

**MAN-374H - GENERAL MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGY
- SPRING 2012 -**

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Required Reading

Course packet at UT Copy Center.

(Note: It is a violation of the honor system to duplicate course packets.)

Course Overview

Why do some firms perform better than others? General managers grapple with this question as they seek to ensure the success of the firms they manage. In this course we will explore possible answers to this question, examine analytical models that help us identify critical issues affecting firm performance, 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 firm strategy 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 firm. 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. Moreover, many firms expect employees in entry-level positions to provide innovative 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.

Course Objectives

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 most relevant to general managers.
2. Understand the key factors that explain why some firms persistently outperform other firms.
3. Understand fundamental concepts in strategic management and build on those concepts to identify how firms can create value, appropriate value and sustain value creation processes.
4. Apply course concepts and frameworks to identify key issues that affect the success of firms in a given industry and analyze how those issues affect a particular firm.
5. Sharpen analytical skills required for competent examination of firm strategy, including:
 - a) development of hypothesis-driven, falsifiable propositions, and evidence-based arguments.
 - b) framing of strategic problems around the underlying causes, not around the observed symptoms;
 - c) formulation of strategic recommendations around the steps that will lead to the desired outcomes, not around the desired outcomes themselves.
6. Communicate arguments effectively in both written and oral form.
7. Learn how to gather and analyze industry-specific and firm-specific data in ways that support strategic analysis and inform firm strategy.
8. Discuss some of the practical realities of running different types of businesses.

Instructional Method

In line with the learning goals above, the instructional method in this course emphasizes both theoretical rigor and practical relevance. Theoretical rigor helps students develop fundamental analytical skills that they can later apply to a broad range of situations. With the goal of enhancing theoretical rigor, this course draws directly from research papers and exposes students to the theoretical foundations of strategic management. Although textbooks can be helpful in providing students with an overview of analytical frameworks used in the examination of strategic issues, students are better off if they understand the theories that informed the development of those frameworks in the first place. Equipped with such knowledge, they can become better at diagnosing strategic problems instead of merely applying generic solutions. In sum, theoretically-rigorous content provide a basis for students to develop knowledge that can be applied in practical situations.

To capture the pragmatic, action-oriented, and complex nature of the general management task, this course is taught through the case method. Case discussions are complemented with hands-on projects that help students integrate the material presented during the semester and apply their knowledge to examine contemporaneous strategic issues affecting organizations. In sum, this is not a lecture course; instead, most of the learning in the course is learning-by-doing – through the analyses of the cases we will discuss in class, and the independent research projects.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

1. Class Contributions	20%
2. Written Case Analyses and Quizzes	10%
3. Midterm Exam	30%
4. Term Project	40%
4.1 Critique (group grade) (5%)	
4.2 Project contributions (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 Contributions

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 in that class 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 occasionally missing a class. If you miss several classes and, accordingly, are not present to contribute to the respective discussions, you are preventing yourself from achieving a strong grade for class contributions.

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 the materials students should read in preparation for each class. I expect you to be fully prepared for each class. I may call upon you at any time to answer specific questions and contribute to the class discussion. To avoid embarrassment, please let me know in advance if some emergency has made it impossible for you to be adequately prepared for 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.

Class discussions

The vast majority of general managers' 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.

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

In a typical session, I will ask one or more students to start the class by answering a specific question, discussing a specific issue or providing an overview of a topic or case. Preparation of the case and associated readings should be sufficient to handle such lead-off assignments. 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.

Grades for class contributions

I make notes on class contributions after every single session. You will also have the opportunity to let me know what you believe your level of class contributions to be. I will determine your grade for class contributions based on your contributions during the entire semester. When determining your grade, I will take into account both the frequency and the quality of your contributions. You are welcome to see me during office hours, at any stage during the semester, to discuss your class contributions. Please note that a student's failure to observe the appropriate conduct in class (refer to later section on classroom professionalism policy) will adversely affect that student's grade.

Writing Flag

Several assignments in this course involve substantial writing. Students are expected to write succinctly, yet persuasively. Given its emphasis' on writing, this course carries the Writing Flag. Writing Flag courses are designed to give students experience with writing in an academic discipline. You can expect to write regularly during the semester, complete substantial writing projects, and receive feedback from your instructor and your peers to help you improve your writing. You will also have the opportunity to build on such feedback when working on successive iterations of an assignment. For instance, feedback on written assignments can help

you write better answers to the midterm exam. Likewise, you should build on the feedback on your project's draft to improve the final report. The course's emphasis on writing also implies that a substantial portion of your grade will come from your written work.

