

Seminar In General Management And Strategy (Bus 401)
Orfalea College of Business, Cal Poly

Class Time and Location. Mondays & Wednesdays 8:10-10:00 am: Bldg 3, Room 300A

Mondays & Fridays 10:10-12:00 pm: Bldg 3,
Room 305 on Mondays
Room 300A on Fridays

Your Instructor. Alison Mackey, Ph.D., MBA, MOB
03-414, OCOB, Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, CA 93407

Student Hours. Individual assistance is always available by appointment. I also plan to provide assistance before and after class in Room 300A and on Mondays and Wednesdays from 10:00-11:00 am in my office, 03-414.

How To Reach Me. Email me at ProfessorMackey@gmail.com
Call or text me at 805-400-8797

Course Description. Think for a moment about the role of corporations in people's lives. Most people spend the majority of their lives either working for corporations or using their products or services. Our lives are tied to the success of corporations either directly through our employment, retirement, or indirectly through the health of the economy. What determines the success of corporations? Why do some companies succeed while others fail? And, what, if anything, can managers actually do about it?

These topics are the focus of strategic management. Understanding these topics is vital for individuals, organizations, and societies. In the course, you will have the opportunity to learn about the fundamentals of strategy, and specifically different theoretical framework that help answer these fundamental questions. You will complete the course with the ability to explain—and some practice in doing—the fundamentals of strategic management. You will also be well positioned to critically evaluate how organizations formulate and implement strategies.

This course is designed to provide senior undergraduate-level participants with an overview of strategic management. This course is referred to as a capstone course to a business undergraduate degree. Our focus is strategic management in established, for-profit organizations, yet much content applies to other organizational settings (government, entrepreneurial, and not-for-profit entities).

Course Objectives. Some of the specific skills you will obtain in this course are listed here, as well as the reason why these skills are important. All of these skills will help you to become an informed decision-maker about competition in situations in which resources are scarce and performance matters. This course is designed to prepare you to deal with and make sense of ambiguous and imperfect information in the real world.

Educational Objectives of the Course

1. Learn diagnostic reasoning skills
2. Improve communication skills
3. Learn, understand, and apply “strategy toolkit” to analyze any strategic situation

College and University Learning Objectives

This course covers the following BSBA Program Learning Objectives:

- LO 1.1: Apply knowledge to identify opportunities and solve business problems.
- LO 4.1: Demonstrate effective written communication skills.
- LO 4.3: Demonstrate effective participation in teams.

Positioning You to “Hit the Ground Running.” Employers today have little time or resources to bring new hires up-to-speed on business management fundamentals. Decades ago, employers had extensive internal training programs to teach recent hires what they would actually be doing each day; this allowed schools to focus primarily (or perhaps almost exclusively) on theory. Employer training programs, although still existing in some form, are not as extensive as they used to be. Rather, employers expect new hires need to have fundamental business management proficiencies from the moment they are hired so they “hit the ground running” (i.e., contribute to the organization from the time of hire).

Indeed, many individuals describe their intern or initial job experiences as ‘baptism by fire:’ an unpleasant, intense learning experience. Such individuals report that employers expected them to not only know the fundamentals of management, but also to perform in highly ambiguous situations with little assistance or direction from managers. Indeed, employers indicate a strong preference for employees who require little “hand-holding,” which occurs when managers spell-out exactly what an employee is to do, how, and when. Employers expect that they will need to handhold employees through ambiguous situations when those employees have far less education and earn far less than graduates from good schools.

When hiring a management student from top schools such as Cal Poly, employers expect the student to “be able to act independently.” Interestingly, this is a substantial transition if the student is highly accustomed to courses with detailed rubrics, or explicit set of criteria shared with students to help them figure out how to do work based upon how it will be graded. A rubric usually also includes specific ranges of achievement for each criterion, and sometimes includes work or performance samples that typify each of those levels (e.g., to earn an A, the essay will be free of typos).

Think for a moment what these rubrics do. They eliminate ambiguity. They create structure. It is the teacher who creates the structure (not the student). Thus, by providing this structure, in some ways, a rubric ‘handholds’ a student, spelling out specifically what to do, how, and when to do it. Although rubrics are handy for students and aid learning in many ways, if rubrics are persistently used over one’s entire educational career, students are unprepared for the ambiguity of the workplace.

In other words, students are not prepared to “create their own structure” in ambiguous situations.

