

COURSE SYLLABUS

Business Ethics

Course code: MGT301

Semester and year: Spring 2025

Day and time: Tuesday, 11:15h – 14h

Instructor: Gabriele Meissner, MBA

Instructor contact: NEO / gabriele.meissner@aauni.edu

Consultation hours: Tuesdays, 14h-14:30h; or make an appointment

Credits US/ECTS	3/6	Level	Bachelor
Length	15 weeks	Pre-requisite	MGT 245, MKT 248
Contact hours	42 hours	Grading	Letter grade

1. Course Description

This course aims to provide students with solid skills to know and deal with the essentials of ethics in a business environment. They are enabled to analyze business, social and environmental issues that are relevant to the development of Corporate Social Responsibility and sustainable business practices. The course focuses on the CSR practices of multinational Corporations (MNCs), the challenges and opportunities of acting responsibly in the arena often called "the global village". It also assesses the role of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in acting responsibly in a highly competitive environment.

A main goal of the course is to make students aware of what influences individual and organizational decision making and to accept that however strong the external pressure might be individuals are still responsible for their decisions and its consequences. This includes a look at technology development and the role of media.

The course provides a comprehensive introduction to ethical considerations in business.

Students are enabled to develop a deeper understanding of how to act responsibly towards all business stakeholders while, at the same time, not neglecting the firm's profitability. The course will discuss models of how CSR can create a sustainable ROI for companies.

Students are encouraged to gain awareness of the interconnectedness of organizations and nations in a globalized world and how their actions as managers will affect different stakeholders, nations and the world as a whole.

2. Student Learning Outcomes

By the end of this course, students should be able to:

- Show familiarity with current ethical questions, economic, social and environmental policy frameworks in which CSR takes place
- Demonstrate mastery of CSR theory and practice in Europe from corporate codes of conduct to related EU policies, frameworks and discussions
- Appreciate and articulate complex issues in corporate governance under local and global settings
- Show familiarity with critical issues of CG and CSR, including corporate ownership structures, transparency, board practices, CSR strategy formulation and implementation, and their impact on different stakeholders

- Know how to integrate management control issues with corporate governance as a firm-specific objective to achieve superior company performance and greater accountability
- Analyze, communicate and provide recommendations on business cases

3. Reading Material

Required Materials

Ethical decision making for business / John Fraedrich, O. C. Ferrell, Linda Ferrell.
-- 8th ed. -- Mason: South-Western Cengage Learning, 2011

This book is available in the library and students are required to get it. The mid-term essay topics will be based on the book.

Students need to sign up at the library for online access of literature databases immediately at term start.

Recommended Materials (Available in the Library or via Interlibrary Loan)

D. Ariely, *The Honest Truth about Dishonesty*, 2014
 D. Ariely, *The Irrational Bundle*, 2013
 J. Bartlett, *The Dark Net*, 2014
 W. Black, *The Best Way to Rob a Bank is to Own One*, 2014
 A. B. Buchholtz, A. B. Carroll, *Business and Society*, 2012
 S. Chayes, *Thieves of State*, 2015
 S. Das, *Traders, Gun & Money*, 2011
 E.W. Dunn & M.I. Norton, *Happy Money*, 2013
 F. Gino, *Sidetracked*, 2013
 D. Kahneman, *Thinking Fast and Slow*, 2011
 S. Platt, *Criminal Capital*, 2015
 N. Roubini, *Crisis Economics*, 2010
 L. Shelley, *Dark Commerce: How a New Illicit Economy is Threatening our Future*, 2018
 L. Shelley, *Dirty Entanglements*, 2014
 J. Stiglitz, *Creating a Learning Society*, 2014
 J. Stiglitz, *The Price of Inequality*, 2012
 G. Zucman, *The Hidden Wealth of Nations*, 2015

Recommended Materials

List of obligatory additional readings will be provided on the course website.

4. Teaching methodology

In this course, you will participate in in-class discussions related to the lecture, video cases and debates.

We will be taking an active learning approach in this class. Research has shown that active learning is more effective and interesting for both the students and the instructor. Successful active learning does, however, require you to prepare for each class in advance. This means that you should do the readings before class each week, think about the issues, and be prepared to contribute to class discussions.

