

Business Policy & Strategic Management (Business 690)
Fall 2008 – San Francisco State Univ.
College of Business, Syllabus v 2.0

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Class Meetings: Sec. 7: Thurs. 7-9:45pm TH 326 (Thornton Hall); Sec. 12: TH 3:35-6:20pm BUS 108.

Texts:

Required: De Wit & Meyer, Strategy: Process, Content, Context, 1998, **3rd Ed.**, Thomson Business Press;
Required: The Financial Times (6 days/week).
Required: Articles and materials as noted and/or distributed in class.

Other Required Reading:

Students are also expected to review leading business publications such as the Wall Street Journal, Business Week, The Financial Times (read by the instructor) and The Economist for current, application-oriented treatments of strategy topics. This is an important part of the class, as students are expected to develop their own cases and examples for presentation and discussion in class (see below). Additionally, students need to be very up-to-date regarding the present status of any firm or industry for which they are responsible at any time, for any task in class. Your performance will be improved with the regular reading (daily) of just ONE source as noted above—multiple sources are highly encouraged. It is also required to scan the instructor's web page (see above) twice per week minimum for announcements.

Course Description-Overview

This is a "capstone" oriented strategy course. It involves the synthesis of many topics studied in other business courses. Broadly speaking, this course addresses strategy formulation and situational (industry) analysis for business-unit, corporate, entrepreneurial and (a few) not-for-profit organizations. The course features a focus on international issues and implications for strategy formulation. The objective of the course is to enable a high degree of competency among students in a wide variety of strategy-related areas in multiple industries. Broadly, by the end of the course, students are expected to be able to detect, diagnose and recommend solutions for many types of strategy-related issues in the real world. More specifically, after this course, students should be able to apply any of a variety of (thoughtfully selected) analytical and prescriptive, theory-grounded tools to answer the question, "What should the strategy be, And why?" We return to this question throughout the course.

Description in more detail

This course treats an assortment of advanced topics in business strategy. Many of the "paradoxes" encountered in business are derived from different discipline-based points of view (e.g., economics, sociology, psychology, social-psychology, political science, anthropology). Tension between different prescriptive viewpoints is the focus of both the textbook's and students' attention in the class. The tension can often be "resolved" by comparing several industries or firms in such a manner as to demonstrate the validity of each viewpoint (or lack thereof) given certain industry or firm conditions. Conveniently, major differences manifest between application of viewpoints as implemented in different businesses and international cultures. Thus, comparative, internationally-savvy analysis and stories add great value.

Are there, however, some strategic orientations that are more "general" (and hence "more generally useful") than others? Are there some strategic viewpoints that should be "kept on the shelf" except in rarefied or dire circumstances? How does one go about selecting a strategic orientation for one's firm or business unit? Though these are important questions, the class continually returns to the core question: "What should an organization's strategy be, how does it decide this question, and how might the chosen strategies be implemented?"

Specific Objectives:

By the end of the course, the student should be able to

- a. Analyze firms/industries along the important dimensions of several perspectives. Students should also be familiar with the trade-offs between perspectives (e.g., what does a particular perspective ignore that another perspective addresses?)
- b. Recommend and competently defend your choices of strategy (and implementation) based on a particular school of thought using cogent arguments.
- c. Communicate research and other exploratory findings and recommendations in a convincing, professional manner (written, oral skills) at a level appropriate for advanced undergraduates seeking to meet rigorous university standards.
- d. Locate, read, understand, critically evaluate, and apply findings of a research paper(s) in the field of strategy or a related area of business to a strategy problem grounded in the real world.
- e. Comfortably utilize newly refined critical thinking skills in strategy-formulation and implementation contexts.

Evaluation

a. 20%: Final Case Project (Group-based). Written version: Due last class meeting, start of class. Length: maximum 12 pages double-spaced text (~3500 words). Do NOT exceed the length requirements (either number of pages OR number of words). Of the 30%, 15% will be decided based on the final presentation of your case; the other 15% of the grade will be based on the written submission. This will be a group project—your group shares the grades for this project. Grades: Scale of 1-10. See also * below for peer-evaluations of group-based assignments.

