

## Fall 2016 Semester Opening Note to My Students

By Don Sutherland

With the aim of increasing early-semester student engagement, I sent my fall 2016 students a note tied to the importance of steady preparation to course success rather than a more generic message about course logistics. As the Olympic Games just concluded, I organized my note around that experience.

Below is the note I sent to my fall 2016 students:

*Dear Student,*

*Colin Powell once observed, “There are no secrets to success. It is the result of preparation, hard work, and learning from failure.” These are important thoughts for the semester ahead.*

*Just recently, the world witnessed remarkable achievements from such athletes as Simone Biles, Usain Bolt, Allyson Felix, Katie Ledecky, and Michael Phelps, among others at the 2016 summer Olympic Games in Rio de Janeiro. Their excellence was not the solely the result of accident, random chance, or talent. It was the product of an enormous investment in time, training, and determination. That investment transformed the raw potential of those athletes’ talents into gold medal-winning performances against the world’s strongest competitors.*

*Powell’s formula of “preparation, hard work, and learning from failure” played a key role in the spectacular successes the world witnessed. Learning from experience, even failure, can be especially valuable. Following a rare defeat for Jamaica’s 4 X 100-meter relay team some two years ago, Usain Bolt explained, “I take every loss as a learning curve.” Bolt completed a career spanning three Olympic Games, undefeated in his events. Challenge and adversity offer an opportunity that, if leveraged, can push one beyond what one might otherwise attempt, much less achieve.*

*These qualities and efforts fit well with one’s academic work. The BBA 407 Strategic Management course builds upon and applies concepts from earlier courses. The analytical level of difficulty is a little greater than that for earlier courses, perhaps the equivalent of a 3.6-level dive vs. a 3.2-level dive. One should expect no less, as the course is for students who aspire to become senior managers. Much more is expected from such managers than from an organization’s overall pool of employees.*

*If you take to heart Powell’s recipe, you will put yourself in a good position to succeed. Success, means lasting learning of course concepts and an ability to apply those concepts to real-world problems and opportunities. One need not make the extraordinary level of commitment expected of Olympic gold medalists to succeed in this course, but a reasonable commitment to regular study, staying abreast of current business events, and learning from your course experiences can provide a strong foundation for success.*

*Every experience along the way—whether or not it meets your expectations—offers a possibility for insight and self-improvement. One simply needs to see those experiences in a*

*positive fashion, as generators of possibilities for improvement and then embrace those possibilities. "I just try to find the good in everything and try to have a positive outlook...," Biles explained. She came away from the Games with four gold medals and a bronze medal.*

*Each of you has the ability to succeed. Believe in yourself, but also challenge yourself to do more and to do better. With continual preparation, you will succeed. "I think that everything is possible as long as you put your mind to it and you put the work and time into it," Phelps observed. He retires after having won a staggering 23 gold medals and 28 total medals over his Olympic career.*

*I wish you the best for the upcoming semester.*