

BBUS 502 • Strategic Management in High Technology Firms

MBA Program
University of Washington Bothell
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Course page: <http://faculty.washington.edu/lavery/BUS502>

Library reserves: <https://eres.bothell.washington.edu/eres/coursepage.aspx?cid=978>

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I. Course overview and purpose

This course takes an executive's perspective of what is probably the fundamental question of business practice: what makes an organization successful? I pose this as two related but distinct questions: [1] How do you explain success? (That is, what are the reasons why different organizations are more or less successful than others?), [2] How do you manage to make a particular organization successful? (That is, where do you focus attention, what problems do you address, what choices do you make? Questions such as these are posed given the specifics of the organization itself and the business environment in which it exists.)

Historically, business schools had a *business policy* course that focused on the decisions made by the firm's top managers to achieve the organization's purposes. This course typically has been an integrative *capstone* taken after students had studied the functional disciplines of business (e.g., finance, accounting, marketing, operations, organizational behavior). In the past twenty years, the field of *strategic management* has infused the capstone/business policy course, particularly in bringing economics-based perspectives to understanding competition, evolution of industries, and sources of rent (economic profit).

The UW Bothell MBA Program is one of a number of leaders in an innovation to move this business policy / strategic management course to the *beginning* of the curriculum. It is our intention that students will carry this executive's level perspective into subsequent courses, and will be *deeply motivated* to study those courses as the result of the questions and problems raised in BBUS 502.

This course is designed to address the concerns and perspectives described above through theory- and case-based study of firm-level business strategy and performance. Specifically, each student will be required to [a] engage in seminar-format discussions addressing theory and cases, [b] present high-quality written work that reflects an understanding of the course material and the motivation to continue in subsequent coursework to examine themes introduced here, and [c] working as part of a group, design and carry out a research project related to the purposes of the course.

Class sessions will be conducted as seminars. I use the term *seminar* to capture the objective of thoughtful and critical discussions of the assigned readings and cases in which each person is expected to be a contributor. This is not a lecture class with one-way information flow.

I encourage an analytical approach in class sessions, written work, and presentations. To me, *analytical* means [a] seeking to identify underlying problems and issues, [b] evaluating the theories and evidence presented, and [c] comparing and contrasting across different readings and perspectives. An analytical approach contrasts both with descriptive (compiling facts, definitions, and lists) and argumentative (mustering evidence in support of a pre-established position) approaches.

As part of the MBA Program's focus on effective written communication, this course in particular will provide each student with unique opportunities to improve her/his writing. Nancy Kool, the Program's Writing Specialist, will help you both by evaluating and giving feedback on selected work that is submitted for course requirements, and by being available for individual consultation.

II. Expectations

In general, students are expected to demonstrate the level of motivation, responsibility, and quality of work consistent with the explicit and implicit expectations associated with graduate study at a leading research university. Quality work requires thinking critically and systematically, writing clearly, and communicating ideas and arguments in a seminar format.

Every student should be prepared to make high quality contributions at every class session based upon assigned material. Studying (not just simply reading) assigned readings and cases is necessary for students to meet expectations for contribution.

III. Grades

Each student will be assigned a grade that represents my judgment as to the student's accomplishment and contribution in the course. The weighting in determining the grade will be

30% Individual papers and rewrites (including writing portfolio)

- 10% Quizzes
- 20% Final exam
- 20% Individual contribution to class discussion
- 20% Group research project (single grade; greatest emphasis on written report)

I consider a grade of B (3.0) for a graduate student to be appropriate for work that has no significant errors of either omission or commission. To me, this characterizes the minimum expectation for graduate students at a leading research university. Grades above 3.0 require the demonstration of excellence above and beyond this level.

Important notes on grades

1. A student will not earn a passing grade in this course without a passing weighted average (as above) grade on the individual work (papers, quizzes and final exam. That is, if the weighted average on these elements is 2.6 or below, that grade is assigned, without including the group paper or individual contribution.
2. If it is clear to me that the contribution of an individual to the group research project is significantly above or below that of other group members, the grade for the individual will be adjusted accordingly, up or down from the grade assigned the group.

