COMPETITIVE STRATEGY (MBA 604)

COURSE CONTENT
Welcome! This course is intended as an introduction to strategic management, or how to distinguish a firm from its competitors in the marketplace. As a graduate level instructor, my primary goal is to help you along your professional development path, regardless of whether you work at a Fortune 500 organization or the local retail store. At the end of the semester, my aim is to make you a better strategist. To that end, I try to be topical and applied. In today’s VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous) environment, businesses need to pay heed to technological disruptions, hyper-globalization, political instability etc. This makes the need for strategy more crucial than ever. However, as you will learn, strategy involves a way of thinking using an amalgam of concepts and ideas. Moreover, as I hope to show you, strategy extends to the domain of business model design – the two domains are inextricably linked. Over the course of the next five weeks, we will review the basic precepts of strategy and then migrate to connecting the engine that can realize an intended (and, at times, an accidental) strategy, namely the business model. By recognizing the interrelated and symbiotic relationship between a company’s strategy and its business model you will gain a concrete understanding of how to achieve a company’s long-term competitive advantage. Moreover, this course will lay the foundation for the Advanced Strategy Seminar where you learn additional skills and acquire complementary tools to round out your ability to think and act strategically.

HOW THE COURSE WILL BE TAUGHT
This course will rely on case studies, established theory, real world examples, and classroom discussion. Do not expect a traditional lecture in which I speak and you take notes – my role here is as ‘facilitator’ to bring together frameworks and their application; in fact, in certain aspects many of you possess a knowledge that far exceeds my own. Similarly, I couldn’t hope to have the experience you have within your own organization and industry. We have a great deal to learn from each other. Therefore, it’s up to us COLLECTIVELY to make this an enriching, dynamic and informative class. Given the course only lasts 5 weeks, each class will require heavy preparation as well as active class participation from each student.

OBJECTIVES OF THE COURSE
1. Appreciate the challenges general managers face in uncertain and volatile environments.
2. Understand basic questions and concepts of strategic management and business model design.
3. Learn concepts and tools of strategic analysis and how to apply them.
4. Recognize the value, challenges and shortcomings of the tools of strategic analysis.
5. Distinguish business models from strategies, grasp their importance, and appreciate the interrelationship between the two.
6. Realize your role as strategist and what it entails.

Required Articles (on Moodle)
- “What is Strategy?” M. Porter
Required Case Studies (on Moodle)
- myMuesli: New Markets for Customized Breakfast Cereal

REQUIREMENTS/GRADING

1. Individual Strategic Analysis 40%
2. Individual Business Model Analysis 40%
3. Class Participation/Contribution 20%

1. Individual Analyses
   In the Week 2 of the course, you will be assigned an individual case study. You will be assigned another individual case study the last week of our session together. Both assignments will involve you conducting in-depth strategic analyses of a particular company in a specific industry using the strategy frameworks discussed in class. Grading will be based on the “tightness” of your arguments using the tools at your disposal: did you apply the frameworks correctly? Does your analysis reflect critical thinking? To what extent does your analysis support your reasoning and conclusion?

3. Class Participation and Contribution
   Seeing that we only have a handful of sessions together your class participation is a critical element of this class. I fully appreciate that many of you are working professionals with numerous obligations (e.g. travel, family); however this class is driven by student preparation and participation; as such, attendance is crucial to a successful class. There is no extra credit or make up work - if you are going to miss a class, still prepare the material, and then get any class notes or materials from a team mate. Students learn from each other by openly stating their insights. Active participation is also good practice as passive behavior finds little reward in the business world. Absences will reflect negatively on your final grade. If you cannot attend a session, please notify me in advance. While I realize that active participation may not overlap with everyone’s learning style, it is a good habit to have. Effective oral communication is critical to every manager and business professional (as is respect for others). Excellent participation consists of relevant, well-stated opinions said openly in class that build logically upon readings, peer comments, materials discussed, etc. Feel free to challenge your peers and your instructor. Contributions are not just talking in class, however; they include attentive listening to others, active participation in in-class group projects, asking questions, office visits, bringing relevant articles to our attention, etc. Being on time for class and regular attendance are expected. Everybody must have read the assigned material. As is the case with real world work environments, you are judged not by what you know but by what you contribute. With respect to the cases, you should be able to identify key issues, apply concepts discussed in class previously to the case and address each of the discussion questions in class. Thus I recommend you rely on your groups to meet and discuss cases before class.
ABOUT YOUR INSTRUCTOR
Prior to academia, I was a director with a Los Angeles-based boutique merchant bank, Stephens & Partners, where I initiated, raised capital for, and managed leveraged buyout strategies and transactions for private equity firms. In this role, I raised over $150 million in private equity capital, in the process helping to found Intelligrated, a U.S.-based materials handling company. I was also responsible for managing acquisitions and divestitures for private and publicly-traded firms across a variety of industries, including logistics, medical device manufacturing, water filtration and purification, consumer products, publishing, and e-commerce. My early career was spent in sales and business development in publishing, direct marketing, and e-commerce in Los Angeles, New York and Europe, working with clients such as Staples, Auto-by-tel, Conde Nast, and 101Communications. I also had an opportunity to be part of an internet start-up called Shop2Give which, while enjoying some initial success and media coverage, joined the many casualties of the dot.com bust of the early millennium. These days, I assist companies on issues dealing with strategy, business models, turnaround and leadership.

I was born in Switzerland and spent my early childhood in Zurich, Brussels, and London, moving to the U.S. when I was in my teens. I received my B.A. in Asian Studies (Japanese) from Cornell University, an M.A. with Fellowship in Publishing and Media from New York University, an MBA from the University of Southern California’s Marshall School of Business, and a Ph.D. in Management from the University of Massachusetts, Amherst. In my free time, I enjoy spending time with my wife Daphne and my four children, Madeline, Alexandra, Nicholas, and Rachel.

GENERAL COURSE POLICY

1. **Academic Honesty**
   Plagiarism, cheating, or any form of dishonesty will at a minimum result in a zero point grade for the assignment. All students must practice academic honesty. Academic misconduct is subject to an academic penalty by the course instructor and/or disciplinary sanction by the University. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at [http://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/dean-of-students/default.php](http://www.umt.edu/student-affairs/dean-of-students/default.php)

2. **Class Notes**
   You can find copies of materials, readings, this syllabus etc. on the Moodle site for this class.

The University of Montana MBA Program

*College of Business Administration Mission Statement*
The University of Montana’s College of Business Administration is a collegial learning community dedicated to the teaching, exploration, and application of the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed in a competitive marketplace.

**Master of Business Administration Mission Statement**
Serving our region by educating ethical leaders who are effective in managing organizations in the global environment.

**Master of Business Administration Assessment and Assurance of Learning**
As part of our assessment process and assurance-of-learning standards, the MBA program has adopted six learning goals for our students. These are as follows:

COB MBA graduates will demonstrate...

- integrated knowledge and understanding of various business functions.
- strong communication skills supportive of their leadership abilities.
- integrity and ethical behavior in individual and collective work.
- analytical and critical thinking in decision making.
- an understanding of emerging trends in information technology and the interplay between information technology and organizational strategy.
- an understanding of the implications of the global business environment.

This Syllabus is Tentative and Subject to Change