

BAD 64185: BUSINESS STRATEGY
Graduate School of Management
Kent State University
Fall 2011
Section 20795
Classroom: BSA 205
Time: T/Th. 11:00 a.m.-12:15 p.m.

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READING MATERIALS:

Required: 1.- *Contemporary Strategy Analysis –Paperback*, 7th edition, 2010, Robert M. Grant.
2.- Course pack with cases and articles selected by the professor (available at www.shop.CoursePacksEtc.com).

Optional: A general business magazine or newspaper such as *Business Week*, *Fortune*, or *The Wall Street Journal* is recommended. Selected materials from these sources may be assigned from time to time.

COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES:

This course is about concepts and tools derived mostly from the Strategic Management field, and which are used by general managers to analyze complex business situations and to make decisions. The phenomena of interest is the determinants of success and failure of business organizations. We will investigate both (i) the underlying causes of sustainable differences in profitability across businesses competing in a single industry, as well as (ii) the factors behind superior value creation by firms that operate in multiple businesses.

Learning objectives for the course are two-fold: First, participants will familiarize themselves with strategic management concepts, theoretical models, and analytical techniques. This will be accomplished by means of recommended readings and lectures organized into a series of topic areas.

Second, participants will be asked to apply the concepts, models, and analytical techniques learned to real-life business cases. During the length of the course, you will analyze industries, explore the way in which different organizations choose to compete within them, and learn from the outcomes of such choices. You will also perform strategic analyses of individual firms, identify their sources of competitive advantage and disadvantage, and devise ways in which they can enhance their competitive positioning. Finally, you will evaluate the merits of alternative corporate strategies, and propose ways in which multi-business and/or multinational corporations could improve their

shareholder value created. In short, the course is as much about concepts as it is about practicing your analytical ability as managers, by drawing upon those concepts and performing strategic analyses and proposing solutions.

It is important to emphasize that the course takes the perspective of a general manager. This means that our emphasis will be on making the total business organization successful, rather than concentrating on any single functional department.

CLASS FORMAT:

The course is a broad survey of several topics of interest within the academic field known as Strategic Management. To cover as many topics as possible during the next 15 weeks, the course is structured so that there is one opportunity to learn about a given topic area and set of analytical tools, and only one (or two) opportunities to apply those tools to a real-life case. After that, we move to the next topic.

For each topic you will typically be assigned one or two book chapters or articles to read, and one case to prepare. Book chapters and articles introduce concepts and managerial tools related to the topic and provide the technical background needed to analyze cases. Cases provide a real-life business situation that calls for application of the concepts and tools learned. We will meet in class to discuss both kinds of materials. Accordingly, class time will be evenly split between theory and case analysis sessions.

During theory sessions, I will review and extend what you have read in the assigned book chapters or articles. The purpose of these sessions is three-fold: (1) To reinforce main ideas, (2) to discover and clarify any remaining misconceptions, and (3) to provide you with an opportunity to ask further questions on each given topic.

During case analysis sessions, the focus will be on diagnosing what is critical in a complex business situation and on finding pragmatic solutions to the strategic and/or organizational problems at hand. We intend to benefit from group thinking and to learn from each other during these exchanges. I will take on a discussion facilitator role, pointing the group toward main discussion themes and/or asking specific questions. In turn, students are expected to introduce their own ideas and points of view, and to draw, challenge, and build upon ideas expressed by others. The liveliness and pedagogical value of these sessions will largely depend on the extent to which students engage the material and take ownership for class discussions.

WORK EXPECTATIONS:

Pages 10 to 18 of this syllabus contain a detailed course schedule, with assigned readings/cases and discussion questions. To prepare for each class, you are to read the assigned articles, and analyze the assigned case. You should produce and bring your **personal notes on the case, containing your analysis and opinions**, to class for your own benefit during the discussion. As explained below, in-class contributions are an important component of your performance evaluation in this course.

