
Business 9776 – Grand Challenges

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Tuesdays 1:00 to 4:00 PM EST
3102 / [Zoom](#)
(6 Sessions)

OVERVIEW AND OBJECTIVES

The charter of business has been radically rethought in August 2019, and continues to co-evolve as we confront a growing range of Grand Challenges (GC). As we co-orient towards the 17 United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) as guideposts of decisions that affect (un)desirable futures, the meaning of sustainability extends far beyond the earlier pillars of corporate social responsibility to include moral rights and duties to anticipate and respond to (un)planned system changes, (un)expected extreme events, and slow catastrophes (climate change and planetary boundaries).

In this 6-session course, we explore a subset of GCs that intersect with organizations and organizing. We start with the basics to lay the conceptual foundation of how GCs have been conceptualized and operationalized. Given the nature of GCs, our focus in this course is on problems (meta-, wicked) more than solutions. Because GCs far exceed the capabilities of single actors, we pay particular attention to collaborative approaches, from goal (re)setting to activism and collective action. We end with emerging theories about seeing, coordinating and making (alternative) futures.

We dedicate the topical sessions in between to four impact areas deemed critical to Ivey and Western: 1) climate change, 2) biodiversity (planetary boundaries, nature-based problems and solutions, regeneration), 3) inequality and 4) dignity. For each of these four topics, we sample the growing repertoire of emerging theories and methodologies being brought to bear on this subset of GCs and invite hopeful, playful and impactful modalities of scholarship within your respective disciplines.

Whereas other business courses have a strong disciplinary focus, this course has implications across business disciplines (e.g. strategy, operations, finance) and bridges into non-business disciplines, including anthropology, biology, psychology and sociology. This plurality provides fertile ground to cross intellectual boundaries and encourages theoretical blending across disciplines. Because the same concept (events, crises, resilience, regeneration) often has distinct meanings, and implications, depending on the ontological heritage of each field, careful consideration of underlying assumption is a must, and a core skill, you will develop in this course.

This course should appeal to any scholar who wants to “be the change” and develop a model of impactful scholarship by addressing timely and relevant problems. GC scholarship goes beyond specific problem-solution combinations to seek and yield new insights into novel forms of collective organizing that enable actors to come together in the face of unprecedented suffering. If you are looking for formulaic research and quick wins, this is not the course for you. If you are interested in developing your point of view, and using your time and voice to orchestrate change, you will enjoy the course.

Professor Branzei has been studying collaborative cross-sector solutions to GCs since the early 2000s. She has led multiple large-scale research initiatives on GCs in the contexts of inequality and dignity (abilities, poverty, mental health and war) and is currently devoting most of her time and attention to addressing climate change and the biodiversity crisis.

Our objectives for this course include:

- 1) to understand the intellectual heritage of grand challenges
- 2) to appreciate the progress to date in documenting organizing in response to grand challenges
- 3) to open up opportunities for meaningful and impactful contributions at the yet-unexplored interstices among different disciplines, by discovering new ways of knowing, doing and being

There will be a lot of variance in the experiential and disciplinary foundations of students. Some students will be further along in their doctoral work at the business school, whereas others aren't even enrolled in a business program. This theoretical and experiential plurality are welcome and I have designed the course to benefit from diversity, as long as students engage deeply in the materials.

APPROACH

The purpose of the course is not to provide a complete understanding of all grand challenges, but rather to expose you to the most recent discoveries as you begin to think critically and programmatically about the teams and types of collaboration needed to re-orient organizing for a future different from the past.

In keeping with this ambition, the class will be run in a ‘salon’ format. Initiated in the mid-1800s in revolutionary France, these social gatherings were intended to expand participants’ knowledge through conversation. You will prepare the material prior to class, and within class, we will engage in debate and discussion. The direction of conversation won't be bilateral – from me to you – but multilateral with each other, as we all bring a unique and valued perspective. I will encourage active debate and thoughtful reflection. You need to feel comfortable drawing not only on the readings, but your own experiences. You are expected to come to class prepared to ensure not only that you learn, but you contribute to the learnings of others.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS / EVALUATION

Activity	Grade	Due Date
Pre-class Essays (6)	30%	Mondays by 11:59 pm (closed)
Classroom Contributions (6)	20%	Tuesdays 1-4 pm ET (live)
Post-class Reflections (6)	30%	Wednesdays by 11:59 pm (open)
Final Exam (2 questions in 2 hours)	20%	TBA (take home)

The weekly preparation for this course will expose you to different types of scholarly thought and voice.

