

**MAN-S374 - GENERAL MANAGEMENT AND STRATEGY
- SUMMER 2013 -**

Professor	Dr. Polidoro
Office	CBA 4.230
Office Hours	Wednesdays 12:30-2:00 pm or by appointment <i>(Office hours may vary periodically. Check announcements in class.)</i>
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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 answers that strategy research has provided 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. Students are encouraged to build those skills and to focus on the development of a research-based 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 a firm's overall success. Because the general manager's task cuts across functional areas, this course builds on your previous work in the business 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.

This course is designed to be a capstone-style experience where students integrate skills and knowledge they have developed through previous coursework. Strategic management is an inherently cross-disciplinary field that builds on insights from several disciplines such as economics, sociology, and psychology. The practice of strategy is also cross-disciplinary in that the issues that general managers face span the boundaries of several functional areas. Accordingly, it is essential that students integrate their knowledge about these different areas when examining key strategic issues affecting the overall performance of organizations. By the time students take this course, they have developed knowledge about several business foundations (e.g., finance, management, accounting, marketing, supply chain management, etc.) and, hence, can benefit from this course to consolidate their learning and think about how the integration of knowledge in different business foundations can help them address issues that cannot be fully understood from any functional perspective alone.

Course Objectives

1. Develop the ability to view a firm from the perspective of general managers. Achieving this goal presupposes synthesis of knowledge acquired in previous courses and understanding of 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.
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, through a semester-long process of inquiry that includes:
 - 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

As mentioned above, a key goal of MAN-S374 is to help students understand why some firms outperform other firms, a question that general managers grapple with as they seek to ensure the success of the firms (or business units) they manage. To achieve this goal, this course exposes students to strategy research on the key factors explaining differences across firms and the resulting academic frameworks and analytical tools. Rigorous academic content provides students with the opportunity to refine their critical reasoning and analytical skills that are essential to their understanding of complex issues that affect the performance of firms, which in turn should guide their efforts to devise realistic recommendations for firms to address those

issues. Moreover, this conceptual focus enhances the generalizability of the knowledge that students develop in this course. That is, it helps students refine fundamental skills that they can later apply to a broader range of specific business 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, students can become better at diagnosing strategic problems instead of merely applying generic solutions. Conceptually-rigorous content provides a basis for students to develop knowledge that can be applied in a broader array of practical situations.

Conceptual rigor is complemented with emphasis on practical applications. Immersion in the specific realities faced by real world organizations provides students with a context in which they can apply the concepts and frameworks they learn in this course, which in turn facilitates their assimilation of the academic content. Further, this knowledge contextualization provides students with the opportunity to learn how the conceptual knowledge they develop in this course through classroom activities actually informs the practice of strategy. By grappling with issues similar to those faced by the general managers of real-world organizations, students can establish linkages between conceptual knowledge and normative knowledge, thus refining their abilities to provide strategic recommendations that are informed by sound reasoning and, whenever possible, supported by empirical evidence.

To capture the pragmatic, action-oriented, and complex nature of the general management task, this course is taught through the case method. The premise underlying the prevalence of the case method in strategy courses throughout the world is that students are better able to develop a general management perspective if they tackle issues that general managers of real organizations face. Case discussions also mirror the situation that students are likely to face in their careers, since many firms expect employees in entry-level positions to provide innovative ideas to improve the functioning of the organization as a whole. Through case discussions, students refine their abilities to make verbal contributions to elucidation of issues that are inherently ambiguous and to provide insights into a complex problem when its intricacies are not fully known. Further, case discussions encourage analogical reasoning and allow students to develop skills related to verbalizing an argument and marshalling evidence supporting that evidence. In line with these considerations, classroom time is heavily focused on in-depth case discussions, which constitute the primary means through which understanding of strategy theories is deepened and elaborated. Lectures are occasional and serve the purpose of clarifying questions that students have when reading assignments on more complex topics or to expand their conceptual knowledge beyond course readings.

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. This is not a lecture course; instead, most of the learning in the course is learning-by-doing – through case analyses and independent research projects.

In sum, by highlighting both rigorous academic content and practical relevance, this course exposes students to a variety of companies and industries in a relatively short period of time and helps them develop knowledge that they can readily apply to new contexts they will surely encounter in their professional careers.

Course Requirements and Evaluation

1. Class Contributions (include peer evaluation of each student's project contributions: 5%)	25%
2. Written Case Analyses and Quizzes	10%
3. Midterm Exam	30%
4. Term Project	35%
4.1 Project outline (group grade) (3%)	
4.2 Critique (group grade) (4%)	
4.3 Presentation (group grade, peer evaluation) (8%)	
4.4 Final report: Industry analysis and Firm analysis (group grade) (20%)	

Individual final grades will result from a student's performance in each of the activities and assignments listed above. Final grades in this class will follow 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. Moreover, repeated absences can compromise your learning and, accordingly, result in lower grades in other components of course evaluation.