You should **plan on investing a minimum of 8 hours per week to prepare for class**. Assigned articles may take two hours to read and there is normally two articles assigned. Besides book chapters, whenever we can, I am going to have you read from the original authors or proponents of ideas.

Analysis of cases is more involved and will require 4-6 hours of work or more. Case analysis consists of:

- (i) A first read of the case, where you highlight important parts of the text and make notes on the margins. The objective here is to summarize the case facts.
- (ii) A focused, second read, with the assigned discussion questions in mind (mostly you go over your prior marks and notes). The objective now is to gain further familiarity with the issues pertinent to the analysis at hand.
- (iii) Your critical analysis. Look for previously introduced tools, ideas, and models that may be useful for evaluating this particular situation, use careful thinking, and apply practical business sense.
- (iv) Preparing a set of notes with your final arguments. Normally these are for your own use during the discussion in class and, thus, you can use whatever format will serve you well (e.g., notes can be handwritten). However, from time to time I will ask you to submit your notes (or parts of your notes). When that happens, notes need to be typed and follow the instructions detailed in the “Write-up Format” section below.

EVALUATION:

Your final grade in this course will be a weighted average of the grades obtained for:

In-class contribution:	30%
Required Case Write-ups:	10%
Group Presentations	10%
Examinations:	
Mid-term:	25%
Final:	25%

IN-CLASS CONTRIBUTION:

Most general managers spend very little time reading and even less time writing reports. The vast majority of their interactions with others are verbal. For this reason, the development of verbal skills is given a high priority in this course. The classroom should be considered a laboratory in which you can test your ability to convince your peers of the correctness of your approach to complex problems, and of your ability to achieve the desired results through the use of that approach.

Furthermore, active participation in class enhances the pedagogical value of the session. Class discussions provide the opportunity for us to benefit from group thinking and to learn from each other. Thus, by contributing their analysis and ideas students make class sessions enjoyable and enhance learning by the group.

Therefore, as an integral part of this course, **each student is expected to be a contributor to our discussions**, by presenting his/her analysis and ideas as well as by listening and reacting to analysis and opinions expressed by others.

Also, students may be called upon at any time to provide their analysis or discussion of an issue. In particular, one or more students may be asked to start the class

by answering a specific question or discussing a specific issue. Preparation of the case (including the assignment questions) and associated readings should be sufficient to handle such a lead-off assignments. After the initial analysis, we will open the discussion to the rest of the class.

In class-contributions are a major portion of your grade in this course. Some of the behaviors that contribute to effective class participation are captured in the following questions:

1. Do the comments show evidence of analysis of the case?
2. Do the comments add to our understanding of the situation?
3. Does the participant distinguish among different kinds of data (that is, facts, opinions, beliefs, concepts, etc.)?
4. Is the participant a good listener?
5. Are the points that are made relevant to the present discussion? Are they linked to the comments of others?
6. Do comments clarify and highlight the important aspects of earlier comments and lead to a clearer statement of the concepts being covered?
7. Is the participant a good communicator? Are his/her arguments clear, to the point, and persuasive.
8. Is there a willingness to test new ideas, or are all comments "safe"? (For example, repetition of case facts without analysis and conclusions or a comment already made by a colleague.)
9. Is there a willingness to share?

A student must be an active, effective, and consistent contributor to get a good participation grade by the end of the semester. I will assign a grade for your contributions each session. I will record information during the session itself (with the help of a seating chart), and will make final determinations right after each session has concluded.

Credit for participation will be earned as follows:

Prepared student = 0 points. Completing your assigned work by the date indicated in this syllabus is an absolute requirement; not a source of credit. You receive no participation points unless you go a step further and contribute your thoughts to the class discussion. I encourage you to do so.

Session contributor = 1 point. When you contribute your understanding (either voluntarily or prompted by the professor), or pose interesting questions, you get one point for the session.

To promote broad participation, students don't receive multiple points for multiple contributions during a single session. You can only gain one point per session. You should be ready and try to contribute every single class.

