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. 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 a website that contains chapter notes, samples of excellent presentations and papers authored by previous students. www.academic.marist.edu/strat

- Begin working with your team right away. Although the semester begins on Tuesday September 2, the course will open on Friday August 29. The teams are 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.

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. Teams will then 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 play out in the business environment.

The course structure should make it easy for you to readily identify where all materials related to a topic area can be found- in packets. Instead of having you purchase a readings book, all readings will be uploaded into the packets.

Lastly, I have custom designed your text and cases using Primis. It draws from the McGraw-Hill book by Thompson, Strickland & Gamble- “Crafting and Executing Strategy 15th edition”. The Primis version excludes a couple of chapters and the cases. It is available from the Marist bookstore. While I know many of you like to buy your books more frugally elsewhere, the customized books do price substantially lower than a traditional text would. Also, I created a separate text and cases book so that if you choose to not keep your text, you can sell it for spring semester use. The cases that we use will not be used again for at least 2 years.

Our casebook includes 3 or 4 Harvard Business school cases- thus we only pay for what we use. This semester I have created an e-book- 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.

The College is migrating to a new technology base for on-line learning and we will be using it- ilearn. You can access it through
ilearn.marist.edu. It is an intuitive platform—some of it easier than elearning some of it a bit not—but nothing major. Please go the site and use the tutorial to familiarize yourself with it. I will also post helpful notes as the semester proceeds.

I tend to post announcements a few times a week and I will be checking my email often, so we will be engaged in this odyssey together. I have included my home telephone number. It is to be used to clarify time sensitive issues and questions, and with extreme discretion.

If our registration exceeds 21 students, I will call upon Andrey Pavlov to help manage the class. Otherwise, he will assist during the Jewish Holidays and on other occasions. He is a wealth of knowledge and has worked with me for years in many capacities. You will learn more about Andrey in my course greeting.

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

All the Best

Helen