Because being able to create your own structure in ambiguous situations is vital to your success, I will help you learn how to create structure in any situation. We will practice using these tools extensively because being comfortable with ambiguity is a way you can positively differentiate yourself for employers.

About Your Instructor. My doctorate in Business Administration is from The Ohio State University. My emphases were business strategy and economics. My Masters in Business Administration, my Masters in Organizational Behavior, and my undergraduate degree in economics are all from Brigham Young University. I worked in industry and consulting for several years. While a consultant, my clients included tech companies like Intel, retailers such as Fingerhut, and health care providers such as Intermountain Health Care.

In consulting, one of my favorite parts of my job was coaching managers in how to do their job more effectively. These individuals, like you, had degrees from fabulous programs and much going for them. I was quite surprised by some of the challenges they faced in the workplace. Because of my interest in preparing the next generation of management professionals, I quit my job, got my Ph.D., and became a professor. I have been a professor for seven years. I love what I do, my vocation is my vacation.

A substantial part of my job here at Cal Poly is doing research and writing papers. Here, my focus is exactly what we talk about in class: strategic management. Specifically, I study how firms utilize their resources (like managers and top executives) to generate competitive advantage.

How can you best succeed in this course?

Realize that the way I teach may very well be the exact opposite of what you have experienced in many classes with regard to what is called: “initial exposure” of concepts. In most classes you’ve taken, the instructor has probably introduced you (given you your initial exposure) to course content. This provides initial exposure, establishes structure, and reduces ambiguity. In such situation, it was likely the most efficient use of your time and best for learning to read the texts after the lecture.

All types of teaching approaches are valuable and develop different skills. Despite the many advantages of instructors doing initial exposure, there is however, a problem. The instructor doing the “initial exposure” takes away from students the learning opportunity of making sense of new material and creating their own structure. This is a critical workplace skill—one that employers want our graduates to be better at. Thus, in this class, I will not be providing you with initial exposure to concepts. This gives you the opportunity to practice critical workplace skills while in school. What’s the implication for you? You need to do your initial exposure to the text before class.

If you are waiting for me to hold your hand and walk you through the textbook, you’ll be waiting a long time! I don’t do that. Similarly, on the job, your boss isn’t going to

walk you through all of the background material for your projects. (And they won't provide you with learning objectives).

The purpose of our class time is to amplify, explain, discuss, and demonstrate some of the material presented in the text. Our discussion will focus on questions you have about the learning objectives and concepts you are struggling with. We've all needed help understanding something at some point in our lives. If you find yourself not understanding the readings or if are struggling with a learning objective, bring this up during class. Chances are many of your classmates are having the same challenge. We will work through your questions together. The reason we have class time is to have these types of discussions.

Unique Aspects of My Teaching

I am a firm believer in assessing learning in different ways. You'll notice this two ways. First, you'll notice a focus on formative assessments, which are non-graded assignments that:

- Inform me of what you are getting and not getting, so I can adapt my plans for how we spend class time and find other ways to convey concepts
- Give you feedback—and if warranted, confidence—regarding if you are getting it.

Some formative assessments are in class (you may not even know we are doing them), while others are available on PolyLearn. Like all course content, it is ultimately your choice whether or not you do these. Do one for each module, do them all... do them consistently, inconsistently... your call.

Relative to learners who don't do formative assessments, individuals who do engage in this type of learning are:

- Highly likely to do better on interim and summative assessments (graded) than individuals who don't.
- More likely to have an understanding of what course content they "get" and what requires more work.
- Less likely to experience severe stress about the course during finals week.

Instructional Philosophy. You and I are responsible for making this course a positive learning experience. I love to teach and believe students wouldn't enroll in school if they didn't want to learn. I will do my best to:

1. Expose you to "real-world" business challenges,
2. Integrate course material with conceptual tools that allow you to gain a sense of mastery (and develop confidence in your ability to recognize similar situations in the future), and

3. Promote independent thinking with respect to strategy topics and phenomena.

Role of Writing. Research has shown a connection between critical thinking and writing. Critical thinking skills are essential for the strategist. Thus, In this course you will be doing a lot of writing. Some of the writing will be formal and graded and some will be informal and you will receive class engagement “credit” for doing these writings.