My goal is to engage your interest and facilitate your learning through highly varied classroom activities. I think it is important to provide expert, logically structured input via lectures, and to orchestrate frequent opportunities for you to participate, think, apply, test your understanding, and build skills via in-class activities. I intend to develop your skills

beyond merely learning the material to become able to critically and selectively apply and adapt your knowledge to specific contexts and problems in the real world.

The NEO LMS platform is the main channel for assignments and all email communications. Students in another time zone need to upload their weekly summaries and discussions of the case studies on NEO.

5. Course Schedule

Date	Class Agenda
Class 1 4.2.2025	<p>Topic: Introduction to Business Ethics, individual and organizational decision making</p> <p>Description: Importance and impact of ethical and legal behavior in organizations; Surveys and studies on current global compliance issues and problems</p>
Class 2 11.2.2025	<p>Topic: Corporate Governance, Compliance, Stakeholder Management</p> <p>Description: Definitions; current business practice; relevant concepts, tools and methods</p> <p>Reading: Will be provided on the course website</p>
Class 3 18.2.2025	<p>Topic: The Business Model of Forced Labor and its impact in the global economy</p> <p>Description: Impact of practices in global business on economies, societies, environment</p> <p>Reading: Will be provided on the course website</p> <p><u>Assessment details (In-class Presentations / Final Group Project) Introduction Mid-term Essay / Instructions</u></p>
Class 4 25.2.2025	<p>Topic: Organizational vs. individual responsibility</p> <p>Description: How decisions are made; recent research of behavioral economists; irrationality in decision making; impact of decisions making; how to enforce ethical (and legal) behavior in organizations</p> <p>Reading: Will be provided on the course website</p> <p>In-class Presentations</p>
Class 5 4.3.2025	<p>Topic: The challenges of AI/ML</p> <p>Description: AI will dominate businesses in the future. As this currently is an almost completely unregulated area, business leaders are facing new and unknown ethical questions and challenges.</p> <p>Reading: Will be provided on the course website</p> <p>In-class Presentations</p>
Class 6 11.3.2025	<p>Topic: Corruption, Money Laundering - Managerial and organizational ethics</p> <p>Description: Behavior ethics and managing organizational ethics</p> <p>Reading: Will be provided on the course website</p> <p>In-class Presentations</p>
Class 7 18.3.2025	<p>Topic: Economic Crises; Risk Management</p> <p>Description: With the example of the economic crisis of 2008 we will look at the different players who were responsible, structural and systemic flaws in different sectors of societies – politics, business and academics. Where are we today? And what needs to be done to prevent such crises in the future. How can organizations design and implement efficient risk management and control-systems?</p> <p>Reading: Will be provided on the course website</p> <p>In-class Presentations</p>

	<u>Deadline Mid-term Essay</u>
24.3. – 28.3 2025	Mid-term Break
Class 8 1.4.2025	<p>Topic: The ethics of digitalization Description: Digitalization, predictive behavior and the use of AI/ML poses a huge number of new unknown challenges for business leaders. Furthermore, the power of the tech companies is also interfering with ethical standards in day-to-day business. Issues of privacy, surveillance on the workplace etc. are issues firms need to deal with.</p> <p>Reading: Will be provided on the course website In-class Presentations</p>
Class 9 8.4.2025	<p>Topic: Corporate Culture; The challenges of innovative business models Description: We know today that behavior is contagious, good or bad. Corporate culture is the framework in which behavior in organizations takes place. The culture, which is mainly influenced by executive level management behavior, values and principles, shapes the behavior of the whole firm. This will be illustrated by the case of ENRON. Reading: Will be provided on the course website In-class Presentations</p>
Class 10 15.4.2025	<p>Topic: Who controls the controllers? Description: A rising number of major frauds in which auditors and government control bodies play a significant role have shaken the trust in businesses in general. This will be an analysis of the recent fraud case in Germany – Wirecard. Reading: Will be provided on the course website In-class Presentations</p>
Class 11 22.4.2025	<p>Topic: Technology, Big Data, The Internet of Things, Cyber Crime and the Dark Web Description: The wide use of social media poses new and, in many areas, unanticipated risks – cybercrime, a thorough change of public communication. How should we use technology, what do organizations need to do to prevent misuse and how do communication patterns influence our view on the world. The Sharing Economy/ Platform business models / IoT/ Circular Economy New Business Models change the way we live, work and consume. Innovative technologies pose new ethical questions. Reading: Will be provided on the course website In-class Presentations</p>
Class 12 29.4.2025	<p>Topic: Human Rights - The Hidden Wealth of Nations: Tax Havens; tax avoidance and evasion Description: The massive use of tax havens especially by corporations causes serious problems for countries and their budgets. It also is considered as unethical by a vast majority of people, no matter if the elaborate schemes firms use are legal. It is also a major part of the business of tax consultants and specialized service providers. These very often facilitate crime by helping clients to hide illegal income. Reading: Will be provided on the course website In-class Presentations</p>

