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Chapter 14. Agility and Excellence in Business – A Transdisciplinary Capstone Course on Sustainability Using the Knowledge and Skills of Commerce

14.1. COURSE SUMMARY

Table 14–1

Audience and level of studies	Students (bachelor)	
Group size	Entire course: 500–1000 Seminar group: 50	
Course duration	13 weeks	
Credits	5 ECTS	
Workload	Presence: 39 h Self-study: 21 h Teamwork & assessments: 90 h	Total: 150 h
Contents/primary topics	• Sustainable and global mindset • Teamwork • Employability	
Main course objectives	• The integration of all knowledge and skills from students' entire degree in a single project (capstone course) applied in global sustainability challenges • The application of teamwork and communication in a cross-disciplinary context • The enhancement of employability skills via teamwork in a cross-disciplinary sustainability challenge	
Main teaching approaches	• Active learning • Collaborative learning • Transdisciplinary learning	
Main teaching methods	• Sustainability-related consulting project • Inter-disciplinary team teaching • Group discussion	
Learning environment	Classroom (face-to-face learning) or virtual classroom (online learning) with synchronous (interaction in real-time) learning	

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Link to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)	SDG 1 | No Poverty | End poverty in all its forms everywhere SDG 2 | Zero Hunger | End hunger, achieve food security and improved SDG 3 | Good Health and Well-being | Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages SDG 4 | Quality Education | Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all SDG 5 | Gender Equality | Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls SDG 6 | Clean Water and Sanitation | Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all SDG 7 | Affordable and Clean Energy | Ensure access to affordable,reliable, sustainable and clean energy for all SDG 8 | Decent Work and Economic Growth | Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all SDG 9 | Industry, Innovation and Infrastructure | Build infrastructure, promote inclusive and sustainable industrialization and foster innovation SDG 10 | Reduced Inequalities | Reduce inequality within and among countries SDG 11 | Sustainable Cities and Communities | Make cities and human settlements inclusive, safe, resilient and sustainable SDG 12 | Responsible Consumption and Production | Ensure sustainable consumption and production patterns SDG 13 | Climate Action | Take urgent action to combat climate change and its impacts SDG 14 | Life below Water | Conserve and sustainably use the oceans, seas and marine resources for sustainable development SDG 15 | Life on Land | Protect, restore and promote sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems, sustainably manage forests, combat desertification, and halt and reverse land degradation and halt biodiversity loss SDG 16 | Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions | Promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels SDG 17 | Partnerships for the Goals | Strengthen the implementation and revitalize the global partnership for sustainable development

Table 14–2

Impact assessment	**(None) Low/ Medium /High**	**Explanation**
1. Degree of student participation / activeness	High	Students synthesize their prior knowledge and skills, and conduct their own research to apply their knowledge and skills to their own project.
2. Degree of student collaboration / group work	High	Students participate in a team project over a whole semester.
3. Degree of student emotional involvement	Medium	Students reflect on their experiences and articulate their own emotional stands with respect to selected sustainability issues.

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Impact assessment	**(None) Low/ Medium /High**	**Explanation**
4. Degree of inter-/transdisciplinarity	High	Students work in mixed-major teams on a group project where knowledge of different disciplines needs to be considered and combined to find an innovative, integrative, and holistic solution to a sustainable development challenge using business principles.
5. Degree of student (self-) reflection	Medium	Students write a reflective essay at the beginning of the semester on their knowledge and skills to date in their degree. This reflective essay is written around four pillars: scholarship, engagement, ethical practice, and sustainability. At the end of the semester, students create a presentation reflecting on employability and sustainability skills gained while completing their project.
6. Degree of experience of real-life situations	Low	Discussion of a few case studies based on real-world enterprises that revolve around the SDGs, to give students context and inspiration for their own SDG projects. This is supplemented with invited guest lectures from industry professionals who work in the sphere of sustainability.
7. Degree of nature-related experiences	None	Classroom teaching.
8. Degree of stakeholder integration	Medium	Students conduct surveys and interviews with the relevant stakeholder groups of their project.
9. Degree of integration between theory and practice	High	Students go through a series of modules as pre-readings, which in conjunction with their prior knowledge, requires them to apply the theories learnt from the modules towards their project to advance a SDG.

