BBUS 544
Strategic Management in High Technology Firms

MBA Program
University of Washington, Bothell
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Further updates will appear on the course web page and will be announced on Blackboard and via the class e-mail list.

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I. Course overview and purpose
Understanding how a firm should be managed to achieve success is fundamental to the study of business. 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 was a 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 integrate these three related purposes by offering theory- and case-based study of firm-level business success. Specifically, each student will be required to [a] engage in seminar-format discussions addressing theory and cases, [b] individually develop an integrated perspective on how a firm should be managed to achieve success, [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 in written 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

- 15% Individual one-page analyses of assigned readings *see note below*
- 20% Individual paper: integrated perspective on firm success
- 20% Contribution to class discussion
- 10% Group paper: seminal ideas from the MBA program
- 10% Group written analysis and presentation of assigned case
- 25% Group research project (presentation and final written report will be graded; proposal 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 in examinations and 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. 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. Please do not use computers or other electronic devices during class for anything (e.g., e-mail, NCAA) not directly related to the material at hand. My purpose for this policy is to maintain individual and class focus, and I consider extraneous activity, noise, and communication (electronic or not) to detract from this purpose.

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 should be considered required reading for students in BUS 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

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.

VII. Group assignments

Students will self-select groups for three assignments.

Group paper: seminal ideas from the MBA program (due Wednesday April 6)

As this is the capstone course with the purpose of assessing how firms should be managed to achieve success, I believe it makes sense to take stock of “where we are” at the outset. Prepare a report that [a] identifies the seminal concepts and theories from each of the classes you have taken in the MBA program to date, [b] summarizes how each of these concepts and theories address how firms achieve success (i.e., you may combine/cluster individual seminal ideas for this purpose), and [c] synthesizes the above elements into an analytical paper. In other words, be careful not to simply organize the paper around a list of courses.

Please submit this is a report of ten pages or less (exclusive of references, tables, and figures). Be prepared to discuss your findings in class on Wednesday April 6.

Group written analysis and presentation of assigned case (due as scheduled)

Each group will analyze a case, making a presentation to the class and submitting a written report. The purpose of the case analysis will be to apply course material to a particular business situation, identifying the underlying problem(s) faced by the firm’s management, and formulating and justifying a recommended strategy for the firm. The cases available are on Weds Apr 20, Weds Apr 27, Weds May 4, and Mon May 9.

Further requirements will be provided. In general, anticipate a requirement of 6-8 pages (exclusive of references, tables, and figures). For the presentation, expect to have 20 minutes for the presentation plus 15-20 minutes to respond to questions.

Group research project

Each group will write and present a research project that builds on the required material from this course and, optionally and secondarily, on material from other courses. You may choose from among three possible types of subjects: [a] a single company, [b] an industry, or [c] an important topic or issue in strategic management.

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

Further requirements will be provided. In general, anticipate a guideline of 15-20 pages (exclusive of references, tables, and figures).
The group research project milestones are:

**Wednesday April 13: proposal due**

This can be very short (e.g., one page), but should make clear what you propose to study, how you plan to carry out your research, and how the subject builds upon the material from this course. (My test will be: does this appear to be a subject of enough value to the class that it is worth devoting half a class session to.) I will try to prevent more than one group from working on the same company, industry, or topic, unless I can be assured that the projects would be complementary.

**Weds May 18, Mon May 23, Weds May 25: presentations**

Your challenge will be to prepare short presentations that capture the essence of your work. Tentatively, I can offer 30 minutes for the presentation plus 25-30 minutes to respond to questions. I will have to insist on strict adherence to time limits.

**Wednesday June 1: report due** (both hard copy and electronically)

**VIII. Individual assignments**

**One-page analyses of assigned readings**

(After thinking about concerns expressed on the first day of class, I have changed some specifics related to the number of papers required and how they will be weighted for assigning a course grade. This section has been revised as of 4/4/05. - KL)

Writing is an act of both cognition and communication. In order to support preparation for class sessions and development of your individual integrated perspective on the course material (e.g., as will be expressed in your individual paper due June 1), I will require that you submit at least seven (7) one-page analyses of assigned readings for individual class sessions. Each analysis should address the major issue(s) covered and indicate why they are important and/or fit into the content of the course. It should be clear that you have done some “digesting” of the material; for example, an outline of a reading would not be acceptable.

Guidelines:

a. Except when cases are assigned, the analysis should cover all the readings assigned for that class session.

b. When cases are assigned, choose a single case.

c. No more than one analysis per class session.

d. Do not submit an individual analysis of the case to which your group is assigned.
Grading the one-page analyses:

I will calculate your course grade under 2 scenarios: [a] with the one-page analyses weighted as 10% of the final grade, and [b] with the one-page analyses weighted as 25% of the final grade (with the weighting of the other grade components adjusted proportionally). I will assign the grade that is the higher of these two calculations.

