

BBUS 502
Strategic Management in High Technology Firms

MBA Program
University of Washington Bothell
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I. Course overview and purpose

This course takes an executive's level perspective of what is probably the fundamental question of business practice: what makes an organization successful? I pose this as two related but distinct questions: [1] how do you EXPLAIN success? (how do you explain why different organizations are more or less successful than other?), and [2] how do you MANAGE to make a particular organization successful (given the specifics of organization itself and the business environment in which it exists)?

Historically, business schools had a *business policy* course that focused on the decisions made by the firm's top managers to achieve this end. This course typically has been an integrative *capstone* taken after students had studied the functional disciplines of business (e.g., finance, accounting, marketing, operations, organizational behavior). Currently, the field of *strategic management* has infused the capstone/business policy course, particularly in bringing economics-based perspectives to understanding competition, evolution of industries, and sources of rent (economic profit).

The UW Bothell MBA Program is one of a number of leaders in an innovation to move this business policy/strategic management course to the *beginning* of the curriculum. It is our intention that students will carry the executive's level perspective into subsequent courses, and in fact will be *deeply motivated* to study those courses as the result of the questions and problems raised in BBUS 502.

This course is designed to address these concerns and perspectives through theory- and case-based study of firm-level business strategy and performance. Specifically, each student will be required to [a] engage in seminar-format discussions addressing theory and cases, [b] individually develop an integrated perspective on the questions raised by the course and the theories and perspectives presented, and [c] working as part of a group, design and carry out a research project related to the purposes of the course.

As part of the programs focus on effective written communication, each student will have the opportunity to work with a writing specialist, who will evaluate selected work that is submitted for course requirements.

Class sessions will be conducted as seminars. I use the term *seminar* to capture the objective of thoughtful and critical discussions of the assigned readings and cases in which each person is expected to be a contributor. This is not a lecture class with one-way information flow.

I encourage an analytical approach in class sessions, written work, and presentations. To me, *analytical* indicates seeking to identify underlying problems and issues, evaluating the theories and evidence presented, and comparing and contrasting across different readings and perspectives. An analytical approach contrasts both with descriptive (compiling facts, definitions, and lists) and argumentative (mustering evidence in support of a pre-established position) approaches.

II. Expectations

In general, students are expected to demonstrate the level of motivation, responsibility, and quality of work consistent with the explicit and implicit expectations associated with graduate study at a leading research university. Quality work requires thinking critically and systematically, writing clearly, and communicating ideas and arguments in a seminar format.

Every student should be prepared to make high quality contributions at every class session based upon assigned material. Studying (not just simply reading) assigned readings and cases is necessary for students to meet expectations for contribution.

III. Grades

Each student will be assigned a grade that represents my judgment as to the student's accomplishment and contribution in the course. The weighting in determining the grade will be

- 20% Individual papers on articles and cases
- 25% Individual papers (final): integrated perspective on firm success + final case analysis
- 20% Individual contribution to class discussion
- 10% Group written assignment: case
- 25% Group research project (final written report and "almost final" written report will be graded; proposal and presentations will be graded pass-fail)

I consider a grade of B (3.0) to be appropriate for high-quality work that has no significant errors of either omission or commission. This grade represents the minimum expectation for graduate students at a leading research university. Grades above 3.0 require the demonstration of excellence above and beyond this level.

Important notes on grades:

1. A student will not earn a passing grade in this course without a passing weighted average (as above) grade on individual written assignments.
2. Note: If it is clear to me that the contribution of an individual to the group research project is significantly above or below that of other group members, the grade for the individual will be adjusted accordingly, up or down from the grade assigned the group.

IV. Policies

1. Strict adherence to University of Washington, Bothell standards with respect to academic integrity is expected implicitly by enrollment in this course. The section on [plagiarism](#) (below) and the links contained therein are assigned reading for this class.
2. E-mail sent to your UW account is considered by UWB to be official communication. I will send notices regarding the class to the list of currently enrolled students, and it is your responsibility to receive these e-mails.
3. Each written assignment must be completed and submitted in hard-copy format by the beginning of the class session at which it is due. (Select assignments will be submitted in duplicate.) Late assignments will receive a substantial penalty. If you cannot attend a class when an assignment is due, or if you have a one-time printing problem, I will accept an e-mail attachment or a faxed copy as indicating the assignment was completed on time, but you must provide me a hard copy as soon as possible.
4. Laptops, blackberries, etc. in class. Please do not use computers or other electronic devices during class for anything (e.g., email, World Series) not directly related to the material at hand. My purpose for this policy is to maintain individual and class focus. We all benefit when we are collectively engaged.

V. Plagiarism

When I suspect that a student or group has committed plagiarism, I will follow established UWB procedures for addressing the matter. If a student or group has committed plagiarism, I will assign a grade of zero for that project.

The following two links are required reading for students in BBUS 502. Instances of plagiarism will not be excused due to a professed lack of understanding; if you have any questions, please ASK!