14.2. COURSE INTRODUCTION

The course is designed to be the capstone, or any other final year course, for a degree program where students have multiple majors as choices for specialization. Such degree programs may include Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Science, or Bachelor of Commerce students (Karunaratne, et al., 2016), or degrees that have a variety of majors on offer. The course is designed to bring together students from different majors in a cross-disciplinary context to synthesize their knowledge and skills to solve a societal problem – collaboratively, sustainably, and profitably. Students are empowered to showcase the highest level of thinking – the creation of new knowledge (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001).

Students work collaboratively in teams of five to seven students, in consultation with their teacher to integrate the knowledge and skills acquired within their previous studies. Students work in cross-disciplinary teams, incorporating each other's lenses of viewing the world (Meyer & Land, 2003), to complete

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a semester-long project utilizing their knowledge to address a United Nations (UN) (2015) Sustainable Development Goal via a business enterprise.

Each student is required to demonstrate how their major plays a specific role in their project by applying their major's knowledge and skills. In essence, each team member takes on the role of a specific part of an organization, and all team members form the entire organization. Each student contributes one chapter about their major being applied in the overall capstone project. The course aims to prepare students for sustainable leadership in their future workplaces as team players and leaders. The course intends to achieve institutional learning outcomes and societal expectations to prepare students for the world of work – teamwork, employability, and a global mindset.

The course embodies a "guide-by-the-side" teaching philosophy, rather than a "sage-on-the-stage" teaching philosophy (Morrison, 2014). Students are guided in weekly seminars via a scaffolded activity that is constructively aligned (Biggs, 1996) and helps students activate knowledge synthesis in the context of their capstone project. Weekly pre-readings inform students with frameworks to facilitate this synthesis of knowledge.

Each three-hour seminar goes through three steps: Pre-read, Discuss, and Apply. For the first 45–60 minutes, the teacher goes through their pre-reading by facilitating a discussion so that the frameworks in the pre-reading are clear for all students. These readings revolve around frameworks for reflection, teamwork, agility, sustainability, and employability. Then, for the rest of the seminar (120–135 minutes), the students apply the pre-reading to their capstone project via scaffolded tasks. The teacher is the guide-by-the-side, assisting teams and facilitating team discussion. Students select artefacts from each assessment task to include in an e-portfolio (Boud, 2000) that students can later showcase to their networks and future employers. This translates to authentic assessments that enhance graduate employability.

Research by McKinsey & Company (2021) finds that to be successful in the world of work, graduates need not only to master their technical skills in their chosen area of specialization, but also master their transferrable skills across four categories: cognitive, interpersonal, self-leadership, and digital. Thus, this course aims to develop these transferrable skills. Students develop teamwork, employability, and global mindset by working in cross-disciplinary teams to apply business principles and advance a UN SDG.

Students gain experiences and expertise to empower them as they enter the world of work by reflecting on their prior studies and applying this knowledge in a practical way. The learning activities and assessments in the course also enhance the agility of graduates according to the Domains of Business Agility (Business Agility Institute, 2021) – preparing them for dynamic workplaces of the future.

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14.3. LEARNING OBJECTIVES

The course's learning objectives are constructively aligned (Biggs, 1996) to the degree's learning objectives, which are in turn aligned to the entire school's learning goals. The school's learning goals in turn work towards the university's competency framework that has four pillars: scholar, practitioner, citizen, and professional (AMC, 2020).

Table 14–3

Learning objective dimension (UNESCO, 2017)	**Operationalisation**	**Competency referred to (AMC, 2020)**
Cognitive	Integrate discipline-specific knowledge and skills and apply subject knowledge critically, analytically with appreciation of cross-disciplinary requirements.	Scholar
Socio-emotional:	Identify and analyze issues from a variety of ethical and sustainability positions as applied to the business context.	Practitioner And Citizen
Behavioural	Reflect on outcomes of working in multi-functional teams to apply teamwork knowledge and skills for effective collaboration to achieve business solutions in a range of contexts.	Professional

14.4. COURSE OUTLINE

The following course outline assumes that the course is for Bachelor of Commerce students, and in Weeks 9 and 10 these students work collaboratively with Bachelor of Science students to give each other their unique perspectives, consultation, and feedback on each other's projects. The outline below can be equally substituted for any undergraduate degree cohort that collaborates with another undergraduate degree cohort.