Essays (Mondays)

Each essay must be uploaded to LEARN by 11:59 pm Mondays before each Tuesday’s scheduled class. Each essay should be blog-sized, about 600-800 words (2 pages) in length. Please focus on the question asked for each essay, and heed the suggested approach. The aim of the essays is to stimulate your curiosity and help you begin to craft your own point of view before you arrive to class.

Each pre-class essay contributes 5% of the final course grade (30% combined).

Essays will be graded using a 5-point scale with % equivalent. Grades above 4 reflect that the essay has been well written and analytically insightful. It does more than simply synthesize the literature, it offers non-trivial insights. If you receive under 3, then you have not shown much effort in writing the essay or have executed badly. The essay is likely poorly researched and poorly written. Any essays not submitted on time will not earn any points. You will receive my personalized feedback by 11:59 pm on Tuesdays.

Classroom Contribution (Tuesdays)

All assigned readings are linked from each session’s page on LEARN. You are expected to complete these assigned readings before each class. Please pay attention to the suggested preparation guide, which varies from session to session to optimize learning for each topics and exercise different scholarly skills.

The class contribution grade will be based on a 5-point grading scale.

Grade	Performance	# of students
0	<i>Did not attend class</i>	<i>Ideally no one, but emergencies happen</i>
1	Attended class, but remained silent	Ideally no one, but if not prepared one can take the opportunity to practice listening
2	Acceptable contribution	Partially prepared students
3	Good contribution	Most well-prepared students
4	Excellent contributions	1-2 highly engaged students
5	Extraordinary engagement	Rare and noteworthy

Excellent contributions are inquisitive, thoughtful, analytical, insightful and respectful. To make such comments, you will have to *prepare well* for class and *listen carefully* to the discussion. You are encouraged to challenge ideas, not individuals. Classroom discussions should be fun, provocative and enlightening. You are being judged on the quality, not quantity of contributions; in fact, speaking too much means that other people have less opportunity to speak. So, contribute when you have something substantial to say or you feel there is a lull in the conversation.

Only emergencies should keep you away from class. If you know you cannot make one of the class dates, then please let me know in advance. I will start classes precisely on time, so please endeavour to arrive a few minutes early.

If you had to miss class, you can review the recording of the class, but there is no make-up option for the contribution grade for any missed classes.

Post-session Reflections (*Wednesdays*)

By 11:59 pm ET on Wednesdays following each session, you will upload to the Discussion on LEARN your reflections from that class. This is the perfect place to synthesize your *ahas* based on your discoveries from the readings and/or the class discussion. Aim to avoid formulaic research (Alvesson & Gabriel, 2013), say something meaningful (Alvesson, 2012), and construct mystery (Alvesson & Karraman, 2007).

Each post-class reflection should be short (300 words or less, or 1 page) in length. You will be graded on using the same approach as for the essays. The “best in class” post will be discussed in our next class in order to model how we can celebrate individual successes while building on one another’s efforts.

Each post-class reflection contributes 5% of the final course grade (30% combined).

Final Written Take-home Exam

The final exam will include 2 questions to be answered within 2 hours. It is take-home and open booked, but must reflect individual and independent effort. No AI please!

Each question contributes 10% of the total course grade (20% combined).

OVERVIEW OF SESSIONS

Date	Topic
1. October 22	Grand Challenges
2. November 5	Climate Change (please note 2-5 pm ET time change)
3. November 12	Biodiversity
4. November 19	Inequality
5. November 26	Dignity
6. December 3	Futures

ACADEMIC OFFENCES: PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site:

http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com (<http://www.turnitin.com>).

SUPPORT SERVICES: HEALTH AND WELLNESS

Students who are in emotional/mental distress should refer to Mental Health@Western <http://www.uwo.ca/uwocom/mentalhealth/> for a complete list of options about how to obtain help.

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western's Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Please check out the Faculty of Music web page <http://www.music.uwo.ca>, and our own McIntosh Gallery <http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca>. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at <http://www.health.uwo.ca>. Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

Western is committed to achieving barrier-free accessibility for all its members, including graduate students. As part of this commitment, Western provides a variety of services devoted to promoting, advocating, and accommodating persons with disabilities in their respective graduate program. Graduate students with disabilities (for example, chronic illnesses, mental health conditions, mobility impairments) are encouraged to register with Student Accessibility Services, a confidential service designed to support graduate and undergraduate students through their academic program. With the appropriate documentation, the student will work with both SAS and their graduate programs (normally their Graduate Chair and/or Course instructor) to ensure that appropriate academic accommodations to program requirements are arranged. These accommodations include individual counselling, alternative formatted literature, accessible campus transportation, learning strategy instruction, writing exams and assistive technology instruction.