Session leader = 2 point. In exceptional circumstances you may receive two participation points for the session when you have made highly effective, quality contributions that push our discussion forward.

Your final participation score at the end of the semester will be the sum of your participation points in all sessions. Here is how I envision the correspondence between participation points and letter grades at the end of the term:

Participation Points	Numerical Grade	Letter Grade Correspondence
0	0.0	F
1	0.4	F
2	0.8	D
3	1.2	D+
4	1.5	C-
5	1.8	C
6	2.0	C
7	2.2	C+
8	2.4	B-
9	2.6	B-
10	2.7	B
11	2.8	B
12	2.9	B
13	3.0	B
14	3.1	B+
15	3.2	B+
16	3.3	B+
17	3.4	A-
18	3.5	A-
19	3.6	A
20	3.7	A
21	3.8	A
22	3.9	A
23 or above	4.0	A

Because quality class participation figures prominently in this course, the University's Honor Code mandates that you not rely on notes, handouts, or cases from students who have taken this course previously. Thus, you should not use duplicated readings/cases/handouts since these are likely to be "marked up" or highlighted according to the judgments of others.

REMEMBER:

- **The idea of THE "right" answer or solution is often an oxymoron in the context of this course.** Given the complexities of business problems, there is no single answer to many of the issues discussed in this course, although some answers are better than others (and some answers can be wrong). To find better answers, use strategic concepts and tools to analyze a situation.

- **One doesn't need to be "right" to make a contribution.** Bold proposals or somewhat faulty arguments often make most valuable contributions: The former may open a new line of argument, while the latter gives us something to work with and may trigger a clarifying and enriching debate.
- Therefore, **any and all comments/opinions emanating from your understanding of course materials are always welcome.** Just come to class prepared and share your best thinking with us!

REQUIRED WRITE-UPS:

There is no format requirements for case analysis notes that you bring regularly to case sessions, as these are intended for your own personal use during the discussion (e.g., notes need not be typed—even if they end-up being collected by the professor). The exception to this rule occurs when you are given advanced notice that a particular case analysis will be turned in. In such instances, it is expected that your write-up will be typed, and that it will conform to the format guidelines discussed below.

At this time, three write-ups have been scheduled for submission. The course schedule in pages 10-18 provides the details. Other report submissions may be announced as the semester progresses. To receive credit, write-ups must (i) tackle and complete the assignment and (ii) follow the format requirements outlined below. Beyond these basic conditions, write-ups will be graded according to "quality". The latter refers to the level of understanding of the analytical tool(s) used, the depth and insightfulness of the analysis, and the judiciousness of conclusions and recommendations.

Feedback for these exercises will be provided immediately after submitting reports, in the form of class discussion. Two implications derive from this: First, no late write-ups can be accepted. Second, students should bring an extra-copy of their hand-in to class and use it to record feedback as the discussion progresses. You will receive a subsequent notice of evaluation for your work, but hand-ins are typically not returned.

FORMAT for WRITE-UPS:

Case reports should be written as if you were a consultant working for management. Several implications follow: First, provide only information that is directly pertinent to answering the assigned question(s); and think about the most effective way to present your ideas (may be a table?). Second, your reader is very familiar with the firm and its industry. Hence, you should refrain from wasteful repetition of the case's framing and/or unnecessary case facts. Finally, your reader is most interested in the bottom line of your arguments, conclusions, and final advice regarding the issues brought to your attention. Therefore, state your findings and recommendations clearly.

The lion's share of your time should be spent gaining a good understanding of case information and, then, analyzing the issues assigned—i.e., thinking, as opposed to writing. When you finally reach your conclusions, you summarize your analysis and recommendations in a direct, brief, and persuasive manner (e.g., use bullet points!). Your report should be focused, and your writing-style should be succinct and to the point.

Write-ups should be typed, using 1 inch margins and size 12 font. There should be a cover page with the case title and student name on it. After that, assigned discussion questions should be addressed, one at a time, and in the assigned order. Number and repeat each discussion question (as it appears in your syllabus) at the top of a new page, and submit your best arguments after that. Format is important and it affects your grade.

