have related and responded to activists. Case studies and current events will be used to bring the modern role of climate activism to life for a variety of stakeholders.

Course Goals: Students should be able to:

- Understanding Climate Activism & Its History: Students will understand the varied forms that activism generally – and climate activism in particular – takes, especially when aimed at business.
- Impact Analysis of Activism: Students will analyze the impacts of different forms of activism from different perspectives, such as financial, reputational, operational, and political.
- Changing Demographics & Attitudes: The course will consider how the values and priorities of modern consumers are changing and how shifting demographics affect climate activism specifically.
- Business Responses to Activism: Students will explore ways in which companies can relate to and react to activists, including legal, regulatory, marketing, financial and operational responses.

Prerequisites: None
**Grading/Assessment:**
Grading will be based on the following rubric:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Weight</th>
<th>Details</th>
<th>Due</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Class Participation</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td><em>Students will be expected to attend class with all readings complete. Students should be prepared to engage in thoughtful dialogue, both about the topic questions posed by the instructor and discussion questions generated by classmates. Instructor may provide specific in-class activities aimed to gauge participation.</em></td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Case Analysis Papers (x2)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td><em>Written, individual, 2-3 page submissions. Students will be given a case study, which they will have to analyze using the methods learned in class. They will have to answer questions about the methods and impacts of climate activism, and corporate responses.</em></td>
<td>Week #2, Week #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td><em>Students will find an instance of a climate movement targeting a company. Students will be asked to write a 4-5 page paper analyzing the tactics of the activists, the final impact, and the corporate response. Students should explore the demands of the movement, the factors that may have led to its success or failure, and the rationale behind the company’s response.</em></td>
<td>Week #5</td>
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All questions and problems regarding grades must be presented in writing within one week after the test, homework, or project has been returned. The grading scale is fixed; please do not wait until the end of the quarter if you are concerned about the direction of your grade. Grades will be assigned based on all the work you have completed during the quarter using the following scale:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>93.333 to 100</td>
<td>C</td>
<td>73.333 to 76.666</td>
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<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>90.000 to 93.333</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td>70.000 to 73.333</td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>86.666 to 90.000</td>
<td>D+</td>
<td>66.666 to 70.000</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>83.333 to 86.666</td>
<td>D</td>
<td>63.333 to 66.666</td>
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Course Readings:

Supplemental Reading List

CLASS OUTLINE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Weekly Topic</th>
<th>Description</th>
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| **1: Course Overview and Foundations** | - Introduction to course: syllabus, logistics, and grading.  
- Climate Change 101 – science, solutions, stakeholders.  
  - What change is needed? By whom/when? What types of companies will/should play a role?  
  - Portrait of a (Climate) Activist.  
  - Who are they? What are their goals and tactics? What are their direct and indirect ways of pressuring corporations? What roles do non-governmental organizations (NGOs) play? Has this changed over time?  
- Understanding the market  
  - How have demographics changed? What are the values and choices of millennials + Gen-Z? Does climate change affect them differently?  
- Climate activism in the 20th and 21st centuries  
  - Similarities/differences from other types of activism (more business-focused)? Successful and failed (climate) activism. |

**Required Readings:**


· “*Young People are Leading the Way on Climate Change and Companies need to Pay Attention*” [https://hbr.org/2019/03/young-people-are-leading-the-way-on-climate-change-and-companies-need-to-pay-attention](https://hbr.org/2019/03/young-people-are-leading-the-way-on-climate-change-and-companies-need-to-pay-attention) (Links to an external site.)

**Supplemental Readings:**


### 2: Modes of Activism: Sources and Strategies

- What are the different forms in which modern-day activism manifests?
- What is the role of mass media and its coverage of activism?
- What factors have influenced the growth of organic activism? Where do technology and social media fit in? (e.g. Arab spring)
- How is climate activism specifically different? How has climate activism interacted with activism on civil rights and racial justice?
- What has driven recent activity (Greta Thunberg, #FridaysforFuture)?
- What roles have corporations themselves played in climate activism (e.g. US Climate Action Partnership, We are Still In, etc.)?