b. 30%: Critical notes (Individual) (3 x 10%) pertaining to specific chapters in the textbook (and occasional other materials as mentioned in class). Critical notes examine how well the student thinks critically about the material before it has been discussed in class. Due: at start of any class, but it is not allowed to turn in a critical note AFTER that chapter has been discussed in class. No exceptions. This suggests a payoff to reading ahead and attacking the critical notes aggressively. Length--1 page MAX. double-spaced, Times Roman font, 12 point font minimum, 1 inch margins all around the page. Yes, that is a very short length--penalties (typically -1pt.) apply for breaking ANY of these rules). This part of the class is an exercise in writing concisely to enable managers to quickly read and understand your thoughts. Do not submit a second page—it will not be read. Only the first page will be graded. No title pages, please. Only individual efforts for these submissions are allowed (do not work together). If you do not turn in the required 3 critical notes, any unsubmitted notes will be given 0 credit. Grades: Scale of 0-10. See the website for advice in the form of many hints and tricks regarding how to write a good critical note.

YOUR FIRST CRITICAL NOTE IS REQUIRED TO BE SUBMITTED AT THE START OF EITHER CLASS MEETING 2 or 3. This is so I can get some idea as to the level of the class' writing and critical thinking skills. After that, it is up to individual students to decide for which chapters they wish to write critical notes.

If you are unhappy with your grades for your critical notes (after you have turned in two notes), you may optionally submit up to one extra critical note (for a total of up to four), and the lowest grade will be thrown out and your grade will only reflect your 3 highest graded critical notes. All critical notes turned in under this condition must also meet the other requirements for critical notes laid out above (notably, timing). That is, it is very possible to run out of time for submitting critical notes, since the student is allowed to select the chapters for which he/she submits notes. Note the payoff for reading ahead and staying on top of the critical notes.

c. 15%: In-class participation/leadership (audience participation--individuals & leadership duties-groups). (A) 5% individual participation during others' discussion leadership (when you are in the audience), (B) 10% for your own group's discussion leadership duties (10% for each of two presentations). Regarding (A), a sign-up sheet is used to record people who participated as audience members at the end of class. Regarding (B), when it is your turn to lead the class discussion, you will be graded on the quality of your work (content, presentation), but you will also be graded on how well you stimulate relevant, insightful discussion among other students. This is an important part of the experience in the class—can you lead the other students to participate heavily and remain interested, engaged, and on-topic? See also * below for peer-evaluations of group-based assignments.

d. 30% (3 x 10%): Tests on the readings, each administered in class. NOTE: These tests are more “objective” than the other evaluation elements, in order to make certain that you are doing the reading. Tests may be T/F, multi-

choice, and/or short essay/short answer format. NO WARNING IS GIVEN AHEAD OF. If you read and understand the assigned materials for each class, you will be fine—tests will seem easy, otherwise, expect problems.

e. 5%: Attendance of individuals. Attendance is taken at the end of each class by each student turning in a colored paper with name, signature, and an original unanswered question from the class written on it. Cards are passed out ONLY at the start of class to encourage on-time attendance—they are collected at the end of class (not before). The 5% grade is pro-rated from a 10 based on the fraction of 14 classes attended.

*Regarding grades for group-based assignments only: Each group member will confidentially evaluate all other members (i.e., excluding his- or herself) on a scale of 1-10 at the end of the semester for the quality of each person's contributions to the group. This evaluation shall be weighted as 25% of all group-graded activities. In total, 30% of the final grade is decided by group-based assignments (10% for group discussion leadership + 20% for final project=30%). 20% of that 30% = 6% of the final grade to be decided by student peer evaluations—that is over 1/2 of a whole grade. Student-peer evaluations will be averaged to determine the grade assigned to each person. The instructor controls the remaining 80% of group-based grades. Note that peer-evaluations represent student advice to the instructor on what grade individuals deserve to receive for their group efforts. The advice, while often followed, is not binding on the instructor.

Student Notes:

Schedule

1. Process: For all chapters in the book, activities are broken into 2 parts (both parts happen in each class)—(Part 1) Student-group led summary (brief), critique of the reading, and (optional) case. Part 2: Student-led Case and exercise related to the reading or extending the reading. Ideally, different groups plan and execute Parts 1 and 2 at each class meeting. Collaboration between groups doing parts 1 and 2 in a given class is allowed.

