

# GD914-20 Critical perspectives on business and global sustainable development

**23/24**

**Department**

Global Sustainable Development

**Level**

Taught Postgraduate Level

**Module leader**

Nicholas Bernards

**Credit value**

20

**Module duration**

10 weeks

**Assessment**

70% coursework, 30% exam

**Study location**

University of Warwick main campus, Coventry

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## Description

### Introductory description

This module introduces students to debates about the role of business and the private sector in promoting sustainable development. The module will approach these issues from a transdisciplinary and critical perspective, drawing from interdisciplinary work and from disciplines including Political Science, International Relations, Geography, Sociology, Law, History, Anthropology, Economics, and Management and Organization Studies.

### Module aims

The private sector is often assigned a key role in meeting sustainable development challenges. Mobilizing private finance plays a central role in national and global plans for financing responses to climate change, and other sustainability challenges. Discourses about responsible investment, business ethics, and corporate social responsibility are increasingly widespread. Hopes for developing 'green' energy technologies hang on cooperation between government and business. This module aims to foster critical thinking about the role of business in promoting sustainable development. It will introduce students to cutting-edge transdisciplinary scholarship and debates

about the relationships between business and wider processes of socio-political, economic, and environmental change. The module takes an expressly global approach, engaging students with a geographically diverse range of cases, themes, and perspectives. Students will leave this module prepared to engage thoughtfully and critically with the promises and pitfalls of the expanding role of the private sector in achieving sustainability.

## **Outline syllabus**

This is an indicative module outline only to give an indication of the sort of topics that may be covered. Actual sessions held may differ.

Topics to be covered in this module may include (but are not limited to): Neoliberalism and the restructuring of the public/private boundary (e.g. privatization, contracting-out, public-private partnerships) ; The changing role of trans/multinational corporations (e.g. foreign investment, global supply chains and sustainability); Private finance and sustainable development (e.g. mechanisms for 'green' and 'blue' finance, ethical investment and 'ESG' investing, Islamic finance); business ethics (e.g. corporate social responsibility; ethical consumption and fair trade); business and politics (e.g. lobbying, business power, private authority and private governance); sustainable business practices (e.g. social enterprise, circular economy)

## **Learning outcomes**

By the end of the module, students should be able to:

- Understand and critically engage with key debates about the role of business in achieving sustainability.
- Assess and apply different theories, concepts, and methods of analysis relevant to the role of business in achieving sustainability.
- Produce critical analysis of relevant case studies related to business and sustainability, informed by independent research.
- Demonstrate advanced writing and oral communication skills.

## **Indicative reading list**

Readings will consist of advanced texts, primarily research monographs and journal articles, dealing primarily with the critical analysis of business and sustainability. They would draw from a number of relevant disciplines including Political Science, International Relations, Geography, Sociology, Law, History, Anthropology, Economics, and Management and Organization Studies. These should engage students in a diverse range of critical perspectives.

## **Research element**

Healey & Jenkins (2009) propose that Research-led-teaching design should consider four discrete opportunities. This module has been designed to include these opportunities.

1. Research-led learning, where the module syllabus is developed from current research in relevant fields, being based on contemporary and seminal, peer reviewed and other high quality research literature.

As such, all knowledge for student engagement will be consciously and specifically chosen for its merits in reference to broader academic understanding. This will initially include engagements with foundational, interdisciplinary literature on business and sustainable development at local, national, and global levels.

1. Research-tutored learning, where students engage actively in discussing high quality, contemporary and seminal research literature.

This module will provide students with the opportunity to discuss and critically engage with the above literatures, as it is primarily taught in a participatory, seminar format. Students will also engage in depth with a selected issue in these literatures in writing the take-home exam and presentation.

1. Research-orientated learning, where students are actively taught methodological understanding and skills for the independent creation of new knowledge.

Students will be introduced to key methodological and conceptual debates by virtue of engaging with the above literatures.

1. Research-based learning, where student use developing methodological skills to create original knowledge of their own.

This module will provide students with the opportunity to develop and apply the above skills, particularly in the case study analysis.

## **Interdisciplinary**

Positive global transformations are widely recognised to require transdisciplinary approaches. This module has been designed according to our signature problem-based, response focused pedagogy, and as such will draw on a transdisciplinary knowledge in the design and delivery of learning opportunities.

(Authentic) assessment will require students to demonstrate transdisciplinary aptitude. In particular, students will need to be able to synthesize, critique, and apply knowledge about business and sustainable development, drawing from interdisciplinary work and from disciplines including Political Science, International Relations, Geography, Sociology, Law, History, Anthropology, and Business Studies.

## **International**

This is a module on the Master's in Global Sustainable Development which offers a transdisciplinary and international learning experience allowing students to achieve breadth and depth of knowledge.

## **Subject specific skills**

- Understanding of role of business in sustainable development, including relevant considerations of business organization, social and political context
- Understanding of key debates and controversies around the role of business and private sector actors in sustainable development

- Ability to critically analyse relevant cases and engage in key debates about business and sustainable development

## Transferable skills

Critical analysis  
Written communication  
Oral communication  
Research skills

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## Study

### Study time

Type	Required
Lectures	5 sessions of 1 hour (2%)
Seminars	10 sessions of 2 hours (10%)
Private study	70 hours (35%)
Assessment	105 hours (52%)
Total	200 hours

### Private study description

Reading and revision -- 6 hours per week x 10 weeks, 10 hours of additional revision prior to take-home exam.

## Costs

No further costs have been identified for this module.

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## Assessment

You do not need to pass all assessment components to pass the module.

### Assessment group D1

	Weighting	Study time
Presentation	20%	15 hours
Students will prepare a 15 minute presentation on themes related to the module.		
Case Study	50%	60 hours

## Weighting

## Study time

Students will prepare an analysis of a case study relevant to module themes.

Take-home examination

30%

30 hours

Students will answer two of a choice of questions for a total of 2000 words. Questions will be based on class discussions. Students will be given a week to complete the exam.

## Feedback on assessment

Students will receive written feedback on all assessments, and will be able to obtain further feedback in person from the instructor(s) upon request.

[Past exam papers for GD914](#)

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## Availability

### Courses

This module is Option list A for:

- Year 1 of TIPA-LA9Z Postgraduate Taught Community, Engagement and Belonging (MASc)

This module is Option list B for:

- Year 1 of TGDA-L801 Postgraduate Taught Global Sustainable Development