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Table 14–4

Structure		Session focus	Pre-work[23]
Week 1	Session 1 (1h)	Introduction to the course	Pre-reading: Reflective Writing • "Reflection for Learning – The Basics " (Macquarie University, 2018)
	Session 2 (2h)	Reflecting on the journey so far in the Bachelor of Commerce	
Week 2	Session 3 (1h)	Discussion on reflective writing	Assessment: Reflective Essay and Infographic
	Session 4 (2h)	Introduction the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals	
Week 3	Session 5 (1h)	Introduction to Teamwork	Pre-reading: Introduction to Teams • "What the Flipped is Team Based Learning?" (Macquarie University, 2018)
	Session 6 (2h)	Formation of teams, sharing of infographics produced in their prior assessment task	
Week 4	Session 7 (1h)	The Theory of Teams and Teamwork	Pre-reading: The Theory of Teams and Teamwork • "Using the Stages of Team Development" (Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2021)
	Session 8 (2h)	Storming within teams regarding the UN SDGs	
Week 5	Session 9 (1h)	Communication Skills	Pre-reading: Communication Skills • "Communication Skills" (Skills You Need, 2021a)
	Session 10 (2h)	Storyboarding projects – a stage-by-stage diagram showing their entire project and every stakeholder interaction	
Week 6	Session 11 (1h)	Collaborative Problem Solving	Pre-reading: Collaborative Problem Solving • "Decision-making and Problem-solving" (Skills You Need, 2021b)
	Session 12 (2h)	Teams collaboratively problem solving in pairs	

23 All pre-readings are bespoke modules prepared by university staff by curating resources on each of the topics.

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Structure		Session focus	Pre-work[23]
Week 7	Session 13 (1h)	Conflict Resolution	Pre-reading: Conflict Resolution • "Conflict Resolution and Mediation." (Skills You Need, 2021c)
	Session 14 (2h)	Creation of an Interim Pitch	
Week 8	Session 15 (1h)	Introduction of a commercial shock	Assessment: Agility Exercise – responding to the shock
	Session 16 (2h)	Teams work on addressing the commercial shock	
Week 9	Session 17 (1h)	Introduction of Bachelor of Science (BSc) Capstone projects	Pre-reading: The Bachelor of Science Capstone projects
	Session 18 (2h)	Teams work on providing consultation to the BSc Students	
Week 10	Session 19 (1h)	Teams receive feedback from BSc Capstone students	Teams work towards their Report and Presentation
	Session 20 (2h)	Teams work on the feedback provided by the BSc students	
Week 11	Session 21 (1h)	Industry guest lecture on Employability	Teams work towards their Report and Presentation
	Session 22 (2h)	Teams incorporate the guest lecturer feedback on their project	
Week 12	Session 23 (1h)	Alumni guest lecture on Employability	Teams work towards their Report and Presentation
	Session 24 (2h)	Teams incorporate the guest lecturer feedback on their project	
Week 13	Session 25 (2h)	Team Presentations	Teams work towards their Report and Presentation
	Session 26 (1h)	Course wrap-up and Evaluation	

14.5. TEACHING APPROACHES AND METHODS

The world of work is agile. Those that can navigate times of crisis are those who are equipped with transferrable skills and those who have experiences with cross-disciplinary thinking. The teaching approaches and methods of this course reflect the learning outcomes of the course that revolve around transdisciplinary teamwork, employability, and a global mindset – to future-proof

23 All pre-readings are bespoke modules prepared by university staff by curating resources on each of the topics.

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graduates in the world of work (McKinsey & Company, 2021) and develop graduates who are agile (Business Agility Institute, 2021). The teaching approach is in itself agile, and the teaching approach involves the teacher demonstrating and modelling the four categories of employability skills (McKinsey & Company, 2021): cognitive, interpersonal, self-leadership, and digital, so students gain a practical example of these skills in action and are empowered to emulate these in their own endeavours.