Class 13 6.5.2025	<p>Topic: Criminal Capital - How the Finance Industry Facilitates Crime</p> <p>Description: Overview on current and common problems concerning conflicts of interest, lack of risk management and appropriate control systems and greed in the finance industry, auditors and jobs like accounting, law and consulting. Money laundering, corruption, breach of sanctions etc. and its impact on global economies and societies.</p> <p>Reading: Will be provided on the course website</p> <p>In-class Presentations</p>
Class 14 13.5.2025	<p>Final Exam</p> <p>Group Project Presentation / Discussion</p> <p>Deadline for Group Project Paper</p>
	<p>The sequence of topics might change due to possible guest lectures.</p>

6. Course Requirements and Assessment (with estimated workloads)

Assignment	Workload (average)	Weight in Final Grade	Evaluated Course Specific Learning Outcomes	Evaluated Institutional Learning Outcomes*
Class Participation	42	10 %	Pro-active participation in class discussions and exercises; professional behavior in class; critical thinking	1, 2, 3
Team Presentation	38	30 %	Analyzing and researching a case study / academic text and translating the conclusions from the case/topic to current business practice; developing presentation skills concerning focus, critical thinking, communication	1, 2, 3
Mid-term home assignment	30	30 %	Explain, discuss and apply theoretical concepts, tools and methods; give appropriate examples	1, 2
Final Group Project	40	30 %	Analyzing a real-life problem of a client company; applying basic HRM concepts, tools and methods to give improvement recommendations to the client; writing a professional consulting report; preparing and giving a professional presentation	1, 2, 3
TOTAL	150	100%		

*1 = Critical Thinking; 2 = Effective Communication; 3 = Effective and Responsible Action

Deadlines:

Deadlines in business are critical. All deadlines are posted on NEO. Each student is responsible for checking the class course space and their AAU Student e-mail box regularly, attending every class on time, and completing the assignment on time.

No papers are accepted after the final class and group presentation.

Meeting all requirements:

The formal requirements are clearly stated in all assignment descriptions. It is your duty to read and follow them. If you don't meet the requirements your grade will drop down at least 2 levels.

Note from the Dean approved excuses for absence from the exams won't be accepted; the dates are stated above and in the detailed assessment descriptions. This is especially valid for the final group project presentations.

7. Detailed description of the assignments

1 *Attendance and Class Participation:*

Participation

Participation is evaluated on the quality of your contribution to the learning experience of the class. Participating by actively responding to questions, asking questions yourself, and engaging in class discussions will help you earn your participation grade. Simply attending every class is not participation. If you are not sure, please ask your course leader what you can do to increase your participation.

We will have some panel discussions on controversial issues and your contribution and if you get appointed to be on the panel your preparation will be important for your grade.

Note that the quality of your participation is not necessarily a function of the quantity of your participation. Your participation grade will be evaluated, (at the end of the course), as follows:

- Outstanding: Contributions provided important insights for the class. Arguments were well supported (with evidence) and persuasively presented. If this student were not a member, the quality of the class would have been significantly less.
- Good: Contributions were on target, fairly well supported and persuasive. If this student were not a member, the quality of the class would have been slightly less.
- Attending nonparticipant: Contributed nothing to the class. The student attended every class but was silent and did not participate.
- Repetitive: If a student's class comments were repetitious and obvious and did not add value to the class. That is, you will be penalized for 'airtime' without value.
- Unsatisfactory: Unsatisfactory contribution occurs due to inadequate preparation. If this student were not a member of the class, the quality of the discussions would have been enhanced.

Professional Behavior in Class

Think of the following as an "Employee Handbook" setting out expected behavior and mutual obligations between us, similar to that which would exist between employer and employee. I undertake to treat students with respect, be well-prepared for class at all times, provide extensive developmental feedback, and respond quickly to your inquiries.