Preparation

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. 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. 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 discussions *during* class. I may call upon you at any time to answer specific questions and contribute to class discussions. Please let me know in advance if some emergency has made it impossible for you to be adequately prepared for class. Although doing so obviously adversely affects your grade for class contributions, it may avoid additional embarrassment.

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 contributions.

- 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, 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 student 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 or does s/he merely respond 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 case analysis and address the problems and issues that the case presents. At the end of class, or at the start of the subsequent class, I will 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 session. You will also have the opportunity to let me know what you believe your level of class contributions to be. Your grade for class contributions will depend on the frequency and quality of your contributions during the entire semester. Occasionally, some students find it difficult to contribute to class discussions because of language or other challenges. Should you face any such challenges, I encourage you to speak with me and discuss your suggestions for us to help you overcome those challenges. Finally, failure to observe the appropriate conduct in class (refer to later section on classroom professionalism policy) will adversely affect a student's grade.

Written Case Analyses

During the course, students will work in groups of three and submit written case analyses for any two cases discussed between Session 3 and Session 7. Building on the feedback I provide, students should be able to refine their abilities to apply course concepts in the examination of strategic problems and communicate the resulting arguments in written form. Students will have the opportunity to demonstrate these abilities in the midterm exam and in the term project. You can choose with which two colleagues to write the case analyses and which two cases to analyze. It is your responsibility, though, to ensure that you complete the two assignments by the start of Session 7. Late write-ups will not be accepted.

Quizzes

There will be a variety of unannounced quizzes during the semester. As mentioned earlier, students should make sure that they carefully prepare for, and actively contribute to, each session. Because this course builds on a progression of ideas from session to session, trying to compensate lack of effort in a session with greater attention in another is not an effective learning strategy. Trying to assimilate all concepts and frameworks a few days before the midterm or working on projects a few days before a major deadline are equally ineffective learning strategies. The goal of quizzes in this course is to provide the appropriate incentive structure for students to avoid procrastination and keep track of the learning materials in a timely fashion. There might be a variety of quiz formats. In terms of content, some questions may focus on the topics that students should have prepared for a class, other questions may be about topics covered previously. Emphasis lies on understanding of core concepts, key information and conclusions, not on peripheral facts or obscure details. In sum, quizzes reward students who regularly prepare for class, contribute to class discussions, and reflect on what they have learned in each class.

As mentioned earlier, I will not keep track of attendance. However, if you decide to skip a class, you should factor in your decision that by doing so you may miss a quiz and receive a score of zero in that quiz. There will be no make-up quizzes. Depending on the total number of quizzes during the semester, I may drop a student's lowest grade when computing the final score for the semester.

Midterm Exam

The midterm examination is in the format of a take-home case analysis. Students will receive the exam during class on **Thursday, July 25**. Students must leave their answers in the drop-off box in the Management Department and post an electronic copy onto SafeAssignment (Blackboard) by **noon on Monday, July 29**. No extensions will be granted. Late submissions will not be accepted. In addition, the midterm exam will also comprise a set of questions that students will have to answer during class on **Thursday, July 25**.

The exam is due two days after its distribution in class to provide students with flexibility. Students can decide specifically when between exam distribution and the submission deadline they will work on the exam. It is students' responsibility, however, to plan and manage time effectively, taking into account other activities and unforeseen circumstances that might arise in that period. Although students vary in how much time they allocate to the midterm exam, a student should be able to analyze the case in about the same time s/he spends on the preparation of a case for class discussion. The key difference is that, besides organizing her notes, she will have to fully articulate the analysis in written form.

The midterm exam is an individual assignment and students are not allowed to discuss any part of the exam with other students. The minimum penalty for academic dishonesty will be a zero for the exam. Other penalties might be applicable as well (please refer to section 'Policy on Scholastic Dishonesty' below).

I strongly encourage you to discuss your learning difficulties with me during the semester. I cannot, however, discuss any aspect of the course or the exam in the period between the exam distribution and the submission deadline.

Term Project

A semester-long research project complements the course's instructional method and supports the achievement of the learning goals. The project encourages students to integrate the course content and apply the resulting conceptual understanding to interpret contemporaneous issues affecting firm strategy. In essence, students are expected to analyze an industry and then, informed by such industry analysis, develop a better understanding of the strategic issues facing a particular firm in that industry. In the industry analysis, students should build on the concepts and analytical frameworks discussed during the semester to identify and discuss a major issue affecting the abilities of firms in a particular industry to create and capture value. In the firm analysis students should discuss the implications of that major challenge from the viewpoint of a particular firm and formulate realistic strategic recommendations for that firm. There will be several intermediate deadlines to encourage students to decompose the project into manageable tasks and to receive feedback as they progress toward completion of the final report, which is due at the start of the last day of class. Late submissions will not be accepted.

