Course Syllabus – DRAFT

ISEN 472 Climate Activism and its Business Impacts (0.5 credit)

Northwestern University

Instructor:

Faculty Sponsor:
Dr. Brayden King, https://www.kellogg.northwestern.edu/faculty/directory/king_brayden.aspx

Possible Guest Lecturers: TBD

Office Hours: By appointment
Class Room: TBD
Class Timing: Mondays, 12-3pm

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:

- **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.
**Grading/Assessment:**

Grading will be based on the following rubric:

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<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>Students will be expected to attend class with all readings and viewings complete. Students should be prepared to engage in thoughtful dialogue about the topic questions provided by the instructor.</td>
<td>Ongoing</td>
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<tr>
<td>Opinion Papers (x2)</td>
<td>40%</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Week #2, Week #3</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>30%</td>
<td>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.</td>
<td>Week #5</td>
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**Grading Policy:**

- Grades will be assigned based on all the work you have completed during the semester following the traditional practice of A=90-100, B=80-89, C=70-79, D=60-69, F<60.
Course Readings:


- Morgan, Demetri L. *Student Activism, Politics, and Campus Climate in Higher Education*, May 2019.


- Bomberg, Elizabeth. Mind the (Mobilization) Gap: Comparing Climate Activism in the United States and European Union, May 07, 2012³

- Hook L. Greta Thunberg: ‘All my life I’ve been the invisible girl.’ *Financial Times* 2019 Feb 22. ⁴


Course Viewings:

- Greta Thunberg Short Film [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0xUX0zEZcY](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q0xUX0zEZcY)


Supplementary Readings & Viewings:

- Ferrell, Liang, and Renneboog. “Socially Responsible Firms”

- Flam, “Does Corporate Social Responsibility Lead to Superior Financial Performance?”


- [Information Spillovers from Protests against Corporations: A Tale of Walmart and Target](https://www.ft.com/content/3df1b9e8-34fb-11e9-bd5a-882a211d90d5)

- Hawn, “Strategic Role of Corporate Social Responsibility in International Expansion of Emerging Market Multinationals”

- Soule: Contention and Corporate Social Responsibility, Chap 1-2

- [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsNsKDFd5CM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rsNsKDFd5CM)

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² Understanding the Organization of Green Activism: Sociological and Economic Perspectives


⁴ [https://www.ft.com/content/3df1b9e8-34fb-11e9-bd5a-882a211d90d5](https://www.ft.com/content/3df1b9e8-34fb-11e9-bd5a-882a211d90d5)
## Weekly Topic

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

### 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)
- Can activism come from inside the organization? How does this change its dynamics?
- How is climate activism specifically different? Could climate activism be considered more government-focused rather than corporate-focused?
- What roles have corporations themselves played in climate activism (e.g. US Climate Action Partnership, We are Still In, Climate Leadership Council, etc.)
- What has driven recent activity (climate strikes, Greta Thunberg, #FridaysforFuture)?

### OPINION PAPER #1

### 3: Impacts of Activism
- 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?
OPINION PAPER #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?
- Where do B corps and Socially Responsible Investment Funds and other constructs fit in?
- How do corporates respond to internal activism? What is an effective way to balance a culture of internal activism with productivity?

5: APPLICATION: Climate Activism and Exxon Mobil

- In-class analysis of protests and activism against Exxon Mobil in Dallas and New York.
- How does activism tie into the fact that Exxon was standing trial at the time?
- Have these protests had an effect in shaping company policy in any way? How has Exxon’s CSR focus been affected by activism?
- This analysis provides practice for students to write their final papers.

FINAL PAPER

Northwestern University Policies & Resources:

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.

AccessibleNU and Disability Accommodations
Any student requesting accommodations related to a disability or any other condition is required to register with AccessibleNU (847-467-5530) and provide professors with an accommodation notification from AccessibleNU, preferably within the first two weeks of class. All information will remain confidential. See the AccessibleNU website for more information.
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 she can verify your illness with Health Services.

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.