Reciprocity in the form of professional behavior is expected from you. You should behave as if employed by a major organization, taking responsibility for your actions and treating your colleagues with respect.

Class will begin on time. Lateness, taking phone calls, sending SMSs, browsing the internet or checking e-mails, private conversations especially during a presentation of your classmates, wandering in and out at will, eating and other unprofessional behaviors are rude, inappropriate, disrupt the learning of others, and may result in sanctions being applied.

Pro-active verbal participation is required.

For students in another time zone: you need to follow the recorded lecture of each class and write a summary of the content. You also need to answer the questions for the case studies in writing. All your papers (summaries and case analyses) need to be uploaded on NEO. You will find a special assignment for you there.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Quality contributions to class discussions (s.a.)	35%
Focus – paying attention to class activities (i.e. staying online while not being available anymore)	30%
Quantity of contributions to class discussions	35%
Total	100%

2 *In-class Presentations:*

Students are asked to prepare a presentation based on given academic articles/case studies or a topic of their own choosing of max. 15 minutes followed by a discussion of again max. 10 minutes for which they also need to prepare the questions and which they will facilitate.

Each assignment comes with some questions, which the team needs to research and answer. I will decide the sequence of presentations in alignment with the syllabus.

Requirements for the presentations:

1. You need to write an abstract about your presentation focus of appr. 1/3 of an A4-page.
2. If you present in a team each team member also needs to write a meaningful peer evaluation using the template on the course website.
3. All sources you might use must be valid academic/professional sources (four is the minimum) and named in the usual scientific form as an appendix. This is also valid for Internet sources (don't base your presentation on Wikipedia!)
4. Please format the presentation professionally, that means title (put a title on the abstract and peer evaluations as well, but separate it from your main paper), page numbers and your name on each page.
5. You need to cover and structure your topic along with certain research questions, which you will develop on your own. Please note, that just presenting facts and figures will not meet the learning objectives and will only earn mediocre grades. I expect you to see your topic in a holistic context and also to critically evaluate the different ethical concepts involved.

Please prepare a set of open questions and facilitate the class discussion on your topic, and also hand in a copy of these questions. You are responsible for keeping within the time limit!

You need to submit your slides, the abstract and peer evaluations on the NEO course site as pdf-files.

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Correct summary of the article (theory, models, methods, conclusions) / abstract of presentation (there should be a difference!)	20%
Impact on business practice	20%
Recommendations for organizations	20%
Critical evaluation of article on the background of additional background research	20%
Meeting all requirements, especially meaningful peer evaluations, abstract, meeting the deadline, uploading all required document in time in required format (pdf) on NEO	20%
Total	100%

3 Academic Essay/Mid-term Home Assignment:

Students will write an academic essay about topics referring to chapters in the textbook (s.a.) asking for theoretical and conceptual knowledge. A list of possible topics is given but they may also choose their own topic. Students do need to do additional research in academic databases and academic and professional literature.

Required Preparation:

Textbook Chapters 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8 and individual literature research

Date: March 18, 2025

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Analysis, coherence, conclusions	25%
Reference to concepts, tools and methods outlined in the relevant chapters of the textbook and/or in other chosen references	25%
Application of concepts, tools and methods to relevant examples; meeting the requirements, especially citation rules	25%
Outline of relevance to current business practice	25%
Total	100%

4 Final Group Project:

The final exam is a group project consisting of a group presentation and a report. The details will be communicated at the beginning of the course, as we might have a research project client.

Deadline for presentation and report: May 20, 2025

Assessment breakdown

Assessed area	Percentage
Critical analysis; application of concepts, tools and methods; coherence; conclusions; recommendations	25%
Structure of the report; validity of sources and references; bibliography; professional editing and formatting	25%

Quality of presentation (focus, analysis, critical application of concepts and methods, time management)	25%
Meeting all formal requirements, especially meaningful peer evaluations, keeping relevant deadlines, uploading all documents on NEO in pdf-format – report on NEO assignment	25%
Total	100%

8. General Requirements and School Policies

General requirements

All coursework is governed by AAU's academic rules. Students are expected to be familiar with the academic rules in the Academic Codex and Student Handbook and to maintain the highest standards of honesty and academic integrity in their work. Please see the AAU intranet for a [summary of key policies](#) regarding coursework.

Course specific requirements

There are no special requirements or deviations from AAU policies for this course.