Writing Center

I encourage students struggling with the writing requirements to consider using the Undergraduate Writing Center, FAC 211, 471-6222, <http://uwc.fac.utexas.edu>. The Undergraduate Writing Center offers free, individualized, expert help with writing for any UT undergraduate, by appointment or on a drop-in basis. Any undergraduate enrolled in a course at UT can visit the UWC for assistance with any writing project. They work with students from every department on campus, for both academic and non-academic writing.

Office Hours

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, during office hours, or send me an e-mail to set up an appointment if you are unable to see me during office hours. I strongly encourage you to discuss any issue hindering your learning performance in this class as the difficulty arises; do not wait until a major deadline approaches, leaving you limited reaction time. Take responsibility for your learning and be proactive!

Scholastic Dishonesty

The McCombs School of Business has no tolerance for acts of scholastic dishonesty. The responsibilities of both students and faculty with regard to scholastic dishonesty are described in detail in the Policy Statement on Scholastic Dishonesty for the McCombs School of Business. By teaching this course, I have agreed to observe all of the faculty responsibilities described in that document. By enrolling in this class, you have agreed to observe all of the student responsibilities described in that document. If the application of that Policy Statement to this class and its assignments is unclear to you in any way, it is your responsibility to ask me for clarification. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/or dismissal from the University. Since dishonesty harms the individual, all students, and the integrity of the University, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. You should refer to the Student Judicial Services website at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/> or the General Information Catalog to access the official University policies and procedures on scholastic dishonesty as well as further elaboration on what constitutes scholastic dishonesty.

McCombs Classroom Professionalism Policy

The highest professional standards are expected of all members of the McCombs community. The collective class reputation and the value of the classroom experience hinges on this. Both faculty and students are expected to be professional in all respects. The classroom experience is enhanced when:

- **Students arrive on time.** On time arrival ensures that classes are able to start and finish at the scheduled time. On time arrival shows respect for both fellow students and faculty and it enhances learning by reducing avoidable distractions.

- **Students display their name cards.** This permits fellow students and faculty to learn names, enhancing opportunities for community building and evaluation of in-class contributions.
- **Students do not confuse the classroom for the cafeteria.** The classroom (boardroom) is not the place to eat your breakfast tacos, wraps, sweet potato fries, or otherwise set up for a picnic. Please plan accordingly. Recognizing that back-to-back classes sometimes take place over the lunch hour, energy bars and similar snacks are permitted. Please be respectful of your fellow students and faculty in your choices.
- **Students minimize unscheduled personal breaks.** The learning environment improves when disruptions are limited.
- **Students are fully prepared for each class.** Much of the learning in this program takes place during classroom discussions. When students are not prepared they cannot contribute to the overall learning process. This affects not only the individual, but their peers who count on them, as well.
- **Students attend the class section to which they are registered.** Learning is enhanced when class sizes are optimized. Limits are set to ensure a quality experience. When section hopping takes place some classes become too large and it becomes difficult to contribute. When they are too small, the breadth of experience and opinion suffers.
- **Students respect the views and opinions of their colleagues.** Disagreement and debate are encouraged. Intolerance for the views of others is unacceptable.
- **Laptops are closed and put away.** When students are surfing the web, responding to e-mail, instant messaging each other, and otherwise not devoting their full attention to the topic at hand they are doing themselves and their peers a major disservice. Those around them face additional distraction. Fellow students cannot benefit from the insights of the students who are not engaged.
- **Phones and wireless devices are turned off.** We have all heard the annoying ringing in the middle of a meeting. Not only is it not professional, it cuts off the flow of discussion when the search for the offender begins. When a true need to communicate with someone outside of class exists (e.g., for some medical need) please inform the professor prior to class.

Students with Disabilities

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.

Religious holy days

A student who anticipates having to miss a class or other required activities, including examinations, for the observance of a religious holy day should inform me of the future absence at the start of the semester, so that the applicable arrangements can be made.

A detailed version of this syllabus will be available to students registered for MAN-374H (Spring 2012).