

MBA 752 N - Strategic Management

Walsh University

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

This is the capstone course of the MBA curriculum. The course integrates the topical material from the functional disciplines of Economics, Accounting, Finance, Marketing, and Management through the use of case and/or company analysis. The focus of the course is on: 1. combining the theoretical and practical knowledge that has already been acquired in previous courses; and on 2. developing skills in using that knowledge within a strategic perspective.

In addition, this course contains what used to be the separate wrap-up research project. You are expected to complete your research project by the end of the course so that all graduation requirements are completed. The "research project" will be a comprehensive case analysis of your company (if employed) or of another company (if unable to assess your employer. The company/organization you pick, if NOT your employer, will require instructor approval). This project will require application of theory and analytical techniques from across your preceding MBA coursework.

TEXTS: (required):

- 1) Grant, Robert M. Contemporary Strategic Analysis (4th ed.). Blackwell Publishers, Inc. Malden, MA, 2002.

(recommended):

- 1) Porter, Michael E. Competitive Strategy: Techniques for Analyzing Industries and Competitors, The Free Press, New York, 1980.
- 2) Subscriptions to business periodicals, e.g. Wall Street Journal, Business Week, Fortune, etc. Students should subscribe to (and read) at least one of these publications, or develop a habit of reviewing the library's latest editions before class. See instructor for discounted student rates are available for subscriptions.

COURSE BACKGROUND:

Completion of all 6XX level MBA degree program courses or permission of instructor.

COURSE PURPOSE:

This course is designed as the "capstone" course in the MBA curriculum. As such, it serves to integrate the principles, methods, concepts, and theories from the functional areas. Areas which usually contribute heavily to strategic management practice include, but are not limited to accounting, marketing, economics, finance, management (including organization theory, organization behavior and quantitative decision making), statistics, and ethics.

The course is sometimes known as "strategy and policy". This label refers primarily to the level of analysis adopted (the executive or policy determination level). Only recently (last two decades or so) has the policy area of management initiated a separate research agenda and obtained recognition as a separate and distinct area of study. Traditionally, the term "policy" (or business policy) focused upon problems peculiar to the executive level. The traditional approach, within this perspective, is that top management has responsibility for integrating the activities of the subordinate functional (and other) subdivisions to obtain synergism and thus *enhance the effectiveness* of the entire organization. This requires an understanding of: purposes and activities of each functional area; and the inter-organizational relations between functional areas. (This also requires establishing and maintaining, monitoring and coordinating relationships with the external environment.) Additional emphasis has been placed upon methods and techniques of "strategic planning" and "strategic analysis."

Given all these considerations, this course will consequently blend the unique tools of strategic analysis with the more traditional approach of integrating the functional areas.

COURSE OBJECTIVES:

The primary purpose of this course is to further develop and finally polish your systematic, integrative, analytical, conceptual, and communication skills. These skills build upon analytical and decision making techniques and language tools. It is important for the student's success (in the course and in the "real world") to develop a "feel" for the problems of executive management and to be able to view disparate parts of an organization as an integrated system. Thus, this course will stress application of functional skills and preparation of executive committee reports.

Specific objectives include:

1. Developing your capacity to think strategically about a company, its business position, and how it can gain and/or sustain competitive advantage.
2. Building your skills in conducting strategic analysis in an industry and within given competitive situations.
3. Providing hands-on experience in determining business strategy, reasoning about strategic options, using what-if analysis to evaluate action alternatives, and initiating the changes necessary to keep the preferred strategy responsive to newly emerging conditions.
4. Improving your ability to manage the organization process by which strategies get formed and executed.
5. Integrating the knowledge gained in earlier courses.
6. Developing your powers of managerial judgment, help you learn how to assess business risk, and provide you with a stronger understanding of the competitive challenges of a global market environment.
7. Increasing your proficiency in using personal computers to do managerial analysis and managerial work.
8. Enhancing your awareness about the importance of ethical principles, personal and company values, and socially responsible management practices.

COURSE DESIGN:

This course will combine numerous formats. The primary vehicle, however, will be case analysis and presentation of findings. These methods are used to provide experience with general manager level problems and viewpoints and usually involve analysis of several functional areas. The approach provides opportunities to apply functional analytic skills, formulate strategic responses, and develop implementation programs.

The course is not devoted to problem identification and solution. (*Read this last sentence again*)

The cases are action oriented. They do not necessarily illustrate "good" or "bad" actions by the case characters. Cases merely portray a situation. The student's task on case analysis for this course is to:

- 1) Identify and articulate the organization's goals and corresponding objectives by which the organization's effectiveness (OE) can be assessed. (These OE criteria should also articulate the basic values which the organization uses in decision making. One of your tasks will be to relate decision criteria commonly used in the organizations to the stated goals and objectives. Are these the same?);
- 2) Identify the windows of opportunity, and threats, present in the external environment which could impact the target organization, or any similar organization within the same industry;
- 3) Identify the organization's competitive advantages (CA's) and disadvantages and develop ways to sustain the CA's);
- 4) Develop alternative policies and strategies to capture opportunities and to parry threats.
- 5) Evaluate alternatives and select that set which will best improve the level of organizational effectiveness (e.g. optimizes progress on goals and objectives);
- 6) Develop realistic implementation programs.

It should be remembered that there are no "right" or "wrong" solutions to the cases. Many logical proposals are possible. Thus, student involvement is essential. Your ideas and analysis must be injected into class discussions. If you participate, you'll learn how your approach could be improved. The key point is that your fellow students will also be learning from, and teaching you. In a nutshell, you'll get out of this course what you put into it, both in class and outside of class.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS:

1. Individual comprehensive cohesion case analysis, in several parts.
2. Executive Briefing of the analysis (in corresponding parts to 1 above).
3. Participation in class discussion (Instructor assessment of class preparedness).