



BFA 719
**Corporate Sustainability and the Triple
Bottom Line**

Semester Two 2007

School of Accounting and Corporate Governance

Faculty of Business

Unit Outline

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Unit description

This unit provides an introduction to the concept of economic, social and environmental (triple bottom line) reporting and performance from both a business and social perspective. The unit explores the link between triple bottom line (TBL) reporting and the concept of sustainability. The unit also examines related areas of corporate and government accountability, including corporate social responsibility and corporate ethics.

Learning outcomes

The aims of the unit are to provide a structured framework within which students from many disciplines can explore the issues of corporate accountability and the effects of business operations on society and the natural environment.

Its overall aim is to enable students to gain an understanding of the ways in which corporate information is reported. There is evidence that a major objective of corporate reports is to convey propaganda, or to attempt to legitimise the activities of business in the minds of society. Accounting information in particular can be used as an “excuse” for avoiding social and environmental responsibility, or to obtain benefits for business that might not be in the best interests of the community.

On completion of this unit, you should be able to:

1. Discuss issues of corporate governance and accountability to society and the environment
2. Develop practical multi-disciplinary solutions within a framework of real cases
3. Use accounting information in contributing more fully to the corporate social responsibility (CSR) debate
4. Assess and use social and environmental accounting information to assist in working towards environmental sustainability and social justice

Generic graduate attributes

The University has defined a set of generic graduate attributes (GGAs) that can be expected of all graduates (see <http://www.utas.edu.au/tl/policies/index.htm>). By undertaking this unit you should make progress in attaining the following attributes:

1. *Knowledge*: being able to discuss and apply a range of underlying concepts and principles relevant to the preparation and use of accountability information and triple bottom line reports;
2. *Communication skills*: through essay, report and discussion activities, being able to effectively communicate across a range of contexts; being able to present well-reasoned arguments; and being able to access and organise information from a variety of media;

3. *Problem-solving skills*: being able to conceptualise problems and formulate solutions; to interpret and analyse data; to search, evaluate and use appropriate information; to think logically, and to critically appraise a range of issues;
4. *Global perspective*: since triple bottom line concerns are a global issue, every topic covered in the unit takes a global perspective, using both local and global examples
5. *Social responsibility*: corporate social responsibility and how this can be achieved is the main focus of this unit.

Prior knowledge &/or skills

There are no specific prerequisites for this unit.

Learning resources

Extensive course materials will be provided through interactive CD, WebCT Vista, and, where appropriate, printed media. Many links are provided to web-based materials, but students are expected to maintain an awareness of current issues through accessing appropriate additional academic sources and media presentations.

Whilst there are few texts suitable for a unit such as this, there are several reference sources that will provide useful background information, and the following may be useful:

Relevant issues of the journals:

Accounting Auditing and Accountability Journal

Accounting Forum

Accounting Organisations and Society

Critical Perspectives on Accounting

There are also several seminal works that provide useful historical information:

Brundtland, GH (1987) *Our Common Future*, World Commission on Environment and Development, Switzerland

Dellaportas, S, Gibson, K, Alagiah, R, Hutchinson, M, Leung, P, and Van Homrigh, D, (2005) *Ethics, Governance and Accountability*, Wiley, Milton, Queensland.

Estes, R (1996) *Tyranny of the Bottom Line*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco

Pearce, D Markandya, A and Barbier, EB (1989) *Blueprint for a Green Economy*, Earthscan Publications, London

Additional references and resources relevant to unit discussions will be provided by the lecturers via WebCT Vista.

Equipment & materials

For WebCT Vista

To access WebCT Vista from your own computer you will need the appropriate software, and hardware to run that software. See **Learning Online** at <http://www.utas.edu.au/coursesonline/software.htm> for computer software you will need.

Note: Older computers may not have the hardware to run some of the required software applications. Contact your local IT support person or the UTAS Service Desk on 1818 if you experience difficulties.

See *WebCT Vista: Information for Students* for further information about accessing WebCT Vista.

Details of teaching arrangements

No formal face-to-face meetings are scheduled for this unit, but students are strongly encouraged to maintain contact with the lecturers through WebCT Vista, e-mail, and telephone, and with the lecturers and other students through the WebCT Vista chat and/or discussion features. It is expected that students will work consistently through the unit resource CDs, and will participate in WebCT Vista discussion at the appropriate stages of the course. Students may work through the course materials at their own pace, but those joining discussions later than other students are expected to make original contributions to the existing discussions.

Unit schedule

<u>Module</u>	<u>Title</u>
1	Introduction
2	Corporate activity and sustainable development <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The concept of sustainable development ▪ The origins of the company ▪ The role of the corporation ▪ The changing concept of corporate sustainability
3	Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The concept of CSR ▪ Corporate ethics ▪ Case studies ▪ Reputation and legitimacy
4	Accounting and the triple bottom line <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The role of accounting information in society ▪ Social and environmental accounting ▪ The triple bottom line – measuring and reporting
5	Triple bottom line <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current state of play ▪ Substance or spin? ▪ Verification ▪ Cases and examples
6	Triple bottom line and the public sector <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The role of the public sector ▪ Examples of public sector TBL reporting ▪ The role of the auditor and Auditors General
7	Ethical and socially responsible investment <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Historical development ▪ Factors in decision-making ▪ Performance indicators
8	Sustainability and corporate governance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Current status ▪ Where to from here?

Learning expectations and strategies

Expectations

The University is committed to high standards of professional conduct in all activities, and holds its commitment and responsibilities to its students as being of paramount importance. Likewise, it holds expectations about the responsibilities students have as they pursue their studies within the special environment the University offers.