UWB policies and procedures regarding academic integrity (including plagiarism) can be found at <http://www.uwb.edu/students/policies/integrity.html>.

Northwestern University's detailed site that gives examples of plagiarism can be found at <http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html>.

VI. Contribution to class discussion

The quality of contribution to discussion is not measured by “airtime.” The best contributions to discussion demonstrate [1] responsiveness to what others have offered, [2] identification of issues and competing ideas, and [3] application of facts, models, and analysis.

Although I emphasize an analytical approach, there certainly is room for individual opinion but I expect this to be reasoned, not based on pre-conceptions.

I hope for lively and even intense discussions of opposing viewpoints. Nevertheless, personal attacks and/or lack of respect for others and/or their ideas are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

In preparation for class discussion, I suggest the following:

- For all reading assignments, be prepared to offer a brief (one minute) oral summary of the reading: what is its purpose? What are its major points? How would you compare and contrast it with other readings?
- For all reading assignments, be prepared to describe and discuss what the reading contributes to addressing the course’s fundamental questions.
- For articles (library reserves), be prepared to offer examples from your current (or former) organization that address the models, theories, and/or principles in the article. (I will provide specific suggestions for several readings.)
- For cases (packet at Bookstore), be prepared to address the situation that the managers of this firm face: if you had two minutes of their time, what would you recommend that they do, and why?

VII. Group assignments

Students will work in groups for two assignments.

Group written assignment: case

Each group will submit a written assignment: date and case. Date xxxx Questoins to be provided.

Group research project

Each group will write and present a research project that builds on the required material from this course. You will be expected to apply course material to particular business situations, to identify the underlying problem(s) faced by management, and to formulate and justify strategies. For a topic, you may pick [a] a particular business or other organization that, [b] an industry or industry segment, or [c] an issue in business strategy that is motivated by (and ideally builds on or complements) course topics.

These are the staged requirements and due dates:

- Wednesday October 11: Propose a topic to be studied and present a preliminary list of research questions

A “high technology” topic is obvious, given the theme of the program, the title of the course, and the interests of many students, but I am completely open to other ideas.

The proposal should present research questions and describe both how you see these questions being addressed by material from the course and what else you will need to address the questions

This proposal should be approximately 3-5 pages in length and include a reference list.

- Before Wednesday October 25: Schedule a 15-minute group meeting with me to discuss your project
- “Almost final” written report due Wednesday November 29. At this point, my expectation is that the report will be substantially finished. Details TBA.
- Final report due Wednesday December 13 (both electronically and hard copy). On December 13, we will have *brief* presentations of each report. Details TBA.

Final report should be approximately 15-25 pages in length, not including tables, figures, and references.

VIII. Individual assignments

Individual written assignment #1; Due Monday October 2

Regarding the Timex case: write a single paragraph in which you describe why Timex was successful. Consider only the period 1950-1962.

Individual written assignment #2; Due Monday October 16

Question 1

Why was Wal-Mart successful in the time period covered by this case?

Question 2

Does Wal-Mart have a cost advantage? How do you know? Identify *all the categories* of Wal-Mart's cost advantage. (Explanation: “shrinkage” - loss due to shoplifting and employee theft - is conceivably a category of cost for a retailer. If retailer “A” has less shrinkage than retailer “B”, then “A” can be said to have a cost advantage in this category.) Provide a *quantitative* analysis of how large that cost advantage is, in total and for each category.

All the information you need for question 2 is in the case. For addressing cost advantage, express all data as a percentage of total sales. (For example, for retailer “A”, if total sales were \$1 million and shrinkage were \$15,000, shrinkage would be 1.5 percent of sales.)

Question 1 can be answered in 3-4 paragraphs max.

Question 2 will require both the preparation of tables and/or spreadsheets and a separate "written" answer (which probably only requires 3 paragraphs). The "written answer" should refer to the tables/spreadsheets, but should be written so that it is clear and understandable on its own. Tables and/or spreadsheets should be designed so as to be understandable without reference to your written answer.

Indicate the source (i.e., from the case) of all data used, and show all calculations.

Individual written assignment #3; Due Monday November 20
Assignment TBA

For each case, I will provide specific questions to spark your analysis. In general, apply models and frameworks from this class to address: how well the company is performing relative to its industry, what kinds of strategic issues does its management face, what are the alternative courses of action available, and what criteria should be used to evaluate those alternatives.

Each analysis is due (hard copy) at the beginning of the class session for which the case is assigned.

Individual papers (final) (due Wednesday December 6)

There will be 2 parts: [a] "integrated perspective on firm success" (a synthesis of what you have learned in the course) and [b] an analysis of a case. Details TBA.