Students are provided frameworks for learning as well as scaffolded activities to help their projects progress each week. Students and teachers are partners and co-creators in this course. Students are encouraged and empowered to think critically and synthesise their knowledge to create new knowledge (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Bloom's Taxonomy is utilised as it gives students and teachers a framework to scaffold knowledge from lower-level thinking to higher-level thinking where students demonstrate the ability to evaluate and create new knowledge.

The course embodies active learning in a team setting, where teams work through a scaffolded activity each week. Studies show that students learn more when they experience active learning in the classroom (Deslauriers, et al., 2019). Each activity is based on the application of students' pre-reading – guiding students in the application of theories and frameworks to the specific context of their chosen project.

The university's collaborative teaching spaces are fully utilised for face-to-face streams, as well as all Zoom functionalities for online streams, where the course uses a unique blend of three learning methodologies to keep students actively engaged across a three-hour seminar, which applies the broad findings of Deslauriers, et al. (2019) to maximise student learning:

- Active learning
- Problem-based learning
- Team-based learning

Students work collaboratively in cross-disciplinary teams, with peers and teachers to integrate their discipline-specific knowledge to address a societal problem Students work in self-managed, interdisciplinary teams to complete a semester-long project, preparing individual and group reports and presentations that are of showcase quality. In this teaching approach, the teacher is the guide-by-the-side rather than the sage-on-the-stage, moving the student from being a passive recipient to taking part in the teaching-learning nexus to enhance their integrative learning (Morrison, 2014). This approach empowers students' self-agency as well as their employability.

Students choose a societal problem that addresses one of the Sustainable Development Goals (UN, 2015) They use their diverse knowledge and skills to

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achieve the chosen SDG collaboratively, ethically, sustainably, and profitably (Bajada & Trayler, 2013). In doing so, the course aims to prepare students for ethical and sustainable leadership in their future workplaces as team players and leaders.

Assessments are designed to assure student proficiency in course learning outcomes via a scaffolded approach – assessments are for learning and authentic, where students integrate assessment artefacts in their e-portfolio on *Portfolium* to showcase to potential employers. Evidence suggests e-portfolios increase authenticity and support productive learning (Yang, et al., 2016). This authentic assessment method makes the learning meaningful for students and bridges the gap between education and employability.

The course also integrates experiential learning (Kolb, 2014) via *Lego Serious Play* (Wade & Piccinini, 2020). *Lego Serious Play* is used at the beginning of the semester both as an icebreaker activity and to learn about reflection and reflective learning (Image 2) before students write a reflective essay (Gibbs, 1988). Students then use tools such as *Canva* and *Adobe InDesign* to summarise this essay into a single A4 infographic. These teaching methods engage the students in the transferrable skills of reflection, teamwork, and communication, as well as enhancing their digital literacy by exposing students to new applications and software packages.

Lego Serious Play is also used when teams are formed in Week 3, again as a team icebreaker, as well as to learn about Tuckman's Stages of Teamwork) – forming, storming, norming, performing, and adjourning (Tuckman, 1965). Understanding the stages of teamwork is essential for students' exploration of teamwork. This is a key learning outcome of the course, and an important pillar for students' employability. Students are placed in cross-disciplinary teams of five to seven (of the teacher's choosing to ensure that teams are sufficiently mixed) where students share their single A4 infographic. This is how students share their skills with the rest of team, providing them with experiences and opportunities in networking and showcasing – to further enhance their employability skills (Toth, 2013).

After deliberating for a week, teams choose an SDG, and they are to use the knowledge of their majors collaboratively to create a business product, plan, or process, that helps work towards this SDG. As a team, they work toward their final assessment tasks, which is a report and a presentation. The presentation is a three-minute video-recorded elevator pitch where they showcase their employability skills gained throughout the degree and this capstone course using *Portfolium* (Yang, et al., 2016).

Weekly scaffolded in-class activities are designed to help teams progress their project each week. The teacher guides students as they work through each

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week's activities (Morrison, 2014), offering ideas and empowering students' creativity and critical thinking (Kolb & Kolb, 2005).

