

SUSTAINABILITY: LESSONS FROM IBERIA

Selected Topics in Management Summer 2014

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Course Overview

Sustainability is garnering ever-greater public attention and debate. The subject ranks high on the legislative agendas of most governments; media coverage of the topic has proliferated; and sustainability issues are of increasing concern to humankind. However, the business implications of sustainability merit greater scrutiny — and not just from a “green”-oriented perspective with which we are most familiar. Will sustainability change the competitive landscape and reshape the opportunities and threats that companies face? If so, how? How worried or excited are executives and other stakeholders about the impact of sustainability efforts on their bottom line? What — if anything — are companies doing now to capitalize on sustainability-driven changes? And what strategies are they employing to position themselves competitively for the future?

We address these questions by talking directly to executives of some the leading companies in Spain and Portugal. The Iberian Peninsula has been at the vanguard of the sustainability movement, and this course will offer a unique opportunity to witness, first hand, effective sustainability initiatives by firms such as Acciona, Grupo Siro, Grupo Amorim, Grupo Sonae, and others.

Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, you should be able to (1) *analyze* the effectiveness of sustainability initiatives, (2) *identify* the significant issues associated with implementing sustainability initiatives, and (3) propose and justify *explicit solutions* that are realistic, effective, and efficient.

Objectives

The objectives of the course are threefold.

1. Examine the concept of sustainability and discover why it has moved from a marginal to central position in today's corporate world.
2. Assess how different cultures and societies address sustainability and determine if the U.S. can learn from their successes and failures.
3. Examine how firms headquartered in Spain and Portugal compete in the global marketplace and compare/contrast their business practices to those of U.S.-based organizations.

Achieving the Objectives

The Program and evaluation of student performance is based on three components:

1. Pre-departure (5%)

Two mandatory workshops will be scheduled that will include discussions of the socio/political/historical context of Spain and Portugal; a crash course in language; information on the companies that will be visited; advice on traveling to your Spain and Portugal; and a pre-departure orientation presented by UT Arlington Study Abroad Office.

Students will also required to log on to the course's Blackboard webpage (<https://elearn.uta.edu/webapps/login/>) and introduce themselves. (**Not yet active**)

- a. Log in to Blackboard using your Net ID and password
- b. You will see **Organization Search**
- c. Enter our Organization Name – “[Sustainability Lessons From Iberia](#).” Note there is no hyphen between sustainability and lessons.
- d. Click on **Go**
- e. Once you find the needed Organization, you will see a **pull down menu** to the right of the listed Organization ID
- f. Click on the **pull-down menu**
- g. Click on **Enroll**

2. *Ten day study abroad experience (75%)*

There are two components evaluated as part of the Study Abroad Trip:

A. **Individual Journal (15%) Due June 16th**

During the thirteen day in-country component of the course, each student is responsible for keeping a daily professional journal of their reflections on various professional issues and concerns encountered during the trip. We expect the average daily entry to be at least 250 words in length. We expect that each entry will discuss daily experiences, and describe what each student did and saw, however, this is also a professional journal. This means that each entry must include not only descriptive comments about what you did and saw; it should also make connections between daily experiences and how they help in your development as a business professional. The journal is intended to compel students to make direct connections between what they observe and experience on the trip, and the types of issues and concerns they will face as professionals. These observations can be comparative (how the country is the same or different from the U.S.) and can include comments on day-to-day life, anecdotes, language, politics, geography, stores, social life, the popular culture of the country, etc. As you write on these topics, frame your comments in such a manner that they explain how this helps you understand the people and the lifestyle of your country and how this impacts your professional development in the area of global issues.

Ideally, your journal should be updated daily and an edited electronic version submitted to the trip web site daily, or as web access is available. Bring cameras to document your trip and include photos with your journal if possible. At the end of each day reflect on what you wrote for each day of the trip and continue to update your journal.

Time tends to go by very fast during a trip of this nature, and students may not always have time to complete each day's journal during the trip. Therefore, you have until June 16th to reflect on each day and edit/modify/complete your journal.

B. **Participation (60%)**

Professional activities.

Each student is expected to attend every planned event, including the sightseeing trips, group meals, and most important, the company visits; **be on or ahead of schedule for all events**; participate in all work activities; and be actively engaged in asking questions of lecturers and speakers. Professors from the College of Business will maintain participation records. After each company visit each student should complete an individual reflection on what they saw and write down any observations and/or questions they have from the trip, then use these observations as starting points for the next company visit. Consider such questions as: What interesting strengths or weaknesses were discussed (or are apparent) in the firm that you visited today? Does this firm face any interesting opportunities or threats from the external environment? How is the organization addressing sustainability issues and do they appear to be successful? Are sustainability initiatives an integral component of the firm's strategy? What business practices did you observe?

Personal activities.

We understand that each student is an adult and as so has the right to spend their free time in the country as they wish. However, all students must understand that while they are on the site visits and also on their own time, they are representing UT Arlington. Thus, their actions directly reflect on the University's image and the image of the United States. Failure to maintain acceptable behavior will result in failure of the participation component and can be grounds

for failing the course and possibly expelled from the study abroad program. Acceptable and unacceptable actions will be described in the pre-departure sessions.

