TEACHING GUIDE - 2026-2027

Addressing Global Challenges

UGRA_014151

Departments	Department of Society, Politics and Sustainability
Teaching Languages	English
ECTS	2
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Course Goals

The main goal of this elective is to introduce students to a different way of thinking about and approaching complex social challenges. Instead of thinking directly about a potential solution, students will be encouraged to research, assess, and reflect on the different actors, relations, resources, and processes that together form the underlying system of that social challenge.

The course will offer students a range of frameworks and methodologies. Students will work in groups and focus on a specific social or environmental issue of their choice.

At the end of the course, students should:

- Be familiar with the basic principles and practices of systems thinking.
- Understand the complexity and interrelatedness of complex social challenges.
- Have practice on how to apply a systems mapping approach to specific social or environmental challenges.
- Work on a specific case where they will apply different methodologies such as PESTEL, Stakeholder mapping, among others.
- Learn and apply the Problem-based learning methodology to a specific case.
- Have reflected about the role that different actors, including themselves, can play in addressing societal challenges.
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Having achieved these learning objectives, students will be better prepared for a career in the complex world that we live in, either working directly to address societal challenges from the non-profit, public, or social entrepreneurship sectors, or working in for-profit companies that need to deal (and arguably contribute to solve) many societal issues if they want to be profitable and sustainable.

This elective is designed for future leaders who understant the “business as usual” paradigm is hitting its limits. It wants to offer students a different view of management which is purpose driven, ethically grounded, acts within the limits of the plant, and is human-centered.

2. Learning objectives (aligned with the ESADE 4Cs)

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

Concious: Deconstruct the Homoeconomicus narrative and recognize how mental models share organizational realidty and personal identity.

Competent: Master the tools of regenerative business (Doughnouts econony, TEAL, Steward-ownership) to desing resilient, human centered organizations.

Compassionate: Cultivate emotional intelligence, self-awereness and “humbel inquiry” to foster psycological safety, inclusion, and a sense of belonging in teams.

Commited: Formulate a personal and professional “Manifesto” for systemic change, to transform business into a force for a more fair society.

Teaching methodology

This course is built on a "learning-by-doing" model. Rather than following a traditional lecture format, we prioritize hands-on investigation and critical analysis through two integrated approaches:

In this course, we will apply Problem-Based Learning (PBL) to tackle real-world issues. In this model, students learning will be driven by a specific, real-world "global challenge." Each group will be presented with a complex problem and its task will be to act as a professional team: identifying what you need to learn, conducting targeted research, and collaborating to build a solution. This approach shifts the focus from memorizing information to applying it in a practical, meaningful way.

To successfully navigate the "messy" problems presented in PBL, we will also use Systems Thinking as our primary support tool. Global challenges are rarely simple; they are webs of interconnected parts. Systems Thinking will provide students with the visual and analytical tools to see the "big picture." This complementary focus will help each team understand how different factors influence one another, ensuring that proposed solutions address the root causes of a problem rather than just the symptoms.

Description

Course contribution to program

In a era of polycrisis – climate change, systemic inequality and poverty, and mental health challenges, the traditional “economicist” model of management based mostly on wealth maximization is no longer fit.

The aim of this elective is to explore management and leadership not merely as tools for efficiency, but as professions capable of protecting human dignity and promoting human excellence. This elective wishes to promote the four pillars of ESADE's 4Cs program.

- Concious: Of ourselves and the world’s reality.
- Competent: To be able to face and overcome professional, social and human obstacles.
- Compassionate: With others, demonstrating our empathy and solidarity.
- Committed: To social and political transformation for a fairer society from a social and environmental perspective.

This course will put students in touch with challenges and organizations that are not usually present in their daily lives or in the teaching cases that they see at Esade, and connect them to the broader purpose that business practice - and business education - needs to incorporate. This contact will make them reflect about the different realities that we find in our society, and about the possibilities of putting their skills to work in favor of the more disadvantaged of society. The course will hence complement other courses in the program that are more based on technical and theoretical learnings.

Short description

The goal of this elective course is to provide students with an understanding of the complexity of the global challenges that we face in our society (homelessness, climate change, poverty, pandemics, financial instability, etc.), and providem with different practical tools that can help us address them, and a space for reflection about the role they can play in the future regarding these challenges.

These global challenges are by definition systemic and multifaceted. They affect organizations from different sectors, but these organizations usually evaluate the problem from their own perspective, background, and interests. Furthermore, their actions are interrelated, and it is difficult to imagine that a single actor or sector will be able to tackle those challenges without understanding the role of other actors and collaborating with them. A systemic approach will hence enable us to take one step back in order to understand the nature of these challenges, before taking decisions about what tools are best to address them.

Students will get specially acquainted with the global challenge in which

they work for their final project, but they will also get relevant insights from the work done by the other teams on other topics. Even more importantly, the tools they learn will help them bring the ‘big picture’ to the table in many professional contexts over their career. The course will combine short lectures, case studies, and in-class exercises.

Directly addressing social and environmental challenges will atune students to issues and organizations that might not be present in their daily lives or in the teaching cases that they see at Esade, and connect them to the broader purpose that business practice – and business education – needs to incorporate. This will make them reflect about the different realities that we find in our society, and about the possibilities of putting their skills to work in favor of the more disadvantaged of society.

