

# MAN-374 - GENERAL MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGY

SPRING 2010

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<b>Office Hours</b>	Wednesday 2:30-4:00pm or by appointment
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## Required Reading

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1. Grant, RM. 2005. *Contemporary Strategy Analysis*. Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing.
2. Course packet at the Co-Op. (Note: It is a violation of the honor of conduct to duplicate case packets.)

## Course Description

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Why do some firms perform better than others? General managers grapple with this question as they attempt to enhance the performance of the firms they manage. In this course we will explore possible answers to this question, examine a variety of analytical models that help us identify critical issues that affect firms' performance levels, and build on our understanding of complex business situations to devise realistic solutions that address those issues. Although the specific challenges that general managers face vary across organizations, industries, geographic regions and time, the fundamental analytical skills required in the examination of strategic issues can be applied in many contexts. I encourage you to build those skills and to focus on the development of your own personal approach for identifying and addressing key strategic challenges.

Students are expected to develop the ability to examine strategic issues from the perspective of the general manager of the corporation, division, plant, or other business unit, who must be concerned with the overall success of the organization. Because the general manager's task cuts across functional areas, this course builds on your previous work in the program and provides a comprehensive management perspective.

Not everyone who takes this course will ultimately become a general manager. Yet, this course will benefit virtually all students. The recent trend in the corporate world toward flatter, less hierarchical organizations has resulted in strategic decisions being made at ever lower hierarchical levels. Accordingly, even non-executives are likely to make decisions and initiate actions that have significant strategic implications. Many entry-level positions require employees' involvement in projects that are initiated to elicit innovative and creative ideas to improve the functioning of the organization as a whole. Similarly, functional specialists need to take into account the overall needs of the business when addressing problems in their own areas and thus need to develop a keen awareness of, and appreciation for, the challenges that the corporation faces. Therefore, it is increasingly important that university graduates acquire managerial skills and understand how their actions affect the total enterprise.

In order to capture the pragmatic, action-oriented, and complex nature of the general management task, this course is taught through the case method. We will supplement the case discussions with readings, lectures, and conceptual discussions.

## Course Objectives

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1. Develop the ability to view the firm from the perspective of general managers. Achieving this goal presupposes synthesis of knowledge acquired in previous courses and understanding which part of that knowledge is relevant to general managers.
2. Understand the key factors that explain why some firms persistently outperform other firms.
3. Understand the fundamental concepts in strategic management and build on those concepts to identify how firms can create value, appropriate value and sustain value creation in an industry.
4. Learn to distinguish between basic causes of business problems and attendant symptoms.
5. Practice the formulation of realistic strategic recommendations and implementation plans that balance the tradeoffs inherent in any strategic situation.
6. Enhance analytical thinking and the ability to report conclusions effectively in both written and oral form.
7. Learn how to gather and analyze information on a specific firm and the respective industry.
8. Discuss some of the practical realities of running different types of businesses.

## Course Requirements and Evaluation

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1. Class Contribution	20%
2. Written Case Analyses and Quizzes	10%
3. Midterm Exam	30%
4. Term Project	40%
4.1 Draft Critique (group grade) (5%)	
4.2 Participation (individual grade, peer evaluation) (5%)	
4.3 Presentation (group grade, peer evaluation) (10%)	
4.4 Industry Analysis (group grade) (10%)	
4.5 Firm Analysis (group grade) (10%)	

Individual final grades will result from the student's performance in each of the activities and assignments listed above. Final grades in this class will be awarded according to the plus/minus system. See <http://www.utexas.edu/provost/planning/plus-minus/> for more details.

## Class Contribution

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### *Attendance*

The course emphasizes case analysis and, accordingly, an important part of learning takes place in the classroom. Therefore, attending all classes is essential. Since the course is designed to help you develop a personal synthesis, rather than repeat textbook content, it is not possible to "make up" for an absence. If for some unavoidable reason you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to find out from your classmates what material we covered and what additional assignments or handouts you missed. I will not track attendance – it is your responsibility to come prepared and actively contribute to class. You will not be directly penalized for missing classes. If you miss several classes, however, it is difficult to achieve the highest grade for class contribution.

### *Preparation*

For the learning process to be effective, it is absolutely necessary that you carefully prepare the cases and readings before class and actively participate in the case discussions during class. The session plan at the end of this syllabus indicates which chapters of the textbook and which cases students have to read in preparation for each class. I expect you to be fully prepared for each class. I may call upon you at any time, whether to start the discussion or answer a specific question during the class. Preparation involves a thorough analysis of the case and developing a personal position on the case's issues. Unless you think about these issues and adopt a personal position when preparing for class, it will be very hard to learn from your peers' contributions in class. If for some reason you are not fully prepared on a particular day, let me know before class so that I do not embarrass you inadvertently. I urge you to attend all classes, even if you are not adequately prepared.

### *Class discussions*

Most general managers spend little time reading and even less time writing reports. The vast majority of their interactions with others are verbal. For this reason, this course emphasizes the development of verbal skills. You can consider the classroom a laboratory in which you can test your ability to convince your peers of the correctness of your approach to complex problems and of the results that your approach will generate. The questions below capture some of the behaviors that lead to effective class contribution.

1. Is the participant a good listener?
2. Are the points that the student makes relevant to the discussion? Are those points linked to the comments of others?
3. Do the comments add to our understanding of the situation?
4. Do the comments show evidence of analysis of the case?
5. Does the participant distinguish among different kinds of data (i.e., facts, opinions, beliefs, concepts, etc.)?
6. Is the student willing to share his/her views?
7. Is the student willing to test new ideas or are all comments "safe" (e.g., repetition of case facts or colleagues' comments without analysis)?
8. Is the participant willing to interact with other class members?
9. Do comments clarify and highlight the important aspects of earlier comments and lead to a clearer understanding of the issues in the case?
10. Does the student ask questions rather than limit participation to responding to others' questions?

In a typical class session, I will ask one or more students 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 assignment. As a group, students will then try to complete the analysis of the situation and address the problems and issues that the case presents. At the end of class, I may call a few students to summarize the class discussion and the take-away lessons from it.

## **Office Hours**

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Your performance in this class is important to me. I will be happy to discuss the course, your progress, or any other issue of interest to you on an individual basis. Please see me in class or during office hours. I am also available, within reason, to meet with you outside these times. To set up an appointment, please send me an e-mail. Do not wait until the end of the semester to see me regarding your concerns with the course material or your performance.

## **Academic Dishonesty**

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I have no tolerance for acts of academic dishonesty. Such acts damage the reputation of the school and the degree, and demean the honest efforts of the majority of students. The minimum penalty for an act of academic dishonesty will be a zero for that assignment or exam. Students can find detailed information about academic integrity and standards of conduct at the Student Judicial Services website (<http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>). If the application of the policies regarding academic integrity to this class and its assignments is unclear to you in any way, it is your responsibility to ask me for clarification.

## **Students with Disabilities**

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Upon request, the University of Texas at Austin provides appropriate academic accommodations for qualified students with disabilities. Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) are housed in the Office of the Dean of Students, located on the fourth floor of the Student Services Building. Information on how to register, downloadable forms, including guidelines for documentation, accommodation request letters, and releases of information are available online at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/index.php>. Please do not hesitate to contact SSD at (512) 471-6259, VP: (512) 232-2937 or via e-mail if you have any questions.

A detailed version of this syllabus will be available to students registered for MAN-374 sections 04315, 04320, and 04325.