The University's Code of Conduct for Teaching and Learning states:

Students are expected to participate actively and positively in the teaching/learning environment. They must strive to maintain steady progress within the subject or unit framework, comply with workload expectations, and submit required work on time.

Learning strategies

Encouraging you to study and learn independently is an important goal of university education. It is a feature of a reflective approach to learning, in which you reflect on what it is you are learning and your learning strategy. Please familiarise yourself with the recommendations in the Guide for Students published by the Faculty of Business and available on the WebCT Vista site for this unit.

Assessment

Details of the assessment for this unit are provided in the unit CD.

Review of results and appeals

You may request a formal remark of your original assessment results (in accordance with Rule of Academic Assessment 2, Clause 22.1). Under the Rule of Academic Assessment 2, clause 23, you may also request a review of your final result in a unit. For further information see: <http://acserv.admin.utas.edu.au/rules/Rule2.doc>

Academic referencing

In your written work you will need to support your ideas by referring to scholarly literature, and other sources of information such as the accounting regulatory bodies. It is important that you understand how to correctly refer to the work of others and maintain academic integrity. Failure to appropriately acknowledge the ideas of others constitutes academic dishonesty (plagiarism), a matter considered by the University of Tasmania as a serious offence.

The appropriate referencing style for this unit is the Harvard referencing method. In addition to the *Faculty Guide for Students*, you are encouraged to read Fleet, W, Summers & Smith, B. (2006), *Communication Skills Handbook for Accounting*, which provides detailed information about using the Harvard referencing system. Further information on presentation of assignments, including referencing styles is available at:

<http://www.utas.edu.au/library/assist/gpoa/gpoa.html>

You can also access information about the referencing style used in this unit in the *Faculty of Business Guide for Students* available via WebCT Vista or from the School's website - <http://www.utas.edu.au/accg/studentres.htm>.

Please read the following statement on plagiarism. Should you require clarification please see your unit coordinator or lecturer.

For information on presentation of assignments, including referencing styles:

<http://www.utas.edu.au/library/assist/gpoa/gpoa.html>

Please read the following statement on plagiarism. Should you require clarification please contact your unit coordinator or lecturer.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating. It is taking and using someone else's thoughts, writings or inventions and representing them as your own; for example, using an author's words without putting them in quotation marks and citing the source, using an author's ideas without proper acknowledgment and citation, copying another student's work.

If you have any doubts about how to refer to the work of others in your assignments, please consult your lecturer or tutor for relevant referencing guidelines, and the academic integrity resources on the web at <http://www.utas.edu.au/tl/supporting/academicintegrity/index.html>. The intentional copying of someone else's work as one's own is a serious offence punishable by penalties that may range from a fine or deduction/cancellation of marks and, in the most serious of cases, to exclusion from a unit, a course or the University. Details of penalties that can be imposed are available in the Ordinance of Student Discipline – Part 3 Academic Misconduct, see <http://www.utas.edu.au/universitycouncil/legislation/>

The University and any persons authorised by the University may submit your assessable works to a plagiarism checking service, to obtain a report on possible instances of plagiarism. Assessable works may also be included in a reference database. It is a condition of this arrangement that the original author's permission is required before a work within the database can be viewed.

For further information on this statement and general referencing guidelines, see <http://www.utas.edu.au/plagiarism/> or follow the link under 'Policy, Procedures and Feedback' on the **Current Students** homepage.

Further information and assistance

If you are experiencing difficulties with your studies or assignments, have personal or life planning issues, disability or illness which may affect your course of study, you are advised to raise these with your lecturer in the first instance.

There is a range of University-wide support services available to you including Teaching & Learning, Student Services, and International Services. Please refer to the **Current Students** homepage at: <http://www.utas.edu.au/students/>

Should you require assistance in accessing the Library visit their website for more information at <http://www.utas.edu.au/library/>

If you have a problem...

- of an administrative nature (eg tutorial allocation), contact the lecturer
- of an academic nature, please ask questions of your lecturer
- if you have problems using WebCT Vista, contact the service desk
Website: <http://www.utas.edu.au/servicedesk/student/index.html>
Telephone: 6226 1818
Email: servicedesk@utas.edu.au
- if you have any concerns in relation to this unit, then in the first instance you should discuss the matter with your lecturer. However, if you do not feel comfortable approaching your lecturer, or if you have a discussion with your lecturer and are not satisfied with the outcome, then you are encouraged to contact the Ombudsperson listed below, who also teaches in the School of Accounting & Corporate Governance.

Mrs Simone Bingham
Ph: (+61 3) 6226 2314
email: Simone.Bingham@utas.edu.au

Ms Belinda Williams
Ph: (+61 3) 6324 3661
email: Belinda.Williams@utas.edu.au

Discussions with the ombudsperson will be kept in the strictest confidence. If you wish to pursue the matter further, they will provide advice as to how this can be done. The University also has formal policies, which can be accessed at:

http://www.admin.utas.edu.au/ac_serv/complaints_info.html

Students with Disabilities –University & Faculty Equity Plans

Goal 1 of the University of Tasmania Equity Plan provides for: “An inclusive teaching and learning environment that values diversity, supports the pursuit of academic excellence and produces high quality education and employment results for all students and staff”. The Faculty of Business Equity Plan facilitates the University Plan at an operational level and has developed an ‘Action Plan’. The Action Plan for Goal 1 outlines procedures to ensure that all students, including those with disabilities, have equal access to lecture and course materials. The School of Accounting & Corporate Governance complies with these procedures.