IV. Policies

1. Strict adherence to University of Washington, Bothell standards with respect to academic integrity is expected implicitly by enrollment in this course. The section on [plagiarism](#) (below) and the links contained therein are assigned reading for this class.
2. E-mail sent to your UW account is considered by UWB to be official communication. I will send notices regarding the class to the list of currently enrolled students, and it is your responsibility to receive these e-mails.
3. Each written assignment must be completed and submitted in hard-copy format by the beginning of the class session at which it is due. (Select assignments will be submitted in duplicate.) I may also ask for electronic copies. Specifics will be provided with each assignment. Late assignments will receive a substantial penalty.
 - 3a. If you cannot attend a class when an assignment is due, or if you have a one-time printing problem, I will accept an e-mail attachment or a faxed copy as indicating the assignment was completed on time, but you must provide me a hard copy as soon as possible.
 - 3b. Of course, life circumstances sometimes take precedence over class work. In the case of *unplanned* situations I can be flexible regarding deadlines, but written documentation will be required.
4. Laptops, blackberries, etc. in class. Please do not use computers or other electronic devices during class for anything (e.g., email, World Series, instructor bingo) not directly related to the material at hand. My purpose for this policy is to maintain individual and class focus. If you are using a computer I will consider it equivalent to

“your hand being up” for a turn to answer questions, comment, etc. We all benefit when we are collectively engaged.

V. Plagiarism

When I suspect that a student or group has committed plagiarism, I will follow established UW Bothell procedures for addressing the matter. If a student or group has committed plagiarism, I will assign a grade of zero for that project.

The following two links are required reading for students in BBUS 502. Instances of plagiarism will not be excused due to a professed lack of understanding; if you have any questions, please ASK!

UWB policies and procedures regarding academic integrity (including plagiarism) can be found at <http://www.uwb.edu/students/policies/academicconduct.xhtml>.

Northwestern University’s detailed site that gives examples of plagiarism can be found at <http://www.northwestern.edu/uacc/plagiar.html>.

A few specifics to add to the material on the Northwestern web site:

1. Citations *strengthen* a paper, so never hesitate to cite an idea that came from a high quality, reliable academic or professional source.
2. If you use five (5) or more consecutive words from a source, you must put these words in quotes and cite the source. In this case, merely citing the source is not acceptable and is considered plagiarism. This is because merely citing without quotes indicates that you have adopted an idea, but put this in your own words.
3. Citing a source at the end of a paper (i.e., in a “references” section) is not an acceptable substitute for citing the specific ideas used in the body of the paper.
4. The rules on plagiarism pertain to any material that you submit as your own, including a draft that you might submit to an instructor, or material that you circulate in your group.
5. In most assignments, quotations should be used sparingly. Your task is to digest ideas and put them in your own words. Because of this, and to avoid plagiarism,, I suggest that you *never* copy and paste any text into a document, even the most preliminary set of notes, without putting quotes around the text and including the citation, as you would in a submitted assignment.

Here are some of the most common things I have heard from students who have committed plagiarism, with my responses.

1. *“I did not mean to plagiarize. I did know that what I did was wrong.”*

Many incidents of plagiarism involve some version of “I didn’t know it was plagiarism.” The University of Washington does not recognize this as an excuse.

2. *"There was too much pressure and not enough time for me to do the work."*

If you can't do the work, see me. The consequences of plagiarism are MUCH worse than the consequences of not turning in an assignment.

3. *"I would not steal anybody's ideas at work. But this was just a class assignment/just a minor assignment/just a draft/just a group paper."*

I believe that academic integrity, like excellence, is a habit. It isn't something that you should try to turn on and off at will, like a light switch. Develop good habits, so you never have to think about at what point you should turn on the good habits - they should always be on.