Guidelines for individual (and all) assignments:

1. Please do not settle for generalizations, particularly when you use terms in common use like "leadership" or "operational efficiency." Be very precise in defining terms such as these. Moreover, since the paper should address "how firms should be managed to achieve success" (quoting from above), make sure you clearly state how firms accomplish the elements you write about.
2. Avoid tautologies (defining terms so that the definition is the same as the term defined). For example, I conceivably could define leadership as "the influence necessary for the success of a organization." Then, if I ask, "what leads to success?" leadership is not a very useful answer because, *by definition*, leadership leads to success. To avoid this tautology, I would have to define leadership in a way that does not include success.
3. Pay attention to the calculus (the functional form of the relationship between variables: linear, curvilinear, etc.) and contingencies (the boundary conditions for a relationship between variables).
4. Do not rely on preconceived notions. Challenge your assumptions. You must back up your ideas with facts and citations. That "it makes sense" is not sufficient.
5. Citations: All ideas you present in the paper should be carefully referenced using a consistent standard style.

IX. Statement from Disability Support Services

If you believe that you have a disability and would like academic accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services at 425.352.5307, TDD 425.352.5303, FAX 425.352.5455, or at rlundborg@uwb.edu. In most cases, you will need to provide documentation of your disability as part of the review process.

X. Schedule

The following is the intended schedule of when assigned readings will be covered in class discussion. These readings are from three types of sources, as follows:

- Text: Barney, JB & Hesterly, WS (2006) *Strategic Management and Competitive Advantage: Concepts* (available at UWB Bookstore)
- Case: Harvard Business School Publishing case study (case packet available at UWB Bookstore)
- Article: Available electronically through Library ERes

Most classes will meet from 5:45-7:50 pm; exceptions are noted.

Week 1

- Wednesday September 27 (class meets 8:00-10:05 pm)
 - Overview of the course; scope and relationship to other courses
 - Read assigned material on [plagiarism](#)

Week 2

- Monday October 2
 - Article: Christensen, CM & Raynor, ME (2003) "Why hard-nosed executives should care about management theory," *Harvard Business Review*
 - Case: Timex Corp.
 - DUE: Individual written assignment #1
- Wednesday October 4
 - Strategy and the work of top management
 - Text: Chapter 1

Week 3

- Monday October 9 (class meets 8:00-10:05 pm)
 - Analyzing external environments
 - Text: Chapter 2
 - Article: Porter, ME (1990) "The competitive advantage of nations," *Harvard Business Review*

- Wednesday October 11 (class meets 5:45-10:05 pm)
 - Part I: Elements of the global business environment
 - Article: Steidlmeier, P (1993) "The moral legitimacy of intellectual property claims: American business and developing country perspectives," *Journal of Business Ethics*
 - Part II: Analyzing internal capabilities; the resource-based view
 - Text: Chapter 3
 - Article: Prahalad, CK & Hamel, G (1990) "The core competence of the corporation." *Harvard Business Review*
 - DUE: Group research project proposal

Week 4

- Monday October 16
 - Analyzing cost advantages
 - Text: Chapter 4
 - Case: Wal-Mart Stores' Discount Operations
 - DUE: Individual written assignment #2
- Wednesday October 18 (class cancelled due to instructor illness)

Week 5

- Monday October 23 (Leadership Speaker Series tonight; short class)
 - Analyzing differentiation advantages
 - Text: Chapter 5
 - Case: Patagonia
- Wednesday October 25
 - Vertical integration strategies
 - Text: Chapter 6
 - Case: Feed R&D – or Farm It Out?

[No class meetings during weeks 6 and 7]

Week 8

- Monday November 13
 - Diversification strategies
 - Text: Chapter 7
 - Case: EMI and the CT Scanner (A)
 - DUE: Group written assignment: case
- Wednesday November 15
 - Organizing to implement diversification strategy
 - Text: Chapter 8
 - Case: GE's Digital Revolution: Redefining the E in GE

Week 9

- Monday November 20
Alliances; mergers and acquisitions
Text: Chapters 9 and 10
Article: Dyer, Kale & Singh (2004) "When to ally and when to acquire." *Harvard Business Review*

Week 10

- Monday November 27
Managing diversification and alliances: strategic and organizational dimensions
Case: BRL Hardy: Globalizing an Australian wine company
Case: The HP-Cisco Alliance (A)
Cancelled: There will be no Individual written assignment #3
- Wednesday November 29
DUE: Group research project "almost final" written report
Assignments TBA

Week 11

- Monday December 4
Assignments TBA
- Wednesday December 6 (class meets 8:00-10:05)
DUE: individual papers (final)
Assignments TBA

Finals Week

- Wednesday December 13 (class meets 5:45 until approximately 8:30 pm)
Brief presentations and discussion of group research projects
DUE: Group research project final written report

Note: For weeks 10 and 11

Remaining cases:
Microsoft: Competing on Talent (A)
Matching Dell

Remaining topics
Measuring performance: The balanced scorecard
Making investment decision: Real options analysis
[Others topics TBA]