COURSE SYLLABUS

BUSINESS STRATEGY II
BUSINESS 9711 – Fall 2015

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Tuesdays 9:00 am – 12:00 pm
Location: IVEY 3102
(12 Sessions)

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course introduces the field of business strategy and a sample of the underlying theories from sociology and psychology that may be used to engage in strategy research. We will frame the discussion this semester around the big questions in strategy. This will provide the basis for engaging in discussion of issues at different levels of analysis – a common theme in strategy research that often leads to debate about which perspective may be “more” important. The variation in explanations will provide a platform for lively discussion and debate in class, and the development of research. Importantly, this course will complement Organizational Theory and Business Strategy I.

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COURSE OBJECTIVES

The aim of the course will be to examine a number of perspectives, consider the strengths and weaknesses of each, and to develop a sense of the comparative and complementary nature of these models to explain business strategy. You will develop two skills in this course: 1) the
ability to engage in theoretical discussion at different levels of analysis and 2) the ability to identify boundary conditions and opportunities to develop and extend theory in business strategy.

By the conclusion of this course, each student should
1. have a solid understanding of the main concepts and development at the intersection of strategy and sociology/psychology;
2. be able to integrate and extend lines of thinking in discussing relevant topics;
3. be able to apply theories and perspectives from sociology and psychology to important strategy issues; and
4. be able to develop a well-designed and well-written term paper that is submittable to AOM, AIB, and/or SMS conferences, and is potentially publishable.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS

Discussion Preparation / Discussion Leader / Paper Moderator / Extension Memos (40%)

Discussion Preparation: We will be spending most of our time discussing the week’s materials in class. It is critical that each student comes to class prepared to contribute to the discussion. To facilitate the deeper reading and integration, each student is responsible for leading a full session (the actual number of sessions is a function of the number of people enrolled). This involves preparation of a written integration of the assigned readings and leading the class discussion. In addition, each paper will have a moderator who acts as a specialist for that paper.

Discussion Leader: We will rely on one person each week to provide an integration of the assigned readings. In addition, this person will lead the class discussion. One approach to leading the class is to provide questions to the class (in advance) that will develop into an open discussion. Questions often focus on the strengths and weaknesses of a paper or set of articles.

Paper Moderator: Each paper will have a moderator – someone who is an “expert” on that particular paper. If the discussion leader is in charge of the “forest” of articles, the moderator is in charge of a specific “tree”. Often, interpretations will vary between the discussion leader and moderators. To help get the best mastery of the materials, moderators will want to be familiar with all the assigned readings for the week (not just their individual paper).

Extension Memos: This class will emphasize theory in strategy research. I recognize that writing the first paper with theory is especially challenging for students, so we will practice using short memos for EACH session. While reading, it is easy to be critical: what did the author do wrong, what is missing, what is wrong with the empirics, etc. What is more difficult is taking these “shortcomings” and building on them – after all, these are well-cited papers in an A journal. The objective of this exercise is to choose ONE (1) assigned reading and write an EXTENSION of the paper in a concise manner. Moderators often choose their assigned paper, but you are free to extend any paper from the assigned readings.

An extension should include a short note about the article, emphasizing the point for extension. Then, the student should frame the extension around a research question and wrap-up the memo.
describing what your extension adds to the discussion and our understanding of theory. In a more
general framework, I’m pushing you to Note, Extend, and Sell. Sells are the first step to creating
your contributions and will be critical to getting your work into A journals.

Each of these components is critical to a lively and productive class discussion. In part, these
discussions begin to prepare you for you comprehensive examinations and it is vital that we get
as much out of these classes as we can. These are the base assessments I will be using to evaluate
each session:

1. Does the student demonstrate a basic understanding of the assigned reading materials?
2. Can the student identify the common themes in the readings and use these themes to
   integrate and compare the articles?
3. Does the student use the readings as a base to develop new ideas or insights for potential
   new projects with a logical flow?
4. Can the student formulate appropriate critiques of the readings and defend his/her
   position in discussion with other class members?

**Paper Development / Paper Presentations (20%)**

**Paper Development:** On October 13th, students will “pitch” their paper idea to the class. The
class will provide feedback and suggestions based on:

1. Tie of the topic to the course material (the paper topic can flow from anything covered in
   the course),
2. The relatedness to a big question in strategy,
3. The stated research question(s), and
4. Feasibility for a full paper by the presentation on Nov. 24th.

Inevitably, paper topics tend to change (hopefully to more narrow topics) by the end of the term.
The push to deliver a topic on Oct. 13 is to get the process of paper writing started. This also
provides an open forum for paper development.

