

Spring 2019 Beginning of Semester Note to My Students

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At the start of each semester, I e-mail my students in advance of the start of classes to address the issue of course expectations. I include a copy of my syllabus, which is also posted on Blackboard. Student understanding of course expectations may enhance their overall performance.

Below is the note to my incoming spring 2019 students:

To all,

Welcome to my BBA 407 (Strategic Management Course).

The purpose of this e-mail is to introduce you to the course's requirements and expectations (see the attached syllabus for more detail). BBA 407 is a sort of capstone course. It draws upon concepts learned in earlier courses ranging from financial accounting to corporate finance.

In this note, I will expand a little upon the research paper.

The research paper is a group project worth 25% of the course grade. Employers are increasingly emphasizing exposure to group work. Groups and teams—whether they are comprised of executives, staff, or both—play important roles in the development of corporate strategy, implementation of functional responsibilities, administration of the company, and addressing specific problems or challenges. Therefore, the grade is strictly an evaluation of the finished product. No individual grades are assigned. All participants receive the same grade. How students choose to divide the work is completely up to them. Doing so is a proxy for resource allocation, including the assignment of people to projects.

This paper offers students an opportunity to apply course concepts to an actual company. It provides early practical exposure to the development of corporate strategy. Two common issues that often arise are deficiencies in which some papers lack required elements (a fully avoidable error) and those that provide an overly superficial strategic recommendation and/or simply offer existing strategy as their recommendation. All companies can be improved. The purpose of the paper is to find ways in which an existing company can improve its medium- and long-term performance. Such improvement requires moving beyond a company's existing strategy.

Students are encouraged to submit early drafts for feedback. After all, a key focus of the paper is student learning. Students most definitely should not wait until the closing days of the semester to begin writing the paper.

Even as the course will introduce students to a variety of principles, concepts, and frameworks, students should understand that these principles, concepts, and frameworks

exist within a larger context of change. No situation is static. Change is continual—within companies, the industries in which they operate, and the world as a whole.

The U.S. economy is facing significant changes in the years ahead. With the nation growing older, on average, the working age population is growing far slower than it did during the 1980s and 1990s. Policy headwinds threaten to reverse trade liberalization that had been a defining characteristic of global economic policy making. The federal government has been partially shut down for more than a month, which raises growing questions about the capacity and willingness of the nation's leaders to make complex or difficult decisions. All of these developments will impact industries, companies, and managers.

There is no one-size fits all strategy. How companies define their direction, establish their goals, develop and implement their business model can differ dramatically in different contexts. The requirements for success differ markedly in a rapidly growing economy and in a slow-growth economy.

I very much want to see every student meet his or her full potential. Therefore, I have provided this somewhat detailed explanation in advance of the semester.

Good luck in the coming semester, both in BBA 407 and in all your other classes.