14.6. EXERCISES

The following exercises may need some adaptation for cohorts other than Bachelor of Commerce students. In Weeks nine and ten students work collaboratively with students from a different undergraduate degree cohort to provide unique perspectives, consultation, and feedback on each other's projects.

Lego Serious Play – Reflection

We use Lego Serious Play activities to assist in icebreaking, as well as help navigate through content. In the first lesson, we ask students in groups of five to seven to form a reflective artefact of their journey in the Bachelor of Commerce using Lego. This helps stimulate a creative conversation about the different student journeys during their time at university.

Reflective Essay

To further reflect on their journey in the Bachelor of Commerce, students write an individual reflective essay on the themes of: scholarship, engagement, ethics, and sustainability. Each student summarises their essay as an infographic to be shared with their new team members in Week three – to assist team formation.

Lego Serious Play – Teamwork

When teams form in Week three, we give them a Lego Serious Play activity to help teams bond and visualise Tuckman's Stages of Teamwork. Each team gets the same Lego set. They have ten minutes to plan how they will work as a team and sort out their workspace. Then the clock starts, and it is a race to the finish! Teams then reflect on their performance by working through Tuckman's Stages. To solidify their new knowledge, teams have a chance to repeat the exercise.

Weekly Lesson Plan

From the third week and onwards, students have pre-readings to complete before coming to class, and then the teacher navigates this content via an active discussion at the beginning of the lesson for about 45–60 minutes. For the rest of the three-hour seminar, we have a scaffolded team activity. The weekly accu-

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mulation of these activities helps their project progress each week. As students work through their projects, their teacher is their guide-by-the-side, engaging with students, equipping them with ideas, and empowering their creativity and critical thinking.

Live Industry Guests

Each week either academic or industry guests are invited to the course to give students insights on the themes of sustainability, employability, and/or agility. These sessions are presented synchronously (whether face-to-face or online) and the sessions are recorded for later asynchronous learning support. Those students who attend the live sessions can discuss their projects with these guests and receive feedback. Students and the teaching team benefit from engaging with industry partners for real-world inspiration and insights.

Agility Exercise

The teams are presented a commercial shock in the beginning of Week eight, which is to be addressed within one working week. The teams must work together, drawing upon each other's strengths. The shock remains for the duration of the semester, thereby impacting each team's project. Examples of shocks that could be used include:

- A business ethics training module that is mandated by the government – teams have to show evidence of embedding their learning into their business model.
- A client who needs consultancy on their own project, where the consultancy report has to be produced using a new software – teams have to learn the new software and showcase their consultancy via this new platform and showcase their own project's documentation via this new platform.

Inter-team consultation

Several times during the semester, teams are paired with other teams to share progress, problem-solve, and receive feedback. Initially, teams are paired within the course itself.

Bachelor of Science Capstone consultation

The Bachelor of Science Capstone students also work in cross-disciplinary teams to address an SDG. The teams of the two degrees create project briefs and questions to share with students from the other degree. This gives business students the opportunity to engage with science students. Students produce a

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formal consultation document, giving them experiences in consulting. In the following week, teams receive this feedback, and incorporate this into their projects.

Focus on Majors

Once in the semester, we re-organise seminars and teams according to their majors, where students can meet a teacher from their discipline. Students share how they have applied their major in their own team. This within-discipline sharing is designed to inspire and cross-pollinate team projects.

Consultation Advice from Industry and Alumni

In Weeks 11–12, industry and alumni guests share with students: experiences related to employability and their own expertise. Students are encouraged to engage with these industry reps and ask questions that will help them finalise their projects. Students are encouraged to share their *Porfolium* e-portfolio via professional networking platform, such as *LinkedIn*. *LinkedIn* enables students to engage externally for feedback, showcasing, and networking.

14.7. ASSESSMENT

The following assessment structure assumes that the course is for Bachelor of Commerce students, and in weeks nine and ten these students work collaboratively with Bachelor of Science students to give each other their unique perspectives, consultation, and feedback on each other's projects. The assessments below can be equally substituted for any undergraduate degree cohort that collaborates with another undergraduate degree cohort.