Role of Reading Assignments. In this course I **require** and **reward** deep reading. Deep reading may not be a skill you have yet acquired as academic culture tends to reward surface learning of difficult texts. You are all fabulous students so you know exactly how to read a text to extract the “right answers” for a quiz or a test, cramming right before, retaining the information for a short while, and then moving on with life. Surface reading has served you well thus far, but as you move on in your educational life and career, it will be less effective for you. Some of you may be headed to graduate school at some point. Some of you may be headed to jobs in which you will routinely read difficult texts. In these contexts you will have to read texts that are difficult and for which you are not the intended audience—meaning, you won’t possess the background knowledge, cultural codes, and genre awareness needed for complete understanding.

Part of the required and rewarded deep reading for this course will be the following class features:

- Course Preparation Assignments (CPAs)
- Reading guides for assigned readings
- No lecture over assigned readings
- Students are responsible for text not covered in class

What Happens in the Classroom. Students expecting a traditional lecture-based course with heavy reliance on PowerPoint will be surprised. For various reasons, I do not make extensive use of PowerPoint. Those PowerPoint slides that I do use are to focus discussion and are unhelpful for note-taking purposes, so there is no need for you to print any PowerPoint slides or materials before each class. To guide your note-taking and structure class discussion and your thinking, I do define learning objectives.

- If you speak English as a second language and are struggling to understand what happens during class (e.g., because I do not read from overheads), let me know and I will work with you to aid your transition.

Such an “unstructured” environment can be quite an adjustment for students. However, it is an important adjustment because it mirrors the workplace, where people do not receive overheads for meetings that will take place weeks or months from now, or know exactly what will happen during meetings.

To provide some structure, modules are defined which are the topic for a series of classes. Also, the readings / cases due for each class give an indication of what we’ll be discussing. And students are assigned “class preparation questions” for each class.

During class, we'll talk about these questions, which are learning objectives and I'll look to the "assigned students" to jump in and lead the discussion.

How Can You Best Succeed?

Engaging with the Material. I hope you "engage with the material" in and outside of class. What do I mean by this? A student who is engaging with the material actively reads course content and thinks about what we are discussing. Such a student will note things that surprise them—and make me and others aware of these surprises so we can all learn. A student who engages with course material will also do what is a very important skill in the workplace—be making connections between class and everyday occurrences. That is, a student who engages with course material will begin to see that "Strategy is all around us" and share examples.

I hope you'll engage with the material because I have found it is the best way to learn the material (and it makes our class sessions more fun for all involved). So know that I welcome your comments, thoughts, questions, and hope you take an active role in the in-class discussions.

An Invitation to "See Strategy Everywhere." Being very quiet during business meetings is a common rookie mistake. There is no shame in that, and no doubt, your first business meetings can be intimidating situations. Indeed, I remember making the same mistake at my first job.

You can do better. The reality is that those who excel in their careers know that in business (and grad school!) it is "cool" to talk during meetings. And, those who excel can take any business meeting topic (production schedules, market downturns, launching a new product) and make it relate to their work. Executives appreciate this curiosity, creativity, and initiative. I didn't do this because I didn't know how. If I did know how, I would have. I simply wasn't trained and didn't have enough experience to "See Strategy in Everything".

This ability to "see the Strategy in almost anything" differentiates performers at all levels, including interns and entry-level jobs. I want you to do well throughout your careers, not only in this course. So I hope you use our classroom as a laboratory/safe place to experiment with how to "see Strategy in everything" and practice communicating your ideas to me and your classmates. This positions you to be well-prepared to persuade your future workplace colleagues that Strategy is all around them as well.

Classroom as the Workplace. To prepare you for the workplace, we will treat the classroom as workplace. That is, because this class is offered to prepare you for the business world, the dress for class is business casual. This is to help you learn about and feel comfortable with workplace dress and behavior before you get there. The "assignments" you do for this class will be produced in a deliverable format similar to what is expected in the workplace instead of the classroom.

Course Materials

Required Texts. We will use the following texts during the quarter.

1. *Course packet* of Harvard cases available through Harvard Business School Press. A link to the packet will be emailed to the class.
2. *Real World Strategy* by Jeff Dyer, Paul Godfrey, Robert Jensen, and David Bryce. This text is available, free of charge, on PolyLearn.

Optional Readings.