VI. Contribution to class discussion

The quality of contribution to discussion is not measured by "airtime." The best contributions to discussion demonstrate [1] responsiveness to what others have offered, [2] identification of issues and competing ideas, and [3] application of facts, models, and analysis.

Although I emphasize an analytical approach, there certainly is room for individual opinion, but I expect this to be reasoned, not based on pre-conceptions.

I hope for lively and even intense discussions of opposing viewpoints. Nevertheless, personal attacks and/or lack of respect for others and/or their ideas are unacceptable and will not be tolerated.

In preparation for class discussion, I suggest the following:

- For all reading assignments, be prepared to offer a brief (one minute) oral summary of the reading: what is its purpose? What are its major points? How would you compare and contrast it with other readings?
- For all reading assignments, be prepared to describe and discuss what the reading contributes to addressing the course's fundamental questions.
- For text chapters and articles, be prepared to offer examples from your current (or former) organization that address the models, theories, and/or principles presented.
- For cases, be prepared to address the situation that the managers of this firm face: if you had two minutes of their time, what would you recommend that they do, and why?

VII. Group research project

Each group will propose, carry out, and present a research project that builds on the required material from this course. You will be expected to apply course material to particular business situations, to identify the underlying problem(s) faced by management, and to formulate and justify strategies. For a topic, you may pick [a] a particular business or other organization, [b] an industry or industry segment, or [c] an

issue in business strategy that is motivated by (and ideally builds on or complements) course topics.

These are the requirements and due dates:

- Wednesday October 8: Propose a topic to be studied and present a preliminary list of research questions

A “high technology” topic is obvious, given the theme of the program, the title of the course, and the interests of many students, but I am completely open to other ideas.

The proposal should present research questions and describe both how you see these questions being addressed by material from the course and what else you will need to address the questions

This proposal should be approximately 1-2 pages in length (text) and be supplemented by a reference list.

- beginning Monday October 13 and no later than Wednesday October 22: Have a 15-minute group meeting with me (your responsibility for scheduling) to discuss your project
- Monday 11/10 and Wednesday 11/12. Presentations of projects: research questions, methods, and findings. Details TBA.
- Monday 11/24 Final report due (both electronically and hard copy).

The final report should be approximately 10-15 pages in length, not including tables, figures, and references.

VIII. Individual assignments

The individual assignments will consist of individual writing assignments, quizzes, and a final examination. Requirements for each assignment will be provided separately. Due dates are on the schedule.

The quizzes will be brief (less than 30 minutes) and take place at the beginning of the classes as noted on the schedule.

The final examination will be comprehensive and will take place at the regular class time on Monday November 17.

The individual writing assignments are two papers, rewrites of these, and a writing portfolio. Each assignment is due (2 hard copies and electronic submission) at the beginning of class on the due date.

Guidelines for individual (and all) assignments:

1. Please do not settle for generalizations, particularly when you use terms in common use like “leadership” or “operational efficiency.” Be very precise in defining terms such as these. Moreover, since a theme of the course is “how firms should be managed to

achieve success”, make sure you clearly state how firms accomplish the elements you write about.

2. Avoid tautologies (defining terms so that the definition is the same as the term defined). For example, I conceivably could define leadership as “the influence necessary for the success of a organization.” Then, if I ask, “what leads to success?” leadership is not a very useful answer because, *by definition*, leadership leads to success. To avoid this tautology, I would have to define leadership in a way that does not include success.

3. Pay attention to the calculus (the functional form of the relationship between variables: linear, curvilinear, etc.) and contingencies (the boundary conditions for a relationship between variables).

4. Do not rely on preconceived notions. Challenge your assumptions. You must back up your ideas with facts and citations. That “it makes sense” is not sufficient.

5. Citations: All ideas you present in the paper should be carefully referenced using APA style.

IX. Statement from Disability Support Services

If you believe that you have a disability and would like academic accommodations, please contact Disability Support Services at 425.352.5307, 425.352.5303 TDD, 425.352.5455 FAX, or at dss@uwb.edu. You will need to provide documentation of your disability as part of the review process prior to receiving any accommodations.