Writing Flag

The University requires all undergraduates to earn credit for at least two courses flagged for Writing. In the Center for the Core Curriculum (<http://www.utexas.edu/ugs/cc>) the University explains that “the purpose of the Writing flag is to improve the quality of students writing across all disciplines at UT Austin”. As indicated above, several assignments in this course involve substantial writing. Given its emphasis’ on writing, this course carries the Writing Flag. As a course flagged for Writing, MAN-S374 meets the following criteria: (i) it requires students to write regularly and to complete writing projects that are substantial, (ii) it gives students the opportunity to build on feedback to refine successive drafts, and (iii) the writing assignments are graded based on writing quality as well as content, and combined account for at least one-third of a student’s final grade. To succeed in real-world organizations, wherein a myriad of issues compete to gain managerial attention, students should develop their abilities to communicate complex issues persuasively and succinctly. MAN-S374 offers students the opportunity to do precisely that – students complete writing assignments in which they are expected to articulate complex issues in a compelling, yet concise fashion, and receive feedback they can build on to refine their writing skills.

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 and you can no longer recover; instead, take responsibility for your learning and act promptly.

Policy on 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 BBA Program's Statement on Scholastic Dishonesty at <http://www.mcombs.utexas.edu/BBA/Code-of-Ethics.aspx>. By teaching this course, I have agreed to observe all faculty responsibilities described in that document. By enrolling in this class, you have agreed to observe all student responsibilities described in that document. If the application of the Statement on Scholastic Dishonesty to this class or its assignments is unclear 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, the integrity of the University, and the value of our academic brand, policies on scholastic dishonesty will be strictly enforced. You should refer to the Student Judicial Services website at <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/> 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 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

Students with disabilities may request appropriate academic accommodations from the Division of Diversity and Community Engagement, Services for Students with Disabilities, 512-471-6259, <http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/>.

Religious holy days

By UT Austin policy, you must notify me of your pending absence at least fourteen days prior to the date of observance of a religious holy day. If you must miss a class, an examination, a work assignment, or a project in order to observe a religious holy day, you will be given an opportunity to complete the missed work within a reasonable time after the absence.

Campus Safety

Please note the following recommendations regarding emergency evacuation from the Office of Campus Safety and Security, 512-471-5767, <http://www.utexas.edu/safety/>:

- Occupants of buildings on The University of Texas at Austin campus are required to evacuate buildings when a fire alarm is activated. Alarm activation or announcement requires exiting and assembling outside.
- Familiarize yourself with all exit doors of each classroom and building you may occupy. Remember that the nearest exit door may not be the one you used when entering the building.
- Students requiring assistance in evacuation should inform the instructor in writing during the first week of class.
- In the event of an evacuation, follow the instruction of faculty or class instructors.
- Do not re-enter a building unless given instructions by the following: Austin Fire

Department, The University of Texas at Austin Police Department, or Fire Prevention Services office.

- Behavior Concerns Advice Line (BCAL): 512-232-5050.

Further information regarding emergency evacuation routes and emergency procedures can be found at: <http://www.utexas.edu/emergency>.

Other Administrative Details

1. As the course progresses, I will post information on the blackboard system. So please check the website regularly.
2. I urge you to take notes during class. As I mentioned earlier, one of the main purposes of the course is to help you develop your own personal approach for identifying and addressing key strategic challenges. I will not post slides summarizing cases. After each class I will post slides used in that class to detail assignments or communicate administrative issues.
3. Password-protected class sites will be available for all accredited courses taught at The University. Syllabi, handouts, assignments and other resources are types of information that may be available within these sites. Site activities could include exchanging e-mail, engaging in class discussions and chats, and exchanging files. In addition, class e-mail rosters will be a component of the sites. Students who do not want their names included in these electronic class rosters must restrict their directory information in the Office of the Registrar, Main Building, Room 1. For information on restricting directory information see: <http://www.utexas.edu/student/registrar/catalogs/gi02-03/app/appc09.html>.
4. I frequently call on individuals whose hands are not raised to participate in class discussions. The goal is both to engage everyone in the discussion and to provide a basis for your class contribution grade.
5. To help me learn your names and assign your class contribution grades, I will circulate a seating chart by the start of our second session. Please take the same seat each class.

An expanded, detailed version of this syllabus will be available on the first day of class to students registered for MAN-S374 – Dr. Polidoro – Summer 2013.