

Greetings! I want to welcome you to this final (or near final) course in your MBA pursuit. I thought I'd take the opportunity to share the challenges we face, and to offer some advice for your preparation.

First and foremost, this will be an intensive, stimulating and (I hope) compelling experience. Content and application to the current business environment drive the first half of the semester. There are team activities throughout to assist in developing your dynamics and critical capability. Your presentations, writings and constructive question & answer sessions following each presentation drive the second half of the semester. In brief, there is a lot of reading for the first few weeks, and a lot of research, writing and crafting the rest of the semester. To help you use your time wisely, here are a few of recommendations:

- Begin reading all materials right away. Read the lecture notes posted in the “lessons” folder for each topical area. My discussions will assume that you are prepared. We will be moving quickly. You will need to ask about concepts you want clarity on if I don't cover them. This course is supported by samples of excellent presentations and papers authored by previous students. You will find them in ilearn, in the “lessons” folder, under “sample analyses”.
- Begin working with your team right away. Team composition will be defined in the syllabus.
- Create fair and reasonable schedules with your team members. Everyone's concerns and needs should be taken into account when schedules are being developed.

The course structure should make it easy for you to readily identify where all materials related to a topic area can be found- in “Lessons”. Here you will find my discussion notes and the articles you are to read that supplement the text. I have uploaded them for your convenience. Here you will also find administrative stuff that we will need during the semester. More about that later, but feel free to look.

This course will go deep with knowledge instead of wide. We focus on strategy formulation and not implementation, although I do provide a Harvard Business Review article on the topic. We will limit the number of cases we use, but still ensure that the chosen industries provide you with experience in both the manufacturing and service sectors. This will facilitate your wrapping your minds around competitive intricacies- giving you greater focus on strategic thinking. Also, we will commence a war game from the beginning of the semester. (War game methodology is explained in the syllabus. Briefly, each team is assigned a firm in the same industry. At the end of the semester, all presentations will be offered simultaneously, as if competitors are viewing each other's plans. After Q&A, teams have the opportunity to offer adjusted strategic recommendations). This process will enable you to really conceptualize your strategic recommendations and their implications both managerial and financial.

The war game will also serve as our cohesive case. You will apply concepts, submit your work and I will comment on it. We will also have two conference calls following your submission of war game cohesive assignments. Each team will be asked to conduct a case analysis before the war game engages fully, so that you have experience crafting and presenting. Then, we will launch the war game.

To conclude your semester, as your final project, you will be asked to craft a strategic plan for your firm, or a division of your firm, or a firm that you are personally interested in. This will provide you with an opportunity to perform separately from your team and to apply all that you have mastered in a personally meaningful way. Rest assured that I manage these assignments as if I have signed a non-disclosure agreement, meaning, whatever information about your firm that you reveal in your work is held in the strictest confidence

Another ingredient in our learning is the inclusion of discussion leaders for readings and current event overviews. Again, given that we have the time to really digest what we are learning, we can go deeper by actually discussing the implications of the literature and how we see it manifest in the business environment.

This semester I have decided to use an executive strategy text. What this means to you is that it is much thinner, with rounding coming from the HBR articles, discussions and my lecture notes. The text we will be using is “Strategy: A View from the TOP”, de Kluyver & Pearce, Pearson/Prentice Hall ISBN 9780136041405.

This semester I have created an e-book for the two Harvard Business Review cases that we will use- it is less expensive and easier for you to retrieve. I will have access information regarding this casebook for you the first week of class. The casebook will not be needed until the second half of the semester.

We will be assisted this semester by “Josie” Mazzaferro. Josie graduated in June and is currently applying to PhD programs in strategy. She is extremely bright, did very well in the class and I am certain will be a great asset to us all.

I post announcements at least once a week to remind you of what is coming due. I also post requirements in the calendar function and I will be checking my email often and respond to all queries within 48 hours. I have included my home telephone number. It is to be used to clarify time sensitive issues and questions, and with extreme discretion. It is my intention to have the course ready and open the Friday before our official start date (8/28).

This will be a demanding, yet deep learning experience. I look forward to our journey together.

All the Best

Helen