You may submit more than 7 one-page analyses. If you do, for grading purposes this will essentially be for “extra credit”; I will set up a grading formula such that your grade for this component of the course can only go up if you submit more than 7 analyses.

I would like to emphasize that this component of the course is intended to make our discussions of assigned material as valuable as possible for everyone and to support the development of your individual integrated perspective.

Individual paper: integrated perspective on firm success (due Wednesday June 1)

One of the primary purposes of this course is to provide you an opportunity to develop your perspective on how firms should be managed to achieve success. The final individual requirement will be a paper in which you present this perspective in an integrated fashion, using theory and examples from this course and, where appropriate, what you have studied in other courses. (Among other things, this paper should represent what you have learned beyond the group paper on seminal ideas in the MBA program that you submitted early this quarter.) I view this as a capstone project for your capstone class.

One way I am thinking about this is that you are being challenged to be a “producer of knowledge” with this assignment. Christensen and Raynor (2003) stated that managers are “voracious users of theory.” Here, in one of your last assignments in this UWB Graduate program, I want you to be a producer of theory as well.

Guidelines:

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 what terms like these mean. 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 (in this case, defining terms so that the definition itself answers the question “what leads to success?”) I see this as a potential problem, again, with concepts like leadership or operational efficiency. For example: I could define leadership as “the influence necessary for the success of an organization.” But then, by definition, leadership leads to success. To avoid tautologies, I 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.

Length: I suggest (but do not require) a length of 6-8 pages (exclusive of references, tables, and figures). Within this length, please include a 1-page summary of the basic elements of your perspective.

Citations: All ideas you present in the paper should be carefully referenced using a consistent standard style.

IX. Schedule

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

Text: Walker, G (2004), *Modern competitive strategy*

Article: Available electronically through [Blackboard](#)

Case: Harvard Business School Publishing case studies

Week 1
- Monday March 28
  Overview of the course

- Wednesday March 30
  Strategy, Strategic planning, and competitive advantage
  Text: Chapters 1, 2 and 12
  Read material on plagiarism

Week 2
- Monday April 4
  Industry dynamics and evolution
  Text: Chapters 3 and 4

- Wednesday April 6
  Resources, capabilities, and the value chain
  Text: Chapter 5

Week 3
- Monday April 11
  Group paper due: seminal ideas from the MBA program

- Wednesday April 13
Leadership speaker series: John Hinson, CEO, Quinton Cardiology
Joint session with BBUS 546
Text: Chapters 6 & 7
Group research project proposal due: proposal

Week 4
• Monday April 18

• Wednesday April 20
  Analyzing sources of competitive advantage
  Case: Timex Corp.
  Case: Wal-Mart Stores’ Discount Operations

Week 5
• Monday April 25
  Case: GE’s talent machine
  Case: Matching Dell

• Wednesday April 27
  Vertical integration, outsourcing, joint ventures, and alliances
  Case: The HP-Cisco Alliance (A)
  Harvard Business Review

Week 6
• Monday May 2
  Global business and global business strategy
  Text: Chapter 9
  Case: Philips vs. Matsushita: A New Century, a New Round

• Wednesday May 4
  Case: Robert Mondavi: Competitive Strategy
  Case: BRL Hardy: Globalizing an Australian Wine Company

Week 7
• Monday May 9
  Case: Acer, Inc.: Taiwan’s Raging Dragon

• Wednesday May 11
  Diversification and developing new business units
  Text: Chapter 9
  Case: EMI and the CT Scanner (A)
  Case: EMI and the CT Scanner (B)

Week 8
• Monday May 16
  Managing multibusiness firms
Text: Chapter 10
Case: Patagonia

- Wednesday May 18
  [Note: class tonight will run from 5:45 to 10:05]
  **Part I:** Presentations of group research projects
    X3 and Mo’Beta
  **Part II:** Corporate governance and decision-making
    Text: Chapter 11
    Text: Chapter 12 (re-read)

Week 9
- Monday May 23
  Presentations of group research projects
    Kodak and Anonymous

- Wednesday May 25
  [Note: class tonight will run from 5:45 to approximately 9:00]
  Presentations of group research projects
    InPhase and Allegata

Week 10
- Monday May 30: Memorial Day Holiday, no class

- Wednesday June 1
  Readings TBA
  Individual paper due: integrated perspective on firm success
  Group research project final report due

Week 11
- Monday June 6   TBA