**Paper Presentations:** In the last class of the semester, each student will also present their paper
to the class in about fifteen minutes with some additional time for questions. The goal is to
deliver a conference-style presentation of your work. The quality of the presentation will be
based on the following criteria:

1. Attractiveness and preparedness of the talk,
2. Clarity of the speech,
3. Handling of the questions,
4. Management of the allowed time.

**Term Paper (40%)**

You are required to submit a term paper. The paper must be centered on a topic in strategy
related to what we have covered in the course, and may not be a paper that is used to satisfy the
requirements of another course. The paper should not exceed 20 – 25 pages, double-spaced,
excluding references and any appendices, tables, and / or figures.
A critical question for each student is whether a paper should be theoretical, empirical, or something in between. Each paper must have the strong potential of becoming a full publishable paper with future edits and revisions.

A **theoretical paper** should follow the style of *Academy of Management Review*. The grading of the paper will be based on the following criteria, with more weight on the significance and coherence of the theoretical framework:
- Importance of the topic to the management field
- Relevance and thoroughness of the literature review
- Innovativeness and significance of the theoretical framework
- Logical development of the hypotheses
- Implications of the paper
- Consistency and clarity of the writing
- Professionalism of manuscript preparations

An **empirical paper** should follow the style of *Academy of Management Journal* or *Strategic Management Journal*. The grading of the paper will be based on the following criteria, with more weight on the coherence between the theoretical framework and the research method.
- Importance of the topic to the management field
- Relevance and thoroughness of the literature review
- Development of the conceptual framework (including hypotheses)
- Soundness and feasibility in research design (including data sources, measures, and analytical techniques)
- Thoughtfulness in results interpretations (for generated or expected results)
- Insights in discussions (unexpected findings, boundary conditions, future directions, etc.)
- Consistency and clarity of the writing

I will accept a paper “**between**” theoretical and empirical that does NOT include the data and results sections. Papers without data will have more grading emphasis on the feasibility of the research design. These papers, will need to describe data. Feasibility will relate to whether the data’s accessibility and fit with your research question and design.

**PLAGIARISM / ACADEMIC INTEGRITY**
Scholastic offences are taken seriously and students are directed to read the appropriate policy, specifically, the definition of what constitutes a Scholastic Offence, at the following Web site: [http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf](http://www.uwo.ca/univsec/pdf/academic_policies/appeals/scholastic_discipline_grad.pdf)

All required papers may be subject to submission for textual similarity review to the commercial plagiarism-detection software under license to the University for the detection of plagiarism. All papers submitted for such checking will be included as source documents in the reference database for the purpose of detecting plagiarism of papers subsequently submitted to the system. Use of the service is subject to the licensing agreement, currently between The University of Western Ontario and Turnitin.com ([http://www.turnitin.com](http://www.turnitin.com)).
HEALTH AND WELLNESS

As part of a successful graduate student experience at Western, we encourage students to make their health and wellness a priority. Western provides several on campus health-related services to help you achieve optimum health and engage in healthy living while pursuing your graduate degree. For example, to support physical activity, all students, as part of their registration, receive membership in Western’s Campus Recreation Centre. Numerous cultural events are offered throughout the year. Please check out the Faculty of Music web page http://www.music.uwo.ca, and our own McIntosh Gallery http://www.mcintoshgallery.ca. Information regarding health- and wellness-related services available to students may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca.

Students seeking help regarding mental health concerns are advised to speak to someone they feel comfortable confiding in, such as their faculty supervisor, their program director (graduate chair), or other relevant administrators in their unit. Campus mental health resources may be found at http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/resources.html.

To help you learn more about mental health, Western has developed an interactive mental health learning module, found here: http://www.health.uwo.ca/mental_health/module.html. This module is 30 minutes in length and provides participants with a basic understanding of mental health issues and of available campus and community resources. Topics include stress, anxiety, depression, suicide and eating disorders. After successful completion of the module, participants receive a certificate confirming their participation.

DETAILED SESSION SCHEDULE

I. Strategy and Decisions

__________________________ Big questions in strategy (what is strategy)?

__ Decision-making theory


What is a strategic decision?


OPTIONAL:


II. Strategy and Sociology

Institutions and the institution-based view


OPTIONAL:


Status, reputation, and legitimacy


Social network theory: Extensions and integration


OPTIONAL:


III. Strategy and the Individual

_Power and politics_


OPTIONAL: (tying resource vying to firm outcomes)


___________ Upper echelons theory: TMT and CEO


OPTIONAL:


**Biases in investment decisions**


**Contracts, law, and strategy**


OPTIONAL:


Additional areas:

**Cognition and Strategy**


*** please note that Professor Pinkham reserves the right to change the readings and syllabus***