



United Way
Social Purpose Institute

Purpose Education in Canadian Business Schools

Preliminary Scan

September 2021

Social Purpose Institute at United Way

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Introduction

Business schools are key actors in the pivot from profit-first to purpose-first business models. To understand the current state of purpose education in business schools in Canada, the Social Purpose Institute at United Way commissioned a preliminary scan to find out which business schools explicitly address purpose education in their undergraduate curricula. The research project's original objective was to create a database of schools and courses that addressed this subject. This paper is a brief report of the findings.

Spoiler alert: there weren't enough courses to create a useful database.

Methodology

A subset of 32 post-secondary institutions with business schools from across Canada was selected as the focus of the scan. The scan was conducted by a university student in the summer of 2021. Business school websites were reviewed to identify if social purpose business was explicitly referenced in undergraduate online course descriptions. Six in-person and email interviews of university business school professors and business school-based thinktanks were conducted to supplement the website scan and validate initial findings.

Study Limitations

Only 32 post-secondary institutions were studied, and as such this didn't cover the entire sector. The scan did not investigate course syllabuses and readings which might cover the topic. The study focused narrowly on social purpose in business terminology.

About the Social Purpose Institute at United Way

The Social Purpose Institute exists to grow business for good, partnering with companies and collaborating with governments, allied organizations, and others to grow the Social Purpose Business movement. We achieve this in several ways. We help businesses define and implement their social purpose to drive both business growth and societal good. We champion a Purpose Economy, accelerating the new business ethic to create long-term well-being for all. We are thought leaders, creating and curating insights and knowledge to define the transition pathway to the Purpose Economy. We convene the social purpose ecosystem - the partners and actors needed to bring social purpose to life in communities across Canada. Together, we build a better world through business. For more information, visit us at www.socialpurpose.ca

Acknowledgements

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Social Purpose Business Definition

The Social Purpose Institute defines a social purpose business as a company whose enduring reason for being is to create a better world. It differs from a business with a profit purpose, a customer purpose, or a product purpose in that its growth is a positive force in society.

More information:

<https://socialpurpose.ca/wp-content/uploads/sites/6/2021/03/sp->

Findings

Many business schools have undergraduate programs focused on sustainability, systems thinking, corporate responsibility, social entrepreneurship, social innovation, social impact, and responsible investment.

One school, BC Institute of Technology based in Burnaby, BC, plans to offer a course on social purpose business in January 2022: BUS 7200. See text box for details.

BCIT offers: BSUS 7200 Social Purpose Business; Uniting Brand and Impact

Course learning outcomes/competencies:

Upon successful completion of this course, the student will be able to:

- Compare how corporate social responsibility, social purpose business, and social enterprises address social and environmental challenges.
- Demonstrate how social purpose can be incorporated into a variety of business models and give examples of how it can provide a competitive advantage.
- Give examples of local and international social purpose businesses and evaluate how their business models achieve social/environmental change.
- Analyze the differences between for-profit, non-profit, and charity models and describe their benefits and drawbacks.
- Propose quantitative and qualitative metrics for evaluating social and environmental impact.
- Explain the role of business in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- Apply the five-step SDG Compass to a business and make recommendations for creating and communicating social and environmental value.

Source: <https://www.bcit.ca/outlines/bsus7200/>

The University of Waterloo, Ryerson, Queen's, and UBC have held workshops on social purpose.

It should be noted that while they are not addressing social purpose explicitly in their online course descriptions, many institutions have set up research centres and institutes that focus on corporate social responsibility, sustainability, innovation, social enterprise, and social impact - in particular, SFU's RADIUS Social Innovation Hub, UBC's Centre for Social Innovation & Impact Investing, UVic's Centre for Social and Sustainable Innovation, University of New Brunswick's NouLAB, Memorial's Centre for Social Enterprise, Saint Mary's Entrepreneurship Centre, Ryerson's Institute for the Study of Corporate Social Responsibility, and Ivey's Centre for Building Sustainable Value.



Several institutions also have specializations and certificates in a similar field, for instance, Concordia's Sustainable Investing Practicum, McGill's Social Business & Enterprise Concentration, SFU's Certificate in Environmental and Social Sustainability, and HEC's Certificate in Sustainable Development.

Interviews revealed that the social purpose of business may be addressed within courses, but it is not clearly noted in the course descriptions.

Conclusion

Social purpose in business is a nascent field, and few business schools appear to be purposefully introducing students to the concept. Given the lack of an accepted definition, model, data, and curriculum on social purpose in business, academics are not yet equipped to teach it. The opportunity ahead is to provide business schools with the tools, resources, support, and insights they need to close this gap, and mainstream social purpose business models in business education.