**Guest Lecture: Lindsay Harper, Arm in Arm National Coordinator, US Climate Action Network:** [https://www.linkedin.com/in/alindsayharper/](https://www.linkedin.com/in/alindsayharper/) (Links to an external site.)
## Required Readings:


- Employees are Fighting for a New Cause at Work: The Climate. (Links to an external site.) EcoWatch, April 27, 2020.


## Supplemental Readings:


## ASSIGNMENT: CASE ANALYSIS #1

### 3: Corporate Participation in, and Impacts of, Activism

- Can activism come from inside a business? How do the dynamics differ?
- Which activist tactics yield which kinds of impacts on businesses?
  - Do impacts vary by industry, region?
- What are the financial, operational, regulatory, and reputational impacts of activism on business? How are they inter-related?
- How are other types of organizations – such as cities/governments, financial institutions, or academic institutions – impacted by activism, and what does that mean for businesses?
- Are certain tactics (e.g., boycotts) more effective than other methods (e.g., divest movements)?
### Required Readings:

### ASSIGNMENT: CASE ANALYSIS #2

**4: Corporate Responses to Activism: Defense vs. Offense, Deep vs. Superficial**

- How have companies responded to climate activism?
  - Explore options, from new product development to greenwashing to lawsuits. Where does CSR fit?
  - What proactive moves have corporates taken?
  - Have corporations capitalized on the young demographic’s values? How?
  - How do corporates respond to internal activism? What is an effective way to balance a culture of internal activism with productivity?

### Required Readings:
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<th>5: APPLICATION: Climate Activism and Exxon Mobil</th>
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<tr>
<td>- In-class analysis of protests and activism against Exxon Mobil</td>
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<tr>
<td>- How do the legal strategies and protests in the activism against Exxon fit together? What role did philanthropists play in the activism against Exxon?</td>
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<tr>
<td>- How has activism against the company affected Exxon’s company policy? Has Exxon’s CSR focus been influenced by activism?</td>
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<td>- This analysis provides practice for students to write their final papers.</td>
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**Guest Lecture: Lee Wasserman, Director, Rockefeller Family Fund:** [https://www.rffund.org/about/staff](https://www.rffund.org/about/staff)

**Required Readings:**

- [https://exxonknew.org/](https://exxonknew.org/) (Links to an external site.)

**ASSIGNMENT: FINAL PAPER**

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**COVID-19 Classroom Expectations Statement**

Students, faculty, and staff must comply with University expectations regarding appropriate classroom behavior, including those outlined below and in the [COVID-19 Code of Conduct](https://www.northwestern.edu). With respect to classroom procedures, this includes:
• Policies regarding masking and social distancing evolve as the public health situation changes. Students are responsible for understanding and complying with current masking, testing, Symptom Tracking, and social distancing requirements.

• In some classes, masking and/or social distancing may be required as a result of an Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) accommodation for the instructor or a student in the class even when not generally required on campus. In such cases, the instructor will notify the class.

• No food is allowed inside classrooms. Drinks are permitted, but please keep your face covering on and use a straw.

• Faculty may assign seats in some classes to help facilitate contact tracing in the event that a student tests positive for COVID-19. Students must sit in their assigned seats.

If a student fails to comply with the COVID-19 Code of Conduct or other University expectations related to COVID-19, the instructor may ask the student to leave the class. The instructor is asked to report the incident to the Office of Community Standards for additional follow-up.

Class Recording

This class or portions of this class will be recorded by the instructor for educational purpose and available to the class during the quarter. Your instructor will communicate how you can access the recordings. Portions of the course that contain images, questions or commentary/discussion by students will be edited out of any recordings that are saved beyond the current term.

