

Frequently Asked Questions about the Singapore “Business and the Environment” Program

(By Tseming Yang, Program Director)

Who should be interested in a course on “Business and the Environment?”

If you worry about climate change and the environment, if you want to help your corporate clients stay out of regulatory trouble, or if you aspire to help businesses become more socially responsible corporate citizens and operate in a more sustainable manner, this course will provide you with a basic background and critical understanding of key issues, and valuable tools to effect change. I can promise that the course will be a rewarding learning experience.

What is the Singapore program about?

The program focuses on the intersection of business and environmental law, a set of issues that both business and environmental lawyers must understand well to ensure that business clients act responsibly with respect to the environment as well as to move our society toward greater sustainability. The course will lay the groundwork for understanding by introducing students to general principles of business and environmental law. Thereafter, the issues that have been on the forefront of public debate, such as global climate change, sustainable development, and international trade and environment, will be explored in depth. For example, we’ll explore how business approaches, such as pollution trading, have helped to address climate change, how voluntary codes of conduct and transparency can be beneficial to both businesses and the environment, and how sustainability requires consideration of a wide range of concerns, such as human rights, in addition to markets and the environment.

Because of our program’s location in Singapore, the course gives special emphasis to issues that are relevant to this jurisdiction and this part of the world. These will include the specific sustainability challenges that this city-state face, such as freshwater. One special component of the course, particularly important in Singapore’s multi-ethnic society and culture, will provide an introduction to Sharia law.

Who are the teachers in this program anyway?

The professors will be American and local lawyers, experts, and law professors, including myself. My background as an environmental lawyer and professor spans almost 25 years of teaching and practicing environmental law. Much of that time I have spent researching and writing about the challenges of balancing the demands of business and economic development with the need to protect the environment and forestall climate change. My practice experience includes time as Deputy General Counsel of the US Environmental Protection Agency in the Obama Administration, as an attorney in the Environment Division of the US Department of Justice, and as an associate attorney at a large corporate law firm early in my career. This

course is an exciting opportunity to bring many of the issues that I have observed in practice together in one course. Local instructors will come from Singapore's universities, international and local law firms, and multinational corporations.

Why should you study this subject in Singapore?

One could answer that question with an equally pertinent question: Where better than in a place like Singapore to learn about business, the environment, and the associated challenge of sustainability? In many respects, Singapore is one of the best illustrations of the sustainability challenge that countries across the world face. It is a vibrant city with a humming economy, attracting the cream of the crop of people from all over Asia who want the amenities of modern life, but also do not want to leave Asia behind. This small island nation with a rapidly growing population and expanding economy also has a very limited land base and is greatly dependent on other countries for natural resources, including fresh water. It is a place where environmental quality can be dramatically affected by actions and events in neighboring countries -- a vivid illustration of what the rest of the world can expect given the tightening bonds of globalization. Apart from gaining a better understanding of how applicable law generally facilitates and constrains solutions, we will also gain insights into the specific approaches that Singapore and the Southeast Asia region have adopted to solve these problems.

Are there any other reasons to visit Singapore, other than the excellent program?

Are you kidding? Singapore is also a great city to spend time in. It's a beautiful and lush city, in part because of its tropical climate, so much so that Singapore is usually referred to as the "garden city." But there are also other key adjectives appropriate for describing Singapore: It is a safe, modern, vibrant, multi-cultural, convenient, sophisticated, efficient, and courteous city-state-country. See the subsequent questions for more details.

What are the fun things that students do during the program?

Singapore is one of my favorite cities. There are tons of things to do, ranging from cultural activities, such as going to the local museums, to parks and many neighborhoods that show off how much Singapore is a multicultural society with populations from all over the world. One of the best things about Singapore, however, has to be -- unquestionably -- the great food. It's fabulous and inexpensive. It's something that Southeast Asia is generally known for. But the food scene in Singapore is incredible because Singapore's multi-ethnic communities bring it all together in one city. My favorite dish is Hainan Chicken, a local Singaporean specialty: simple, yet incredibly tasty. I have yet to find a restaurant here in the US that makes this dish well. I will make sure that you have an opportunity to try it before you leave Singapore (unless you are vegetarian). And in the words of a prior faculty director of this program: "The food is FANTASTIC. Plan to eat as much as possible."

What's the area like around the program site?

Our program has been fortunate to snag a great location at Singapore Management University. The program site is next to Fort Canning Park and close to the heart of the city, the downtown core. Within the area, there are lots of restaurants, cafes and shops as well as plenty of cultural amenities such as the National Gallery of Singapore and other museums and theaters. At the waterfront of the downtown core, there are the Gardens by the Bay, a beautiful network of greenhouses and waterfront parks, and the Singapore Flyer, a 165 meter tall Ferris wheel.

Do students travel elsewhere while in the program?

Students often leave Singapore over the weekends. It's only a boat or train ride to Malaysia and Indonesia. But there are also many other notable destinations within striking distance: the resort island of Bali in Indonesia, the former British colonial city of Georgetowne on the island of Penang in Malaysia, the world-famous historic site of Angkor Wat in Cambodia, and big cities like Bangkok and Hong Kong. With the prevalence of budget airlines now available all over Asia, these places are just an affordable short-haul plane ride away. Of course, we do ask that students let us know their whereabouts, if they travel out of Singapore. If anything comes up, we want to know where you are and how to get a hold of you.

Are there any site visits that we will do?

I expect that we will visit the Singapore Supreme Court, the Singapore Arbitration Center, where many international business disputes are resolved, as well as Singapore's Water reclamation plant. The Water reclamation plant is a state of the art facility that essentially turns wastewater into drinking water. It is also one of the key components of Singapore's efforts to become more sustainable and less dependent on water from Malaysia.

What types of externships are available?

What specific externship a student gets matched up with depends on student interest, background, and qualifications. In the past, we have sent students to firms and organizations in the places surrounding the country, including an externship with UNESCO in Cambodia. We are constantly looking for new externship opportunities.

What are the program/course logistics? How do you orient the students to the program site?

The program website provides general program and logistical information. We expect to follow up with final information about the logistical details of the program a few weeks before the program starts.

On the evening before the program starts, we will meet in Singapore at the program site for an orientation session. That will provide an opportunity to convey last minute details, engage in a walking tour of the SMU site and surrounding area, and have a get-to-know-each-other dinner. Hence, please plan to arrive at least a day before the program start. As the course progresses, we will have some site visits as well as informal, social gatherings.

Classes will usually be conducted in the morning, 9 am - 1 pm, with a break mid-way through the morning. Unless there is site visit scheduled, the afternoon will be available to students to study or explore the city on their own.

What do students do about housing?

There are a broad range of resources available to find housing. In addition to options for hostel and other budget-oriented accommodations listed in our on-line program brochure, the easiest resource to use is AirBnb, which also operates in Singapore. Because students often have widely varying budgets and family circumstances, especially if they want to bring their family along for the program, we have found that AirBnB is the most flexible and the most cost-effective option for most students. In March, we will also send a link for Facebook groups for students in the program, which will allow individuals to contact each other and look for housing jointly.

So, tell me again in brief why the Singapore “Business and Environment” course is a great program participate in?

In a nutshell, this will be an interesting and enriching program that is situated in a city with great food and cultural amenities. In addition, Singapore’s central location will make reaching places like Bali, Bangkok, Hong Kong, and many other fascinating places in East Asia very easy. For additional logistical questions, please contact Carly Koebel at cglp@scu.edu. For substantive questions about the program content, please feel free to contact Professor Yang directly at tyang@scu.edu.