

Discipline: Cross-disciplinary (management, organization theory, marketing, business ethics, sociology)

1. Language

English

2. Title

Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Sustainability: Societal Trends and Theoretical Developments

3. Lecturers

Prof. Dr. Hannah Trittin-Ulbrich, Institute for Management and Organization, Leuphana University of Lüneburg (<https://www.leuphana.de/en/institutes/imo/persons/hannah-trittin.html>)

Prof. Dr. Christopher Wickert, Department of Management & Organization, Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam (VU), (<https://research.vu.nl/en/persons/christopher-wickert>)

4. Date and location

Febr 23 - Febr 2026, 2027; Leuphana University of Lüneburg, Germany

5. Course description and target group

5.1 Learning objectives

The objective of this 4-day workshop is to discuss and develop a common understanding of societal trends and key theoretical approaches in Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and sustainability research. This will help participants not only to gain a deep understanding of the vast body of CSR literature, but also to link the state-of-the-art literature and emerging trends to relevant research questions. The workshop will include thematic discussions on various topics as well as cross-thematic inputs by the workshop leaders on e.g., the publication process in CSR and sustainability research, conducting interdisciplinary research, career planning and research communication.

The course is primarily aimed at junior researchers (i.e., doctoral students) in business administration who focus their research on the areas of CSR, corporate sustainability, and the relationship between business and society. In the context of this course, CSR and sustainability are understood as a multi-layered and multi-faceted management phenomenon that can be studied from different theoretical perspectives.

Learning Objectives:

- Gain an in-depth understanding of foundational work and theoretical approaches in CSR and corporate sustainability research.
- Gain the ability to relate different theoretical approaches to theoretically and practically relevant and contemporary research questions.
- Gain practical knowledge on how to collaborate with partner companies in CSR and sustainability research.
- Gain experience regarding possible career paths and publication strategies in CSR and sustainability research.

Target group:

- Doctoral students working on the broad topic of CSR, business responsibility and corporate sustainability, the role of companies in society as well as their relationships with various social stakeholder groups.
- The course addresses doctoral students in the early stages of their dissertation to provide basic theoretical knowledge and a classification of different research approaches, as well as advanced doctoral students who wish to deepen their knowledge of different approaches,
- The course is aimed at doctoral students from all fields of business administration, but offers a focus on management and organizational theory approaches as well as communication science.
- The course is also explicitly aimed at doctoral students from business-related disciplines who deal with social issues such as CSR and corporate sustainability, e.g., sociology, psychology, political science.

5.2 Course content

The role of companies in society and questions of their social, environmental, and ethical responsibility are one of the most important topics of our time. Both in practice and in research, there is a strong dynamic, and companies are continuously confronted with new challenges and are responsible for developing new solutions to these so-called societal grand challenges such as climate change, inequality and so on. At the same time, CSR-related and sustainability issues are currently under siege and are receiving unprecedented societal and political backlash, putting a problematic layer of uncertainty on corporate decision-makers. Under the concept of CSR and sustainability, the course attempts to shed light on these very multi-layered and complex phenomena.

The course introduces different theoretical approaches with which the phenomenon of CSR and sustainability can be studied. After a brief introduction and overview, participants will take ownership of representative and influential studies in thematic blocks based on different theoretical approaches and will introduce them to the other participants in a group discussion led by them.

In particular, the focus will be to understand the underlying assumptions and premises and to analyze for which kind of research problems a certain approach seems to be particularly suitable and how this could make room for theory-informed contributions to research. Furthermore, exemplary contributions dealing with current debates in CSR and sustainability research will be discussed with the participants to gain an understanding of the research agenda for the future.

Each day, there will also be an interactive seminar on the publication process, interaction with practitioners, science communication, and career planning.

Participants will also be asked to prepare a poster of their current research to serve as a basis for discussion and inspiration during the course.

