

BBUS 544
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 others?), and [2] How do you MANAGE to make a particular organization successful? (What do you do? What is your decision? – in the context of the specifics of the 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).

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.

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

- 50% Individual written assignments (portfolio and other)
- 20% Individual contribution to class discussion
- 30% Group research project (written report and presentation)

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 grade on the individual written assignments component.
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. 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, NCAA final) 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 544. 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 research project

Students will work in self-selected groups for a research project. You will be expected to apply course material, conduct research using high-quality academic and managerial sources, and present a well-crafted report summarizing your work.

Proposal due Monday April 9. Each group will first identify a research question (or questions) that would be important and interesting to. While it may not be obvious, identifying a research question is a difficult assignment.

For a topic, you may pick [a] a particular business or other organization, [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. 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 a research question (or questions) and describe both how you see this being important and interesting to managers and valuable to the class. This proposal should be approximately 2 pages in length and include a reference list using a standard format.

It is likely that I will ask some groups to rewrite the proposal and/or schedule a brief meeting with me to discuss their project. In addition, I welcome the opportunity to meet with each group at any time whether or not I initiate the meeting.

Abstract due Wednesday May 30. The abstract should be between 150 and 250 words. I will post it to ERes for other class members to read prior to the presentations on Monday June 4. [Submit the abstract via email – pdf attachment preferred; file name should include project title.] The abstract should present a problem statement, describe

your topic, and summarize how you analyzed the problem, what you found, and what you concluded and (if appropriate) would recommend.

Presentation Monday June 4. Brief, informal presentations.

Final report due Wednesday June 6. Final report should be approximately 15-25 pages in length, not including tables, figures, and references.

VIII. Individual assignments: portfolio Updated April 9, 2007

The portfolio will consist of [i] weekly short (1 page) papers in which you reflect upon the readings and discussion and how these fit into the overall subject of the class, [ii] a mid-term overview, and [iii] a concluding/final overview.

For each of these assignments, the implicit purpose is to address the “great question(s)” for the course: “How do you explain why different organizations are more or less successful than others?” and “How do you manage to make a particular organization successful?” More specifically, I want each submission to indicate how the current course material informs your thinking about the great question, what are the different perspectives offered, what new questions arise, etc.

I have two reasons for assigning the portfolio this way. First, research on learning indicates that adults do not effectively answer any question they have not asked for themselves. Therefore I hope you do not treat this as a “here is a question that the professor knows the answer to and I have to figure out what s/he wants” assignment. It is not. You are graduate students at a great university and you should be creators of knowledge; this begins by asking questions. Second, for everyone I know, ideas that seemed clear when you were reading or thinking are much harder to express in writing. This is not true for facts, but facts are the easy part. I refer here to models, frameworks, and theories, the relationships among variables, and the search for explanation (cf. Christensen & Raynor, 2003).

Weekly papers. Due each Monday beginning the second week (April 2). No paper due Monday April 30 or Monday May 28. [Submit hard copy at beginning of class; retain electronic copy. One single-spaced page for weekly paper.] I would like each paper to be both retrospective (prior week’s readings and discussion and prospective (readings/cases that you have prepared to discuss the Monday the paper is due). For example, for the first paper, address what we covered in the first week and the readings for the class Monday April 2. (If you also have prepared to discuss the readings for the Wednesday class, please bring these in to what you write as well.)

Mid-term overview. Due Wednesday May 2. [Submit (a) a hard copy of the overview and (b) via email a single file that has this overview and the previous weekly papers. Please include your name in the file name. Limit: three pages, not including references, tables or figures.] The specific focus of the mid-term overview will be on business (in contrast to corporate) strategy. (Chapters 1-6 and the associated readings and cases address business strategy.)

Concluding/final overview. Due Wednesday May 30. [Submit (a) a hard copy of the final overview and (b) via email a single file that has the final overview, the mid-term

overview, and all the weekly papers. Please include your name in the file name. Limit: three pages, not including references, tables or figures.] The final overview will address the course as a whole, the “great question(s)”, and how what we have learned here fits with (or perhaps conflicts with) what you have learned in other courses in the program. As part of this overview, please go back to what you wrote for the “What explains why some firms are more successful than others?” assignment. Specifically, critique what you wrote in that assignment.

