

Project Title

Post-Covid Corporate Stakeholder Engagement and Social Advocacy

Project Mentor(s)

Craig Carroll

Project Summary

Companies speak out on social issues and engage their stakeholders in new ways, post-COVID. What do these look like? What is the range and the limits? What are the ramifications? This project examines these questions by studying corporate statements about racial equity, gun violence, Russia-Ukraine war, climate change, and January 6.

Project Description

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that our previous understanding of organizational goals and the purpose of organizations no longer has sufficient value. Historically, management theorists argued that organizations exist to accomplish goals that individuals could not accomplish on their own. The COVID-19 pandemic revealed that organizations and their stakeholders can accomplish more than what organizations can accomplish on their own. At the same time, companies are increasingly making promises to society, but yet there are no systems, checks or balances to hold companies accountable to their claims and promises.

This project on corporate stakeholder engagement and social advocacy consists of identifying and evaluating corporate social advocacy strategies employed by leading companies, and conducting comparative analysis based on several public crises. It provides studies an opportunity to engage with the real world, develop skills in critical thinking, rhetorical criticism, data analysis, and interpretation, and social impact analysis. Because the project employs a grounded theory framework, students will be able to find their own interests and curiosities within the data while still having a systematic framework underneath that unites their projects.

The professor leading this project has an historical background in working with undergraduate students in research through offices of undergraduate research and the McNair Scholars programs at the University of Southern California and UNC Chapel Hill. The project is feasible to complete because our sampling frame (be it of companies or the case contexts) can be adapted based on the number of students and the estimated time for completion for each step.

The project is suitable to implement because the project will have strong guidance from a research mentor, offer training on research literature reviews, content analysis, project management, and research methodology. The professor will lay out his goals for observing and cataloguing new forms of stakeholder engagement and social advocacy. Working with the professor, students will learn the state of the art as identified in scholarly literature for such topics as corporate authenticity, transparency, decoupling (breaks between words and actions),

symbolic action, corporate purpose, and stakeholder engagement. And, then students will a data set for pursue their own research interests, whether their interests are guided by current events or any of the concepts central to the project.

The project will have impact because it speaks to the needs of several stakeholder groups. The university library is privileged because of its research databases for scholarly literature. Scholars of business and society, business ethics, and corporate social responsibility will have new observations, strategies, tactics, performance and outcome goals, and mechanisms of partnership, co-creation, and stakeholder engagement identified. NGOs and nonprofit organizations will simultaneously benefit from these areas, and advocacy groups will find their work expedited by our compilations. Furthermore, companies and students alike will learn “emerging” practices that are defining our post-covid world, and set new beliefs and expectations for what co-creation, participation, partnership and stakeholder engagement look like. Furthermore, the students themselves will be well-positioned for top tier graduate school programs, jobs or internships in major corporations or in social entrepreneurship.

Work will be broken down and managed using the professor's personal project system set up using Notion.so. Each student would be expected to be involved in each step (literature review, sampling, monitoring company websites and social media using the professor’s personally developed systems, cataloguing claims, and evaluation. The professor will meet with the students weekly to review their work, provide feedback, and to ensure milestones are met according to the fellowship’s requirements.

Key Tasks for Fellow(s)

1. Identify the companies to be studied
2. Identify the issues to be studied
3. Compile the corporate statements to an online database using a web clipper
4. Catalogue the statements
5. Conduct keyword searches in scholarly journal articles
6. Compile key concepts, definitions, examples, charts, tables, models from literature
7. Develop personal research questions
8. Catalogue key actions and statements from the texts
9. Learn how to conduct content analysis
10. Create charts and tables
11. Interpret charts and tables
12. Identify concrete facts
13. Establish personal meaning and value based on observations

Qualifications

Critical thinking, teachability, creativity, discipline/focus, able to set and accomplish goals, teamwork, collaboration, follow through, appreciation of both words and numbers,

Learning Outcomes

Literature review, data collection, data cleaning, data analysis, rhetorical criticism, research question development, content analysis, data visualization, project planning, writing a literature review, developing a research methods section, distinguishing between results and discussion, writing results, developing discussion and conclusions, matching data to theory