2. Activities:

Date (session number)	Topic	Reading	Activities	Remark
27 Aug. (1)	Introduction to the class.	None	Walk-through Syllabus and requirements. Teams selection, Brief lecture on PBL pedagogy. Note on citations & bibliographies, plagiarism, writing standards, questions. Instructor's view of strategy and essential questions.	Instructor-led, with opp. for audience oral participation. Choose groups. Essential class; miss it and lose your spot in class
4 Sep. (2)	Organizational Purpose	Ch. 11	Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) student-led cases and exercises relating to chapter. Student-led discussion of chapter. Groups going first = Grade +1.	What is the purpose of firms? Why are there firms? How should purpose affect behavior?
11 Sep. (3)	Introduction to Strategy (History)	Ch. 1	Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) student-led cases and exercises relating to chapter	History: Are these tools still usable? What is Strategy?
18 Sep. (4)	Strategic Thinking	Ch. 2	(1) Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) student-led cases and/or exercises relating to chapter. Ch2: First Update: Final projects—1 minute per group, 1 transparency/slide per group.	Game theory and its alternates. Creative (generative) thinking.
25 Sep. (5)	Strategy Formation	Ch. 3	(1) Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) SKIP student-led cases—this class. Keep everything else.	Strategic Planning or Emergent Strategy?
2 Oct (6)	Strategic Change The Organizational Context	Ch. 4, 9	(1) Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) student-led cases and/or exercises relating to chapters	Changing the firm. Control v. Chaos. Leadership.
9 Oct. (7)	Business Level Strategy	Ch. 5	(1) Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) student-led cases and/or exercises relating to chapter. Second Update: Final projects—1 minute per group, 1 transparency/slide per group.	Porter, Porter, Porter (+ the other readings of course). Learn the Porter framework well (including the issues around it)! 5-forces are key!
16 Oct. (8)	Corporate level strategy	Ch. 6	(1) Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) student-led cases and/or exercises relating to chapter.	Strategy for firms with multiple business units.

Date (session number)	Topic	Reading	Activities	Remark
23 Oct. (9) [No off. Hrs. 28 Oct. – new hrs TBA this week]	Network Level Strategy	Ch. 7	(1) Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) student-led cases and/or exercises relating to chapter.	Networks operate at several levels. What are they? Go beyond the book.
30 Oct. (10)	The Industry Context	Ch. 8	(1) Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) student-led cases and/or exercises relating to chapter.	Play by the rules or create a new industry/change the rules?
6 Nov. (11)	The International Context	Ch. 10	(1) Student-led discussion/review/critique of the literature, (2) student-led cases and/or exercises relating to chapter.	The Globalization Debate. Can you use one perspective to express the views of the other perspectives in this chapter? What's missing from discussion?
13 Nov. (12) [no class 20, 27 Nov.]	Workshop—Final Project Update	None.	Time in class to work on project—updates by group of status and remaining problems/issues related to project.	Instructor- facilitated. Possibility: one or two presentations in this class if there are volunteers.
4 Dec. (13)	Final Project Presentations I	None	Students provide critical insights on presenters' work. Presenters: Be concise. A great short presentation is better than a merely "good" long one! Although <u>attendance is required</u> at all classes—be certain NOT to miss this class!	Instructor- facilitated. OK to submit Final Project Paper. IMPORTANT: 10 minutes max + 3 min. Q&A + Critical reflections.
11 Dec. (14)	Final Project Presentations II & Class wrap-up	None	ATTENDANCE REQUIRED.	Submit Final Project Papers at <u>start</u> of class (required).
Bonus on Dec. 11:	10:30am-2:30 pm	None	Consultation for individuals and groups (optional—this is instead of meeting during finals week).	

Assignments in more detail.

a. **Critical Notes.** By the end of the course, you need to have turned in 3 critical notes, each regarding an aspect of a chapter, which we are studying in the textbook. You choose the chapters for which you will write a note. Each critical note should be 1 page long, and meet the requirements noted above. Each note should remark on at least one **major assertion** of the text that you believe is in error, or with which you disagree. Justify your views briefly, but in a convincing manner. Use supporting **evidence** from the material we have read to support your views. **Outside** readings are allowed and encouraged. **Cite all sources** (in-text and reference list). Each critical note must be submitted BEFORE the session in which the chapter is discussed begins (at the beginning of class). Critical notes are graded 0-10. These notes give me an impression of your written communications skills and your ability to think critically (an essential attribute of a competent strategist).