1. *The Wall Street Journal*
2. *StrategyProfs.net* (Blog authored by strategy professors across the world)
3. *What I Didn't Learn in Business School: How Strategy Works in the Real World*, by J.B. Barney
4. *The Art of Strategy: A Game Theorist's Guide to Success in Business and Life* by A.K. Dixit and B.J. Nalebuff
5. *Thinking Strategically: The Competitive Edge in Business, Politics, and Everyday Life*, by A.K. Dixit and B.J. Nalebuff

Why optional readings? I developed the optional reading list for a number of reasons. Foremost, the readings provide an opportunity for those interested to go beyond the material provided in the required materials and examine in more detail specific topics that interest them as emerging professionals. Second, too often, students simply accept what they see in a text (or what I say) as the truth without critically evaluating the information. My hope is that you will start (if you haven't already) being critical of what you are reading and hearing by drawing upon your own experiences and other knowledge. I have carefully selected the optional readings because they are provocative and provide a different perspective to the required texts.

Assessing Your Learning

The course elements, and their weightings, are listed in the following table.

Four to Five Deliverables. Deliverables are opportunities to do the projects that managers, business analysts, and consultants do, practicing how to apply, synthesize, analyze, and present information. Deliverables include case reports for the cases that we discuss in class. assignments. We use the term deliverable because it is used in the workplace. The point value varies with complexity of the deliverable.	20%
Two Exams. There are two exams in the course. Each exam consists of short-answer, fill in the blank, and case-based essay questions. The content is class preparation (reading objectives) and additional material and class learning objectives. Both exams are midterms.	40%
Formal Paper. Strategic analysis of a business.	20%
Class Engagement. Discussed in <i>Engagement with the Material</i> and <i>An Invitation to See Strategy Everywhere</i> sections of syllabus.	20%
	100%

A Note about Attendance. You should attend every class. I understand that extenuating circumstances arise that can make this difficult. No need to send me an email but do get with your classmates to connect on class notes and discuss in detail what happened during class.

If circumstances make you miss three or more classes during the quarter, you have overextended yourself and should consider dropping the class.

Relative to missed exams or assignments, unfortunately a part of life is illness, death in the family or other traumatic events. A make-up exam (or opportunity to make-up deliverables) will be given if you contact me within 24 hours of the due date and provide documentation.

Other Considerations

*Anyone needing special accommodations because of a disability or other unique circumstances should notify the instructor as early in the course as possible. Students with special needs are responsible for making the instructor aware of their situation. If you have a disability for which you are or may be requesting an accommodation, you also are required to contact the Disability Resource Center, Building 124, Room 119 at 805-756-1395 at the **beginning** of the quarter.*

If you have any questions or concerns about a grade you receive, follow this process: Write a clear, typed explanation regarding the task graded and why you think the assigned grade does not reflect the quality of your performance. Note that “because I worked hard on this and you graded it wrong” is not a compelling rationale. Instead, in your write-up, refer to specific textbook pages and class discussion notes or handouts that support your perspective. Within one week of when you received the grade, submit the appeal through email. Then, take initiative to follow up with the instructor regarding your appeal. Appeals must be received within one week of when your work is returned. All such appeals will be carefully considered and the entire assignment or exam may be re-graded.

Note that if you ask the instructor questions about your grade, you will be directed back to your personal record of assignment grades and the syllabus and told to follow the process outlined. *The time to be concerned about your grade isn't within the last week or two of the quarter, but rather throughout the quarter.*

Students are highly encouraged to use the Cal Poly University Writing and Rhetoric Center. The Writing Center provides individualized consulting related to project planning, drafting, and editing. FYI, even as a professor, I regularly get help with my writing to continuously improve. Cal Poly's Writing and Rhetoric Center is world-class. Consider taking advantage of this resource. Visit their website at <http://www.writingcenter.calpoly.edu/content/writlab/index>.

Academic dishonesty will not be tolerated. Any suspicion of academic misconduct will be acted upon in accordance with university policy. Note that plagiarism at Cal Poly is defined very differently than it is at some other academic institutions, especially

universities outside of the U.S. Plagiarism rules are strict here. For example, the copying and pasting of any text from the Internet without appropriately acknowledging the source through a citation (such as: Author name, year: www.xxxxxxxxx.com) is plagiarism.

The consequences of plagiarism are serious—including failure of the course, referral to the Vice President of Student Affairs for discipline, and potential removal from the university. Please be very careful about plagiarism—acknowledge your sources and/or write original material.