5.3 Schedule

Day 1: Febr 23rd, 2026 - approx. 10 a.m. – 5 p.m. (Prof. Dr. Wickert) – Introduction and theoretical foundations in CSR and corporate sustainability I

- CSR and sustainability research at a crossroads (interactive introductory keynote by course coordinators)
- Instrumental perspectives on CSR: An idea of the past? (participant led session)
- Institutional & stakeholder-oriented perspectives on CSR: The social license to operate (participant led session)
- Researching CSR from an interdisciplinary perspective (interactive session by course coordinator)

(Dinner with instructors and participants; self-paid)

Day 2: Febr 24th, 2027 – approx. 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. (Prof. Dr. Wickert) – Theoretical foundations in CSR and corporate sustainability II

- Political perspectives on CSR: Global governance and geopolitics (participant led session)
- CSR and non-financial impact: The societal consequences of CSR (participant led session)
- Actor-oriented perspectives on CSR: "Micro-CSR" and the role of internal change agents (participant led session)
- Publishing CSR research successfully (interactive session by course coordinator)

Day 3: Febr 25th, 2027 - approx. 9 a.m. – 5 p.m. (Prof. Dr. Trittin-Ulbrich) - Theoretical foundations in CSR and corporate sustainability III

- Communicative perspectives to CSR and sustainability I (participant led session)
- Perspectives on the Sense of Doing: Reinvigorating Purpose and Meaning (participant led session)
- Poster Presentations by participants
- "What's my research's impact, anyways?" Cooperation with corporate practice and science communication (interactive workshop by course coordinator)

Day 4: Febr 26th, 2027 - approx. 9 a.m. – 4 p.m. (Prof. Dr. Trittin-Ulbrich) - Recent social trends and future scholarly developments

- Communicative perspectives to CSR and sustainability II: Greenhushing (participant led session)
- Digital Capitalism & Corporate Digital Responsibility (participant led session)
- On the way to a professorship: Strategic career planning in CSR and sustainability research (interactive session by course coordinator)
- Conclusion and reflection / wrap-up

6. Course format

The course is interactive and strongly involves participation of participants. It consists of three interconnected elements:

First, thematic blocks, where a selected theoretical perspective of CSR and sustainability research is discussed. This is done on the basis of presentations by participants on pre-assigned scientific articles (to be provided to participants a few weeks ahead of the course). The participants are tasked to present the most important contents of each paper, followed by a joint discussion. In addition, research questions that can be derived from the paper will be discussed.

Second, cross-thematic blocks in which general topics such as the exchange with practitioners in research (as addressees of research as well as a source of information) and publication strategies in CSR and sustainability research will be discussed.

Third, all course participants are expected to prepare a poster of their research, which will be discussed during the course.

6.1 Requirements

The course requires only a basic knowledge of current research on corporate social responsibility and sustainability management as well as related fields such as business ethics or sociology.

6.2 Required reading

Required readings will be provided in advance to all registered participants.

6.3 Preparation

Participants are expected to have knowledge of the course literature. In addition, one or two presentations of 30 minutes each are to be prepared by every participant (# of presentations and duration will be subject to adjustment depending on number of participants in the course). Furthermore, participants are expected to prepare a poster that informs about their research and serves as a basis for discussion during the course. After registration, course participants will be contacted by the course instructor with more detailed instructions, including a list of papers.

7. Administration

7.1 Maximum number of participants

20, first-come-first-serve, while priority will be given to PhD students.

7.2 Assignments

Two research presentations, poster about own research and essay (final assignment). *Participation without the preparation of these assignments is not possible.*

7.3 Exam / Exam performance

The final grade will be determined based on the final essay (40%) and two presentations (30% each, 60% in total) after the seminar. The deadline for submission of the essay is 3-4 weeks after the end of the course and will be communicated at the end of the course. Attendance on all four days of the seminar is mandatory. Participants may choose to participate in the course without submitting a final essay but will in this case not receive an ECTS certificate (only a certificate of participation). Participation without preparing the research paper presentations is not possible.

7.4 Credits / Points

The course corresponds to a scope of 6 LP/ECTS.

8. Working time expenditure

Division of working hours	Hours
<i>Preparation</i>	60
<i>Participation</i>	90
<i>Examination (essay)</i>	30
SUM	180h