

# Anna Helm

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*What is the connection between your service-learning courses and your academic research?*

Service-learning entered my life about a year and a half ago when I received a course development grant from the GW Center for Civic Engagement and Public Service for my proposal, "Lessons from Around the Globe: Understanding the Context of Green Business." As I became more informed about service-learning, I realized that it complemented my teaching style well, particularly because I was already familiar with working with real client consulting projects at the GW School of Business. Building those bridges between our students and the business community, and between theory and practice, is something we do on a regular basis. With service-learning, I was able to capitalize on these experiences in order to bring our students and their insights about green business, their theoretical business knowledge, and their analytical skills to bear on worthy organizations located both in our local community and abroad.



Today, there is a growing interest among students at GW in sustainable development and green business. Their interest extends to both a professional and personal level. However, few are afforded the opportunity to engage in real client projects within this emerging field. The overarching idea of my course was for students to gain insights from best practices abroad and transfer these to the local context of their community partners. In my course, titled "International Perspectives on Green Business," 26 undergraduate students were matched with community partners in order to develop "greening" plans for their organizations. Working with my Service-Learning Scholar, I was able to foster a communal and dynamic learning environment by including reflection tasks throughout the course. One such reflection accessible to the public was our course blog (<http://gwgreenbiz.wordpress.com>), which enjoyed high traffic—over 4000 discrete visits—while the course was in session during the Spring semester of 2011.



As a faculty member new to service-learning, it was imperative for me to find ways to bring these experiences into my research. In the spirit of service-learning, it seemed intuitive to allow students to participate in this research. As an extension of the course, one of the students is now working with me, and in tandem with the GW Business School's "Research Experience for Undergraduates" (REU) Program, on a project with one of the previous community partners, Growers First ([www.growersfirst.org](http://www.growersfirst.org)), a non-profit organization focused on supporting sustainable coffee farming and business practices, and its executive as the protagonists. The final outcome will be a case study which thematizes Growers First's idea of "Traceable-Transformation." Its audience will be students of green business. They will be charged with applying their knowledge and analytical skills to this case, suggesting creative ways of designing market entry and expansion in the US market for Growers First's sustainable coffee products. By bringing this task back into the classroom, in a way, and by ways of research, the circle of this service-learning course has been completed.

### RESEARCH INTERESTS

My research interests include:

- International Marketing Strategy
- "Green" Consumer Behavior
- Sustainable Business Strategy
- CleanTech Market Entry
- Business Case Methodology

