Financial Management and Environmental Accounting (ESM 279)

Bren School of Environmental Science & Management
University of California, Santa Barbara
Spring 2026

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Course Objectives

The main question addressed in this course is: what motivates companies to be environmentally-friendly? We will examine this question from three perspectives under the guiding principle that the main objective of companies is to maximize the market value of the existing owners' equity. First, we will study how the market value of a firm is determined and how investors can manage risk by owning equity in a portfolio of companies. Key supporting topics include cash flow valuation, interest rates, and bond and equity markets. Second, we will take a closer look at the financial management of a company to understand how it makes investment decisions. We will examine how companies use information in balance sheets and income statements for financial planning, how they make long-term financing decisions, and how they determine their mix of debt and equity. Third, we will consider if environmental goals are compatible with a company's objective to maximize equity value. The answer depends, in part, on the motivations of investors, which brings us to the last topic of the course: green – or, more broadly, Environmental, Social and Governance (ESG) – investing. We will examine how ESG investment opportunities are identified, how ESG funds are constructed, the performance of ESG funds relative to traditional funds, and the evidence on whether ESG investing yields environmental gains.

After taking this course, you will

- Be able to use basic tools of financial analysis
- Understand how financial instruments (loan, bonds, stocks) work
- Know how investors tradeoff risk and return
- Be able to use information from financial statements to evaluate investment decisions
- Understand how companies do financial planning
- Understand markets for green investment products
- See how green investing can motivate companies to be good environmental stewards

Course Materials

There is not a required textbook for this class. Much of the lecture material is based on Ross, S.A., Westerfield, R.W., and B.D. Jordan. 2017. Essentials of Corporate Finance, 9th Edition. McGraw Hill. The hardcopy of the textbook costs $150 new. There is also an Ebook version for only $20. Another option is to use Higgins, R.C. 2012. Analysis for Financial Management, 10th Edition. McGraw Hill. The pdf version of this textbook is free, and I will point you to relevant sections. This textbook will not track the lectures as well as Ross, Westerfield, and Jordan.

Course Requirements
Class meetings: I expect students to attend every class. I will provide a short "current events" reading before each class. I expect students to come to class prepared to discuss it.
Readings: The readings are optional. My lectures will cover what I consider to be the most important topics. You are encouraged to do the readings if you want to reinforce your understanding of the material presented in lectures and gain exposure to additional topics.
Homework assignments: There will be five short homework assignments. You may work on the assignments with others; however, you are responsible for writing your own answers, in your own words. Assignments will be posted by the end of the week (Thursday or Friday) and due on the following Friday by 11:59 pm.
Group presentations: Students will work in groups to develop a presentation on a topic related to green investing. The topics are listed, below, under Weeks 4, 6, 8, and 10. I will assign students to topics once the class enrollment has stabilized. Students will give a 20-25 minute presentation with slides on their assigned topic and then lead a 10-15 minute discussion. Slide decks should be submitted by June 5.
Essays: After each student presentation, I will assign short essay questions. The questions will be posted by the end of the week (Thursday or Friday) and due the following Friday by 11:59 pm (except for Essay #4, which is due on a Wednesday). You may discuss the essay questions with other students, but I expect you to write your own essays, in your own words.

Times and Dates
Class meets Monday and Wednesday, 3:30-4:45 pm, Bren 1424.
Homework assignments and essays will be due on the following Fridays by 11:59 pm: **April 10**, **April 17, April 24, May 1, May 8, May 15, May 22, May 29,** and **June 10**.
The group presentation slide decks are due on **June 5**.

Course Grades
Course grades will be based on homework assignments (40%), essays (30%), and the group presentation and slides (30%).

Copyright
My lectures and course materials, including PowerPoint presentations, tests, outlines, and similar materials, are protected by U.S. copyright law and by University policy. I am the exclusive owner of the copyright in those materials I create. You may take notes and make copies of course materials for your own use. You may also share those materials with another student who is enrolled in or auditing this course.

AI Policy
The use of AI tools is discouraged. I believe that in the labor force of the future, humans will be valued for their ability to critically examine and evaluate AI-produced content. In other words, the valued-added by humans will be based on their subject expertise. You will develop that expertise in environmental finance by doing the assignments and essays on your own, not by having ChatGPT or other AI tools do it for you.

Schedule

Week 1

March 30. Overview of the Course and Introduction to Financial Management (RWJ Ch. 1)

March 31. Optional class on discounting (2-3 pm; zoom)

April 1. Discounted Cash Flow Valuation (RWJ Ch. 5)

Week 2

April 6. Discounted Cash Flow Valuation (RWJ Ch. 5)

April 8. Interest Rates and Bond Valuation (RWJ Ch. 6)

April 10. Homework #1 Due

Week 3

April 13. Equity Markets and Stock Valuation (RWJ Ch. 7)

April 15. Returns from Capital Market Investments (RWJ Ch. 10) (Mauricio Collado lectures)

April 17. Homework #2 Due

Week 4

April 20. Student presentations I

- What are the global trends in ESG investing?
- What are the motivations of ESG investors?

April 22. Guest Lecture: Dana Jennings, Associate Director, Net Zero Strategy, Anthesis Group (confirmed)

April 24. Essay #1 Due

Week 5

April 27. Risk and Return (RWJ Ch. 11)

April 29. Risk and Return (RWJ Ch. 11)

May 1. Homework #3 Due

Week 6

May 4. Student presentations II

- What criteria are used to identify ESG investment opportunities?

May 6. Financial Statements and Cash Flow (RWJ Ch. 2)

May 8. Homework #4 Due

Week 7

May 11. Working with Financial Statements (RWJ Ch. 3)

May 13. Net Present Value and Other Investment Criteria (RWJ Ch. 8)

May 15. Essay #2 Due

Week 8

May 18. Student presentations III

- How are ESG funds designed?
- How does the financial performance of ESG funds compare to traditional funds?

May 20. Capital Budgeting (RWJ Ch. 9)

May 22. Homework #5 Due

Week 9

May 25. Memorial Day, no class

May 27. Guest Lecture: Emma Friedl, Senior Climate Strategy Consultant, 3Degrees (confirmed)

May 29. Essay #3 Due

Week 10

June 1. Cost of Capital (RWJ Ch. 12)

June 3. Student presentations

- Does ESG investing yield environmental gains? What is the evidence?
- Can we rely on private capital markets to address environmental and social problems?

Week 11

June 10. Essay #4 Due