Note: You also MAY have a rare opportunity to visit another class when that class has a guest speaker or a movie. Not all classes have guest speakers. You will be notified in advance when there is a guest speaker. You may write critical notes about these speakers and films (1 note per speaker). Critical notes written for guest speakers or movies are due at the start of class on the LAST day of class, but may be turned in earlier (recommended). **At least one of your critical notes must be written on a chapter from the book.**

b. **Final Project.** The Final project consists of a detailed **case** (a **real** story) that explores strategy formulation and implementation using at least two of the perspectives presented during the course (**each perspective must be from a distinct article in different chapters**). Excellent projects will look through the lens of three perspectives and discuss the prospects for strategy critically. Describe a **real, important and current** strategy **problem**, for your chosen firm that can be described and addressed in terms of one or more of these perspectives. Your analysis should be detailed and illustrate how a specific problem or issue is addressed by applying each perspective. The perspective can be flawed (for example, a strategy is not workable but sounds good on paper, or a strategy neglects some important elements). In this case you should suggest an alternative perspective or a fine-tuning of the existing perspective to achieve high performance. Select a case story that will **interest your fellow students**. Primary research is strongly encouraged and will be rewarded (e.g., original research in the form of surveys, multiple interviews, discussions with principals, primary data analysis, financial data, etc.) Students in the class may be required to sign non-disclosure agreements for projects involving sensitive information. Graded 0-10.

You should NOT select a strategy “story” that has already happened. This class is not about reporting on the past and then saying how well or poorly the firm did as a result of the strategy. Select a firm with current strategy issues. Unsolved issues. Solve them using the tools provided in class and via the book. Again, do NOT pick some strategic event that already happened and report it. This class is about identifying, understanding and solving real, current problems, as well as **building skills** for solving existing and future problems, not validating old solutions.

Thought: I have noticed that many of the best projects shy away from “major” firms everyone has heard of—better (sometimes) to research a small/medium-sized firm and analyze their strategy. Data is often easier to get and you can talk to founders and other top executives. Boutique industries (e.g., energy drinks, haut couture, etc.) are often more interesting to your fellow students. That said, the choice of firm is up to your group. When grading, the following elements are important: How do the perspectives “connect” to each other? Do they complement each other? Does one replace another? Does one treat something the other neglects? The project should answer the all-important question “What should the strategy be?” via your recommendations, which should relate to the perspectives quite clearly. Also, what are the issues (possible problems) surrounding implementation of your strategy? How might these be overcome? Is your strategy recommendation realistic? Why should the reader believe your recommendations? What are your conclusions based on? Applying pure theory? Find examples of others’ work that shows your approach works. Answer these questions to be convincing, which is important. The following firms are NOT allowed for the final project: Starbucks, Wal-Mart, K-Mart, McDonalds. More firms may be added to this list—see the web page for details.

c. **Student-led discussions.** Each team, in addition to the final case, is responsible for leading one or more class discussions pertaining to the chapter for that class meeting. Each chapter is treated in 2 parts, by DIFFERENT teams: (1) Student-led Review and critique of the reading (may use in-text case), and (2) Student-led ORIGINAL REAL cases RESEARCHED FROM THE REAL WORLD and exercises related to the reading or extending the reading. In general, class is oriented towards a student-driven model of education—it is up to the students to provide examples and ideas that lead the class into interesting territory for discussion and analysis—presenters will be rewarded for doing this well.

More specifically on student-led discussions: Discussion leaders will be graded on their ability to stimulate other students' eager participation. Anything goes here: games, group exercises, quizzes, guests, etc. Student discussion leaders are strongly encouraged to go beyond the cases in the book—find other cases, or articles. Part 1 presenters MAY use the case in the book (not recommended—will result in lower evaluation). Part 2 presenters MUST develop their own outside case using MULTIPLE (cited to the class) sources. Creativity and high levels of student participation will be rewarded.

At the time of the presentation, each team will submit a 1 to 2 page digest of their presentation (for distribution to the instructor AND other students). DO NOT simply provide a printed copy of your PowerPoint presentation to the students and instructor (though you may wish to do this in addition to what is required above). The digest addresses two questions, which are related:

1. What (in brief) are the main learning messages in this chapter? 3-5 bullets here will do the job. Less is more.
2. What are the useful tool(s) presented by the chapter (show how the tool(s) can be used briefly).

Rule of thumb for the digest: Create something useful for the other students—make them WANT to save this document. Digests are required for both part 1 and Part 2 presentations. No digests are required for final project presentations.

Note: For Part 1 presenters: an important part of this presentation is your ability to offer relevant critical reflections on the material in the text: What is wrong with the material? How could it be better? What element(s) does it fail to take into account? Are there many counter-examples to the text's assertions?