The assessment philosophy is that assessments are *for* learning, as much as they are assessments *of* learning. Thus, the assessment tasks assist in navigating the student from gathering their prior knowledge in their earlier studies, to synthesising that knowledge in the context of creating the capstone report and capstone presentation.

Teachers provide students with feedback on these assessments based on a rubric and individual written comments. In addition, the course is constructively aligned, thus students have opportunities to receive feedback from: other teams, students from other degree programs, industry guests, and alumni guests throughout the semester.

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Table 14–5

Evaluation	Deliverable	Format	Percentage (%)
Reflective Essay	Students reflect on their entire degree's journey and write an essay under the headings of: scholarship, engagement, ethics, and sustainability.	1,000-word individual essay and a 1-page infographic.	20 %
Agility Exercise	Teams receive a commercial shock that impacts their projects which they need to respond to within a working week.	700-word individual essay and 3-page appendix.	20 %
Capstone Report	Each student writes a chapter of the team report, and the team co-creates the introduction and the conclusion. The report reads like a book, with chapters focused on different majors.	700-word individual essay and 3-page appendix.	40 %
Capstone Presentation	Each student records a video presentation showcasing their employability skills based on their e-portfolio. The video presentation is a student voice-over as they navigate the audience through aspects of their e-portfolio. Students then share their presentations on their *LinkedIn* site – where each student includes an elevator pitch for networking, showcasing, and employability.	3-minute individual presentation within a team presentation.	20 %

14.8. PREREQUISITES

The following prerequisites are designed for Bachelor of Commerce students. They can be adapted for any undergraduate degree cohort.
Required prior knowledge from students:

- Completion of all first-year courses – the foundation courses of the degree program. For example: in a Bachelor of Commerce the first-year foundation could include introductory courses in Accounting, Economics, Finance, Management, Marketing, and Statistics.
- Completion of all second-year courses – pertaining to the student's major. For example: in a Bachelor of Commerce students may complete courses in their chosen major such as: Accounting, Business Analytics, Business Information Systems, Business Statistics, Cyber Security Governance, Economics, Entrepreneurship, Finance, International Business, Human Resources, Management, or Marketing.
- Completion of some third-year courses – pertaining to the student's major in the Bachelor of Commerce

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Required instructors and their core competencies:

- Lecturer (commerce, sustainability, learning and teaching, and a team player)
- Industry experts (real-life business expertise)
- Alumni (recent experiences translating employability skills)

14.9. RECOMMENDED RESOURCES

Business Agility Institute (2021). *The Domains of Business Agility*. https://businessagility.institute/domains/domains-of-business-agility-overview

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Massachusetts Institute of Technology (2021). *Using the Stages of Team Development.* https://hr.mit.edu/learning-topics/teams/articles/stages-development

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United Nations (2015) *Transforming our World: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. General Assembly Resolution A/RES/70/1*.

The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2019). *Ethics For Justice*. https://www.unodc.org/e4j/en/tertiary/integrity-ethics.html

14.10. GENERAL TIPS FOR TEACHERS

The course is certainly equal parts rewarding and equals parts challenging for a teacher. Leading or being involved in such a course is a great opportunity for

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professional development in your teaching practice and content. Through the cross-disciplinary experience, you will learn about the areas that are not your expertise, via the students in the course.

As a teacher, success in teaching this course depends on openness to challenging the traditional classroom power dynamics. Teachers no longer control the knowledge; they become facilitators of knowledge creation by teams of students.

The course cohort is ideally divided into seminar groups of 50 to make groups manageable. Each seminar group should be divided into teams of five, thus you will have about ten teams to nurture throughout the course of the semester. One approach is to give detailed attention to half the teams each week, as you walk around the classroom while students apply themselves to their projects. This way, in every two-week window, you would have given detailed attention to all teams. If it is not possible to ensure that all students within a team have unique majors – mix teams as much as possible and any students in a team with the same major can focus on different aspects of their major.

Utilise *LinkedIn* as a platform to showcase your students' work and get the attention of industry – either as future guests or as future employers!

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