

**Seminar zur Personalpolitik im Wintersemester 2009:
„Contemporary Issues in Business and Society“**

(2 SWS)

Mittwoch 10.00-13.00 Uhr, 14-täg.

Aims and Objectives:

The seminar introduces key issues related to the interface between business and society. We will explore contemporary policy debates around economic, ecological and cultural externalities arising from business, and seek to better understand the broader social and political context within which business operates. These topics will be studied from the perspective of corporate management, their interactions with key stakeholders, and possible responses to issues via programs to ensure corporate social responsibility (CSR). By learning to apply concepts drawn from stakeholder theory and the literature on CSR, the seminar should be a useful support to a wide range of individual interests and research projects that touch upon the business/society interface.

Assessment:

In-class presentation (Referate) und coursework (Hausarbeit).

The language of the seminar will mainly be English, although the coursework assignments may be completed in English or German. Each seminar will be structured around a mix of an introductory lecture, student presentations related to specific readings, and practical exercises or group discussion of case materials.

Key issues to be covered (*subject to change or additions*):

- **Understanding corporate social responsibility:** What is the relation between business and society? Who are key stakeholders affected by business decisions? If stakeholders are negatively influenced by those decisions, how far can and should businesses go in trying to address wider societal concerns?
- **Business and Global Inequality:** The modern corporation is an engine of economic growth and innovation, but also produces, exploits and reinforces various forms on economic and social inequality. In the last decades, the incomes of top earners have exploded within so-called winner-take-all markets. At the same time, poverty remains a problem as much as ever and large corporations continue to exploit the very low wages and often poor working conditions in their global value chains. Why do labor standards continue to be an is-

sue, and how do corporations respond to the demand for greater fairness and equality?

- **Financialization and short-termism:** How did finance grow to become the dominant industry in the US and UK economies, and arguably also world-wide? How did this process contribute to the current financial and economic collapse, which was most visibly symbolized by the collapse of Lehman Brothers? And has financialization contributed to the growing dominance of short-term economic goals over long-term sustainability of business and society itself? Does the recent movement around “microfinance” suggest an alternative model of responsible investment?
- **The Environment and Climate Change:** For the United States' consumption rates to be sustainable if mimicked by the entire human population, it would take the resources equivalent to 5.3 Earths. This ecological reality and the associated influence of human-induced climate change pose fundamental challenges to contemporary economic thinking and business practices, which are based on continuous economic growth. Many firms and consumers may oppose a change to more sustainable production and products, since these have higher costs and lower profits in the short-term. How can ecologically sustainable production and consumption patterns be achieved?
- **Commodification and culture:** Business has a pervasive influence on various aspects of culture or everyday life. Some of these concern our choices of consumption and lifestyle. But the logic of commodities and consumption also spill over into other spheres of activity and social interaction. Sociologists have examined some of these processes under headings such as McDonaldization, Starbucksization, or Disneyization -- in partial reference to Max Weber's notion of rationalization in modern society. These theories attempt to document a relationship between the instrumental rationality of business, and the growing homogeneity and predictability of cultural life. How can public policy or the development of social enterprise help to preserve cultural diversity and support local communities?
- **Educating Society for Business, or Educating Business for Society? The B-School and its Alternative Futures:** The MBA is often seen as a means of getting entry or improving career aspects within the elite institution of the business world. A longer-term perspective suggests that the MBA also represents a "failed" project of professionalization of modern managers, and decoupling of management education from social and ethical concerns. Is the purpose of business education in universities to increase individual chances of success in the labor market, or socialize managers to 'lead' business to better serve the economy and societies in which we live?