I will grade the portfolio as a whole two times, when you submit the overviews (i.e., the weekly papers will not be separately graded). However, I will read the weekly papers and if I feel you are “off track” I will let you know immediately.

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. 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. Disability Support Policy

If you believe that you have a disability and would like academic accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services at 425.352.5307 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 Updated April 9, 2007

The following is the intended schedule of when assigned readings will be covered in class discussion. Additional readings may be added. (Also, I may move around the assignments for weeks 8 and 9 and /or add other topics.) The assigned 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

Classes will be each Monday and Wednesday from 5:45-7:50 pm; exceptions are noted.

Week 1

- Monday March 26
 - Overview of the course; scope and relationship to other courses
- Wednesday March 28
 - Strategy and the work of top management
 - Article: Christensen, CM & Raynor, ME (2003) "Why hard-nosed executives should care about management theory," *Harvard Business Review*
 - DUE: Individual written assignment: "What explains why some firms are more successful than others?"
 - DUE: Feedback on prior coursework in MBA Program
 - Read assigned material on plagiarism

Week 2

- Monday April 2
 - Text: Chapter 1
 - Case: Timex Corp. Available at <http://harvardbusinessonline.hbsp.harvard.edu/relay.jhtml?name=cp&c=c01604>
 - DUE: First [weekly paper](#)
- Wednesday April 4: No class tonight; entire evening will be Law and Ethics class

Week 3

- Monday April 9
 - Analyzing external environments
 - Text: Chapter 2
 - Article: Porter, ME (1990) "The competitive advantage of nations," *Harvard Business Review*
 - Article: Steidlmeier, P (1993) "The moral legitimacy of intellectual property claims: American business and developing country perspectives," *Journal of Business Ethics*
 - DUE: [Proposal for group research project](#)

- Wednesday April 11
Seminal ideas: including core competence and first mover advantage
Overviews of economics and international business
Article: Prahalad, CK & Hamel, G (1990) "The core competence of the corporation." *Harvard Business Review*

Week 4

- Monday April 16
Analyzing internal capabilities; the resource-based view
Text: Chapter 3
- Wednesday April 18
Analyzing cost advantages
Text: Chapter 4
Case: Wal-Mart Stores' Discount Operations

Week 5

- Monday April 23
Analyzing differentiation advantages
Text: Chapter 5
Case: Patagonia
- Wednesday April 25
Vertical integration strategies
Text: Chapter 6
Case: Feed R&D – or Farm It Out?

Week 6

- Monday April 30 (law midterm tonight)
Diversification strategies
Text: Chapter 7
- Wednesday May 2 (MBA Speaker Series tonight; shorter class than usual)
DUE: [Mid-term overview](#)
Case: EMI and the CT Scanner (A)

Week 7

- Monday May 7
Organizing to implement diversification strategy
Text: Chapter 8
Case: GE's Digital Revolution: Redefining the E in GE
- Wednesday May 9
Alliances
Text: Chapter 9
Case: The HP-Cisco Alliance (A)

Week 8

- Monday May 14
Mergers and acquisitions
Text: Chapter 10
Article: Dyer, Kale & Singh (2004) "When to ally and when to acquire." *Harvard Business Review*
- Wednesday May 16
Case: BRL Hardy: Globalizing an Australian wine company

Week 9

- Monday May 21
Case: Kodak and the Digital Revolution (A)
- Wednesday May 23
Case: Matching Dell

Week 10

- Monday May 28: No classes; Memorial Day
Managing diversification and alliances: strategic and organizational dimensions
Case: The HP-Cisco Alliance (A)
Cancelled: There will be no Individual written assignment #3
- Wednesday May 30: No class tonight; entire evening will be Law and Ethics class
DUE: [Group research project abstract](#)
DUE: [Final overview and portfolio](#)

Finals Week

- Monday June 4 (class meets 5:45 until approximately 9:00 pm)
[Group research project presentations and discussion](#)
- Wednesday June 6
DUE: [Group research project final report](#)