

Seminar in Administrative Policy

Business Administration 478

Section: D300

Term: 2006 Spring

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Discussion Topics: Course Objectives:

This course builds students' ability to analyze and develop business strategies by introducing frameworks and tools to understand the nature of competition in general and to analyze the specific competitive position and strategic options of a given firm. Students will learn frameworks for analyzing industry structure, internal capabilities, and competitive interaction, as well as how to use those frameworks to critique a specific firm's competitive position and develop and evaluate strategic alternatives.

Course Content

The study of Business Strategy is essentially the study of competition: how firms interact with other firms and with their external environment more broadly and how those interactions affect firms' relative performance - i.e., who wins and why? This course starts with the premise that a business strategy is a "plan to compete," or more precisely, a plan to out-compete one's rivals. Ideally such a plan specifies the firm's objectives and the key choices and trade-offs it is making to achieve those objectives in the face of competition from other firms (for example, what market position it will occupy and how it will allocate its scarce resources); in other words, how it will achieve a competitive advantage.

In this context, strategic analysis - the analysis that supports the development of a strategy - requires first an understanding of the nature of competition in general and second an understanding of the specific competitive context faced by a given firm. In particular, strategic analysis involves assessing the competitive landscape, including the structure of the firm's industry; the firm's own internal strengths and weaknesses; and the strengths and weaknesses of its existing and potential rivals. The course emphasizes two themes throughout: (1) the development of a healthy skepticism regarding analyses of firms in the business press; and (2) the importance of recognizing that most strategic decisions involve tradeoffs, as opposed to one right answer. Specific topics include:

- Industry Structure Analysis

- Competitive Positioning

- Internal Capabilities (Strengths and Weaknesses)

- Organizational Structure

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- Competitor Analysis
- Strategic Decision-making Processes

Grading: Assignments and Grading:

Students will be evaluated on the basis of several inputs:

(a) individual written assignments and a midterm examination; (b) a group project involving both a presentation and written report; and (c) individual participation in classroom discussions.

Individual written analyses

In addition to developing your familiarity with the course material, these assignments will also serve to provide you with feedback on your writing skill which can be incorporated in the final group reports.

Midterm Examination

A midterm examination will test knowledge of the analytic tools presented in the first two-thirds of the course. The exam will consist of a multiple choice section and a written analysis of a brief business case. There is no final exam.

Group Strategic Analysis

Students will form groups of 4-5 students in the second week. These groups will conduct a strategic analysis of a company chosen from a pre-defined list. In the second half of the course, groups will make an in-class presentation of their preliminary analyses. Then, with feedback from the presentation, they will hand in a written analysis.

Participation in Discussions

The frameworks of Strategic Analysis are fairly simple in concept, but harder in application. Thus, in-class discussions of specific cases are essential to developing proficiency in using the frameworks. Since case discussions hinge on students contributing to each other's learning, participation by all class members is not only encouraged but required.

Positive participation evaluations will follow from either (a) frequent, relevant comments throughout, or (b) noticeable improvement in participation rates over the course of the term. Case discussions will often be initiated by the professor calling on a student to offer his or her assessment of the key issues in the case.

Grading Criteria

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5% Individual Written Analysis

20% Participation in Class Discussions

30% Midterm Examination

20% Group Presentation of Strategic Analysis

25% Group Written Report of Strategic Analysis

100%

These weightings are subject to change and will be revisited in the first class session. The final grade distribution for the course will adhere to the Faculty of Business Administration norms. The mean grade will be a B or equivalent to a GPA of 3.0.

Required Texts: 1. Crossan, Fry and Killing, Strategic Analysis and Action, 6th ed., Prentice-Hall, 2004.

ISBN 0131278223

2. Oster, Modern Competitive Analysis, Oxford University Press, 1999.

ISBN 01

Recommended Texts:

Materials/Supplies:

Prerequisite/Corequisite: Prerequisites: 90 credit hours; BUS 207, BUS 312, BUS 343, BUS 360, and one of BUS 374 or BUS 381

Notes:

This outline is derived from a course outline repository database that was maintained by SFU Student Services and the University's IT Services Department. The database was retired in 2014 and the data migrated to SFU Archives in 2015.