Unauthorized student recording of classroom or other academic activities (including advising sessions or office hours) is prohibited. Unauthorized recording is unethical and may also be a violation of University policy and state law. Students requesting the use of assistive technology as an accommodation should contact AccessibleNU. Unauthorized use of classroom recordings – including distributing or posting them – is also prohibited. Under the University’s Copyright Policy, faculty own the copyright to instructional materials – including those resources created specifically for the purposes of instruction, such as syllabi, lectures and lecture notes, and presentations. Students cannot copy, reproduce, display, or distribute these materials. Students who engage in unauthorized recording, unauthorized use of a recording, or unauthorized distribution of instructional materials will be referred to the appropriate University office for follow-up.
**Expectations for Class Participation**

Being prepared for class is about more than just showing up, it’s also about making sure you’ve completed the readings, homework, etc. so that you are able to make thoughtful contributions during class. Sitting silently and/or being unprepared can damage your participation grade. When in a virtual class, we expect students to keep their camera and mute on as much as possible. When in the classroom, we expect students to keep their phones off and put away.

**Academic Integrity**

Academic integrity is taken very seriously at Northwestern. Students are responsible for reading and understanding Northwestern’s Academic Integrity policies. All suspected violations will be reported to the McCormick College of Engineering’s Dean’s Office. These include cheating, plagiarism, fabrication, unfair advantage, unauthorized collaboration, and aiding and abetting of academic dishonesty. Students found in violation of academic integrity may receive a zero on the assignment or a failing grade for the course and may be suspended or permanently expelled from the University. See [Academic Integrity: A Basic Guide](#) for more information.

**The Writing Place**

When working on writing assignments for this class, I encourage you to visit the Writing Place, Northwestern’s peer writing center. You will work with juniors and seniors who have been trained to provide you feedback and assistance on any type of writing at any stage in the writing process. They will not edit your work. Rather, they will work with you to brainstorm ideas, organize or outline an essay, clarify your argument, document your sources correctly, or refine grammar and style.

**Accessibility Statement**

Northwestern University is committed to providing the most accessible learning environment as possible for students with disabilities. Should you anticipate or experience disability-related barriers in the academic setting, please contact AccessibleNU to move forward with the university’s established accommodation process (e: [accessiblenu@northwestern.edu](mailto:accessiblenu@northwestern.edu); p: 847-467-5530). If you already have established accommodations with AccessibleNU, please let me know as soon as possible, preferably within the first two weeks of the term, so we can work together to implement your disability accommodations. Disability information, including academic accommodations, is confidential under the Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act.
Illness and Medical Leave of Absence

Review the University’s policy on missing academic work due to illness. Your instructor cannot waive an assignment missed due to illness unless the illness can be verified (e.g., by University Health Services or other licensed health professionals).

 Discrimination and Sexual Harassment

Northwestern’s Policies on Discrimination, Harassment, and Sexual Harassment apply to all members of the University community, including students, staff, faculty, and third parties. Any student, staff, faculty member, or third party who believes that they have been discriminated against or harassed on the basis of their race, color, religion, national origin, sex, sexual orientation, gender identity, gender expression, pregnancy, parental status, marital status, age, disability, citizenship, veteran status, genetic information or any other classification protected by law, should contact the Office of Equity at (847) 467-6571. Additional information about the University’s discrimination and harassment policies, including the campus resources available to assist individuals with discrimination or harassment concerns, is available online on the Office of Equity Website. Students, staff, and faculty who report harassment, discrimination, or sexual misconduct are also protected under the University’s Policy on Non-Retaliation.

Sexual Misconduct and Reporting

Northwestern University is committed to fostering an environment where students are safe and free from sexual misconduct. Confidential resources are available to those who have experienced sexual misconduct. Faculty and instructors are not confidential resources and are required to report incidents of sexual misconduct, whether discussed in your assignments or in person, to the Office of Equity, which can provide information about resources and options. We encourage students who have experienced sexual misconduct to talk with someone to get support. For more information, including how to request interim protective measures and academic accommodations or file a complaint, see the Get Help page.

Other Resources

Students can find useful resources for safety and security, academic support, and mental and physical health and well-being at the NUhelp website.