GROUP PRESENTATIONS:

There will be one group presentation and one group case write-up during the semester. Groups and group assignments will be provided later on. Presentations will be assessed by peers for delivery; and by the professor for content. MORE DETAILS WILL FOLLOW.

EXAMINATIONS:

There will be two in-class examinations during the semester. Test dates are provided in the course schedule (pages 10 to 18).

GRADING SCALE:

Final course (letter) grades will be assigned using the plus/minus grading system adopted by the University. Also, numerical grades for all course components will be expressed in a 4.0 scale. The equivalence between numerical and letter grades will roughly follow the same scale used by the University to award academic honor points. Specifically, the grading scale for this course will be as follows:

3.6 – 4.0	= A
3.4 – 3.5	= A-
3.1 – 3.3	= B+
2.7 – 3.0	= B
2.4 – 2.6	= B-
2.1 – 2.3	= C+
1.7 – 2.0	= C
1.4 – 1.6	= C-
1.1 – 1.3	= D+
0.8 – 1.0	= D
0.0 – 0.7	= F

COURSE POLICIES

LATE ASSIGNMENTS:

Assignments may be turned in **prior** to the due date for full credit. Late work without prior arrangements due to special circumstances will receive no credit.

MISSED TESTS:

It is your responsibility to be in class at the assigned date and time for each exam (unless arrangements were made in advance for an alternative time –see Test Make-up Policy bellow). In order to adhere to standards of professionalism and academic rigor, as well as out of fairness to students that meet course requirements, there will no make-up tests for missed exams. The only exception to this policy might be under the rare circumstance of a last minute emergency (i.e., accident, sudden illness, etc.) –see below.

TEST MAKE-UP:

Since tests are scheduled during regular class periods, there should be no time conflicts with other classes or tests. There may be conflicts with an occasional work assignment, though. In the event of an unavoidable job-related time conflict, speak to me well in advance of the scheduled test date to make arrangements for an alternate time. There will be no make-up tests provided unless arrangements are made with me at least a week in advance of the test date. The only exception to this policy might be under the rare circumstance of a last minute emergency (i.e., accident, sudden illness, etc.) that explains your (unplanned) absence. Also, no makeup test will be permitted more than one week after the regularly scheduled test date.

OTHER UNIVERSITY and COLLEGE POLICIES

The following University and/or College policies apply to all students in this course:

ACADEMIC HONESTY: Cheating means to misrepresent the source, nature, or other conditions of your academic work (e.g., tests, papers, projects, assignments) so as to get undeserved credit. In addition, it is considered to be cheating when one cooperates with someone else in any such misrepresentation. The use of the intellectual property of others without giving them appropriate credit is a serious academic offense. It is the University's policy that cheating or plagiarism result in receiving a failing grade for the work or course. Repeat offenses result in dismissal from the University.

COURSE WITHDRAWAL DEADLINE: The course withdrawal deadline is Sunday, Nov. 6, 2011.

DISABLED STUDENTS: University policy 3342-3-01.3 requires that students with disabilities be provided reasonable accommodations to ensure their equal access to course content. If you have a documented disability and require accommodations, please contact the instructor at the beginning of the semester to make arrangements for necessary classroom adjustments. Please note, you must first verify your eligibility for these through Student Accessibility Services (contact 330-672-3391 or visit <http://www.registrars.kent.edu/disability/> for more information on registration procedures).

ENROLLMENT / OFFICIAL REGISTRATION: Students have responsibility to ensure they are properly enrolled in classes. You are advised to review your official class schedule (using Student Tools on FlashLine) during the first two weeks of the semester to ensure you are properly enrolled in this class and section. Should you find an error in your class schedule, you have until Sunday, September 11, 2011 to correct the error. If registration errors are not corrected by this date and you continue to attend and participate in classes for which you are not officially enrolled, you are advised now that you **will not** receive a grade at the conclusion of the semester for any class in which you are not properly registered.