C. Post-trip report (20%)

The post-trip report will consist of four components:

- a. *Technical Visits*. Select one of the companies visited and discuss how they incorporate sustainability in their strategy, their overall business practices, and any other issue you found interesting or unique.
- b. *Cultural Comparisons*. A discussion of cultural differences between Spain, Portugal, and the US. This discussion should include a comparison of how the three societies view sustainability as well as a general discussion of general cultural differences that you believe will prepare you to be a more effective leader.
- c. *Program Highlight(lowlights)*. A discussion of the activities you found most and least beneficial. Explain why.
- d. *Improvements*. A brief discussion of how to improve the study abroad program.

Course Materials

In the spirit of sustainability, relevant readings will be available on Blackboard.

About the Instructor

Jeffrey E. McGee (Ph.D., The University of Georgia) is an Associate Professor in Management Department at The University of Texas at Arlington. He teaches courses in management, entrepreneurship, strategic management, and organizational behavior. His research interests include new business development and strategic management of entrepreneurial ventures. Dr. McGee's research has been published in *Management Science*, *Journal of Business Venturing*, *Strategic Management Journal*, *Journal of Business and Entrepreneurship*, *Journal of Small Business Management*, *Journal of Small Business Strategy*, *Journal of Management*, *International Small Business Journal*, and *Entrepreneurship: Theory & Practice*. Dr. McGee has also taught university courses in Portugal, China, Taiwan, and France and is a frequent traveler to Iberia.



Palacio Real de Madrid
Madrid



Dom Luís Bridge
Porto



Rossio Square
Lisbon

Drop Policy

Students may drop or swap (adding and dropping a class concurrently) classes through self-service in MyMav from the beginning of the registration period through the late registration period. After the late registration period, students must see their academic advisor to drop a class or withdraw. Undeclared students must see an advisor in the University Advising Center. Drops can continue through a point two-thirds of the way through the term or session. It is the student's responsibility to officially withdraw if they do not plan to attend after registering. **Students will not be automatically dropped for non-attendance.** Repayment of certain types of financial aid administered through the University may be required as the result of dropping classes or withdrawing. For more information, contact the Office of Financial Aid and Scholarships (<http://wwwb.uta.edu/ses/fao>).

Americans with Disabilities Act

The University of Texas at Arlington is on record as being committed to both the spirit and letter of all federal equal opportunity legislation, including the *Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA)*. All instructors at UT Arlington are required by law to provide "reasonable accommodations" to students with disabilities, so as not to discriminate on the basis of that disability. Any student requiring an accommodation for this course must provide the instructor with official documentation in the form of a letter certified by the staff in the Office for Students with Disabilities, University Hall 102. Only those students who have officially documented a need for an accommodation will have their request honored. Information regarding diagnostic criteria and policies for obtaining disability-based academic accommodations can be found at www.uta.edu/disability or by calling the Office for Students with Disabilities at (817) 272-3364.

Academic Integrity

All students enrolled in this course are expected to adhere to the UT Arlington Honor Code:

I pledge, on my honor, to uphold UT Arlington's tradition of academic integrity, a tradition that values hard work and honest effort in the pursuit of academic excellence.

I promise that I will submit only work that I personally create or contribute to group collaborations, and I will appropriately reference any work from other sources. I will follow the highest standards of integrity and uphold the spirit of the Honor Code.

Instructors may employ the Honor Code as they see fit in their courses, including (but not limited to) having students acknowledge the honor code as part of an examination or requiring students to incorporate the honor code into any work submitted. Per UT System *Regents' Rule* 50101, §2.2, suspected violations of university's standards for academic integrity (including the Honor Code) will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct. Violators will be disciplined in accordance with University policy, which may result in the student's suspension or expulsion from the University.

Student Support Services

UT Arlington provides a variety of resources and programs designed to help students develop academic skills, deal with personal situations, and better understand concepts and information related to their courses. Resources include tutoring, major-based learning centers, developmental education, advising and mentoring, personal counseling, and federally funded programs. For individualized referrals, students may visit the reception desk at University College (Ransom Hall), call the Maverick Resource Hotline at 817-272-6107, send a message to resources@uta.edu, or view the information at www.uta.edu/resources.

Electronic Communication

UT Arlington has adopted MavMail as its official means to communicate with students about important deadlines and events, as well as to transact university-related business regarding financial aid, tuition, grades, graduation, etc. All students are assigned a MavMail account and are responsible for checking the inbox regularly. There is no additional charge to students for using this account, which remains active even after graduation. Information about activating and using MavMail is available at <http://www.uta.edu/oit/cs/email/mavmail.php>.

Student Feedback Survey

At the end of each term, students enrolled in classes categorized as lecture, seminar, or laboratory shall be directed to complete a Student Feedback Survey (SFS). Instructions on how to access the SFS for this course will be sent

directly to each student through MayMail approximately 10 days before the end of the term. Each student's feedback enters the SFS database anonymously and is aggregated with that of other students enrolled in the course. UT Arlington's effort to solicit, gather, tabulate, and publish student feedback is required by state law; students are strongly urged to participate. For more information, visit <http://www.uta.edu/sfs>.

Final Review Week

A period of five class days prior to the first day of final examinations in the long sessions shall be designated as Final Review Week. The purpose of this week is to allow students sufficient time to prepare for final examinations. During this week, there shall be no scheduled activities such as required field trips or performances; and no instructor shall assign any themes, research problems or exercises of similar scope that have a completion date during or following this week *unless specified in the class syllabus*. During Final Review Week, an instructor shall not give any examinations constituting 10% or more of the final grade, except makeup tests and laboratory examinations. In addition, no instructor shall give any portion of the final examination during Final Review Week. During this week, classes are held as scheduled. In addition, instructors are not required to limit content to topics that have been previously covered; they may introduce new concepts as appropriate.