This elective is inspired by the ESADE’s mission and the principles of the Humanistic Leadership Academy. And it is designed for future leaders who understant the “business as usual” paradigm is hitting its limits. It wants to offer students a different view of management which is purpose driven, ethically grounded, acts within the limits of the plant, and is human-centered.

Bibliography

Zia Qureshi, Rising inequality: A major issue of our time, May 16, 2023, The Brookings Institution (Electronic Article)

, World Economic Forum, World Economic Forum (Technical Report)
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OXFAM Iinternational, Gender Justice and Women's Rights (Video)

, What You Need to Know About Food Security and Climate Change, World Bank (Electronic Article)
, Managing the Impacts of Climate Change on Poverty, Global Facility for Disaster Reduction and Recovery (GFDRR) | The World Bank (Electronic Article)
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Activities

Online training activities

Following each in-class session, the professor will post a short question in the online forum to extend and deepen the conversations initiated during class. Students are encouraged to actively participate by responding to the question, sharing relevant resources, or posing additional questions to their peers.

In-class discussions and debates

Students will be assessed on their ability to engage consistently and meaningfully in collaborative

classroom discussions, demonstrating the critical thinking principles outlined at the beginning of the course.

Teamwork
Each group will be presented with a case based on the global challenges they have expressed a preference for. They will work together, assuming the role of consultants hired to understand the complexity of the problem and to present a feasible solution that considers stakeholders' expectations, sustainability, and financial criteria.
In the final session, each team will present their findings and will be responsible for leading the discussion around the selected challenge.

Case study resolution
Each group will be presented with a complex problem, and rather than being told what to think, its task will be to act as a professional team:
identifying what you need to learn, conducting targeted research, and collaborating to build a viable solution.
This approach shifts the focus from memorizing information to applying it in a practical, meaningful way.

Case study analyses
The objective is not focused on solving the problem itself, but rather on using it as a foundation to identify learning topics.

Content

#	Topic
1	Session 1. Introduction to the course objectives and to the Problem-based learning methodology.
2	Session 2. World challenges and introduction to the methodologies of System thinking methodology and Problem-based learning.
3	Session 3. Day 1 of Problem-based learning cases: - Present the case for each group, the problem scenario, and its context. - Define the problem and identify what is known. - Identify what needs to be learned - Assign roles and plan research
4	Day 2 of Problem-based learning cases - Conduct Research and share findings - Refine understanding of the problem as new insights emerge. - Integrate findings into a collective understanding. - Develop potential solutions, action plans, or scenarios.
5	Day 3 of Problem-based learning: - Synthesize and propose solutions - Integrate findings into a collective understanding. - Explain findings to other group and receive feedback
6	Final Project presentations - Present and reflect; share solutions, compare them with expert data, and reflect on the complexity and agency involved. - Develop potential solutions, action plans, or scenarios to address the global issue assigned to each team. - Share findings between teams and final reflection on the collective knowledge generated throughout the course.

Assessment

Tool	Assessment tool	Category	Weight %
In-class analysis and	Participation	Retake and ordinary round	20.00%

Tool	Assessment tool	Category	Weight %
discussion of issues			
Individual or team exercises	Reflection essay	Ordinary round	20.00%
Group project	Final group project	Ordinary round	60.00%
Final individual project	Individual project: Systems mapping	Retake	80.00%

PROGRAMS

AI26S-Exchange Program Bachelor in Business and Artificial Intelligence (Undergraduates: Business)
- AI26S Year 1 (Optative)

B13-Exchange Program Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) (Undergraduates: Business)
- B13 Year 1 (Optative)

B13S-Exchange Program Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) (Undergraduates: Business)
- B13S Year 1 (Optative)

BBA20-Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) (Undergraduates: Business)
- BBA20 Year 4 (Optative)
- BBA20 Year 2 (Optative)
- BBA20 Year 3 (Optative)
- BBA20 Year 1 (Optative)

BBA23-Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) (Undergraduates: Business)
- BBA23 Year 3 (Optative)
- BBA23 Year 1 (Optative)
- BBA23 Year 4 (Optative)
- BBA23 Year 2 (Optative)

BBA25-Bachelor of Business Administration (BBA) (Undergraduates: Business)
- BBA25 Year 2 (Optative)
- BBA25 Year 3 (Optative)
- BBA25 Year 1 (Optative)

DBAI23-Double Degree in Business Administration and Artificial Intelligence for Business (Undergraduates: Business)
- DBAI23 Year 1 (Optative)
- DBAI23 Year 3 (Optative)

GEL19-Bachelor in Global Governance, Economics and Legal Order (Undergraduates: Law)
- GEL19 Year 3 (Optative)
- GEL19 Year 4 (Optative)

GEL23-Bachelor in Global Governance, Economics and Legal Order (Undergraduates: Law)
- GEL23 Year 3 (Optative)
- GEL23 Year 4 (Optative)

GMC25-Global Manager Certificate (Undergraduates: Business)
- GMC25 Year 1 (Optative)