Internationally-focused analysis/discussion is particularly interesting, though not required. IMPORTANT: If you come from a place that is interesting to the other students, or have some particular in-depth interest/experience/strength on which you can draw, you are encouraged to use this for the benefit of the other students' learning experiences.

Breaking down Part 1 and Part 2 presentations in-class:

Part 1:

-Brief literature summary (max-10 min, 5 min preferred—we all read the material before class, right?)

-Critique of the literature (where do the articles in the chapter fail or fall short of expectations? What is missing? What is wrong?)

-Case presentation and analysis (from the book or an outside case). It is STRONGLY encouraged to use an outside case—you research the case using multiple sources.

Part 2:

-Outside case (no in-the-book case allowed). This must be different from the Part 1 case. It is allowed to coordinate between groups to avoid problems here.

-Exercise/Activity-The heart of Part 2. Students, in consultation with the instructor, execute an exercise, which allows other students to have the “feeling” of one or more perspectives in action.

IT IS REQUIRED TO MEET OR OTHERWISE INTERACT WITH THE INSTRUCTOR PRIOR TO ALL IN-CLASS PRESENTATIONS IN ORDER TO DISCUSS POSSIBLE APPROACHES/REFINEMENTS FOR YOUR PRESENTATIONS.

Acceptable “meetings” with the instructor include email (keeping the whole group in the loop), in-person (at SF State or in Palo Alto), by phone (not preferred, but acceptable in a pinch—use for quick questions).

Notes:

Assigned Reading. Assigned reading material MUST be read before class. This will not only enhance your understanding and retention of class presentations, but will equip you to participate in class discussions and team activities. Students are responsible for having a solid command of all assigned materials, whether or not they are covered in class. Also, you need to read the material to pass the tests.

Class Participation. Participation is an important part of the class, and will contribute to your grade. Opportunities to participate will arise during discussions in class. Ignoring participation will affect your grade (really).

Use of overhead transparencies and other media is allowed and encouraged. Notify the instructor as early as possible of any special requirements (e.g., PowerPoint-capable setups, etc.). Equipment resources are often scarce. Guidelines will be discussed further in class.

Attendance at every class is expected. If you are unable to attend on a particular day due to illness or emergency, please inform the instructor in advance by e-mail or in writing. Business-related travel or needing to work is NOT a basis for an excused absence. Poor attendance WILL affect grades. Under no circumstances should students miss more than 2 classes. Differently-abled students should contact the instructor if these evaluation procedures are not appropriate. If you miss a class, contact your group members for the material you missed.

Guidelines for Written Material

The written material submitted is expected to show a level of scholarship appropriate for advanced undergraduate business courses. Syntax, spelling and other grammatical problems should be corrected prior to submission, and material should be carefully reviewed for clarity. Style guidelines for the main written assignments will be discussed in detail in class. Generally, students will be held to a strict professional writing standard; it is acceptable to ask a fellow student or friend to review written submissions.

HINT: Have a friend whose English you trust review your written work (all of it—critical notes, digests, written final project) BEFORE it is submitted, and suggest changes. Make the changes, and learn from them.

Important. Evidence of plagiarism may be the basis for failing the class or worse--cases will be referred to the University administration for appropriate action. Don't try it. It is NOT worth it. Plagiarism occurs when you knowingly use someone else's words or ideas without giving them proper credit. If you plagiarize and get caught, you will NOT graduate this semester, because you may fail the class as a result. Use in-text citations and bibliographic references to avoid this issue. Class handouts will be provided to support this anti-plagiarism initiative.

Reminder. Paraphrasing from the College-level policies: Students must enroll in classes during the first 4 weeks of the semester. They will not be permitted to add later even if they have attended all classes, and otherwise completed all course requirements. University policy is that withdrawals are permitted only for serious and compelling reasons. College of Business policy prohibits students from withdrawing from the same course (e.g., BUS 690) more than once.

Policy on re-grading material.

Any material may be submitted for re-grade (except presentations). The conditions of the re-grade are as follows:

0. Before you submit something for re-grading, you should be aware, that once you submit it for a re-grade, the original grade may go UP OR DOWN. Your original grade is not "safe."
1. Submit original work with instructor comments on it (if any). Also submit attached to the original work, a 1-page, typed, explanation of why the grade should be changed. No emails, faxes, orals, etc.
2. Instructor will review materials submitted in this format. No material will be reviewed unless it conforms to this format for review.
3. Instructor will notify you of the results of the re-grade.