Management 8330: Topics in Strategy Formulation

Fall 2014

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Class Time: Tuesday 8-11 a.m. (tentative)
Office Hours: Tuesday Noon - 1 p.m. and by appointment
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Course Description:

This seminar is offered for Ph.D. students with interests in the area of management, and is intended to explore a variety of topics within the Strategic Management discipline. Strategic Management is a field that examines macro topics of internal and external focus with the intent of understanding what enables some firms to outperform others in their industries and marketplaces.

Course Objectives:

The major objective of this course is to enable seminar members to pursue theory-driven research on organizations. In order to accomplish this goal, we will endeavor to:

- develop a thorough knowledge of the major approaches to studying organizations and Strategy;

- encourage a creative and critical engagement with existing Strategy theory and methods;

- gain an historical and contemporary understanding of the Strategic Management discipline;

- improve our ability to articulate arguments and propose new research ideas on the development of the Strategy field.

We will examine both important historical contributions and more recent treatments of key topics. Each session may contain both theoretical and empirical contributions. Because of time limitations, our examination of topics will be introductory rather than exhaustive.

Course Format

Students are expected to come to class thoroughly prepared to discuss the articles assigned for that week. As your workload grows throughout the semester, the temptation will be great to be a “free rider.” Don't do it -- anyone who has preceded you in a
doctoral seminar will tell you that you only get out of it what you put in it. For each set of readings, members of the class will be assigned to summarize each article and lead the discussion. The following questions should help you in preparing to discuss an article:

1. What is the author's basic argument/primary research questions explored in the paper?

2. What are the key relationships the author describes and/or examines? What is the theory underlying these relationships? What are the inherent assumptions associated with the applied theories?

3. (If applicable) Is the methodology used appropriate? What are the assumptions and trade-offs inherent in using this research design and methodology?

4. How useful is this article to scholars? Practitioners?

5. How does this article contribute to the literature being discussed this week?

6. What future research directions might be sparked by this article?

When you are a discussion leader for an article, you need to come to class with answers to the above questions. My main role in class will be to facilitate discussion and provide context for the topics being discussed. We will divide each week’s topics among the students, with each of you acting as the primary discussion leader and topic matter expert for your week as leader.

**Justification for Graduate Credit**

25% of your grade will be based on your contribution to class discussions, both as a discussion leader and as a participant. The course will be conducted as a seminar, which means that all participants bear responsibility for contributing to the common experience. The seminar format focuses on student discussion, not faculty lectures. Students will be expected to have reviewed the assigned readings for each session, and to come to seminar prepared to discuss the assigned readings in detail. My advice would be to divide the readings among yourselves each week, and we’ll have a primary person assigned to lead the discussion and present each reading. You may exchange reading summaries among yourselves as well, however, it is essential that each of you come to class having read each study and ready to actively participate each week. Participation can also include asking intriguing or clarifying questions to be addressed by the seminar participants as a whole, rather than myself. The discussion should relate each week’s readings to one another, as well as relating the readings from the current week to prior weeks.

15% of your grade will be based on the completion of weekly thought papers. Your thought papers should be 1-2 pages in length, and relate to the topic covered that week. In your thought papers, you may 1) compare, contrast, and link the various papers for the week, noting commonalities and gaps in the literature, 2) compare the readings that week to topics covered in previous weeks or prior seminars, 3) expand on one/two particular
papers/topics for the week in greater detail!!! Use your training and imagination, these are more than basic summaries of that week’s readings!!! The goal here is to raise points of interest, explore insightful questions, and to provide stimulation for future research projects. Think of your thought papers as a weekly diary covering the seminar topics, and YOUR impressions and opinions (informed opinions!!) of these topics.

60% of the grade will be based on a conceptual/empirical research paper. Your paper will involve applying theory to a Strategic Management of interest to you in order to generate new insights about the issue. I expect you to produce a paper of Academy of Management conference submission quality, with the ultimate goal of producing a journal publication. Of this 60%, 40% will be derived from your final paper, 15% will be based on your class presentation of your paper, and 5% will be based on your role as a discusant of another student paper in the class. Examples of what your paper should look like will be presented through the semester. The class period on October 16th will be dedicated to turning in a one to two-page outline of your paper, and discussing your paper plans with me individually. The paper should be a minimum of 20 written pages, plus references and tables. Your paper is due to me by 5:00 pm on Wednesday, December 5th, 2012.

*******No in completes will be allowed at the end of the semester.

STATEMENT RELATED TO POLICIES ON UNANNOUNCED QUIZZES AND CLASS ATTENDANCE: Attending class a key to success in this class, and participation is a major component of the grading system. As a result, while attendance itself is mandatory, attendance alone is not satisfactory to complete the course. Unannounced quizzes may be given if the students do not come to seminar prepared to actively discuss readings for the week. Any absences from class must be discussed and approved prior to a missed class.

SPECIAL ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES: Students who need special accommodations should make an appointment to discuss the Accommodations Memo with me during my office hours as soon as possible. If scheduled office hours conflict with classes, please arrange an alternate appointment time. If you do not have an Accommodations Memo, but need special accommodations, contact The Program for Students with Disabilities, 1244 Haley Center, 334.844.5943 (Voice T/O).

ACADEMIC HONESTY: All portions of the Auburn University Honesty Code (Title XII) found in the Tiger Cub will apply to this class.

STATEMENT REGARDING EMAIL AS OFFICIAL MEANS OF COMMUNICATION: Email is the university approved form of communication. It is the student’s responsibility to make sure that s/he checks, receives, and responds to class e-mail.
Class Schedule

Note: We may find it useful to add, delete, and/or move around some specific articles based on how our discussions develop. Most of the articles are available electronically via JSTOR, ABI/INFORM, and other websites.

Week 1 (8/20): Organization of Class and Syllabus Review


Week 2 (8/27): What is Strategy? Defining the Field


Week 3 (9/3): Conceptualizing and Operationalizing Strategy


**Week 4 (9/10): What We Do...Auburn Strategy Faculty Research**


**Week 6 (9/24): Resource & Knowledge-Based Views of the Firm**


Week 7 (10/1): Organizational Learning & Innovation


Week 8 (10/8): Socio-Cognitive Views of Organizations


Week 9 (10/15): 1st Paper Meeting, Initial Paper Outlines Due

Week 10 (10/22): Strategic Leadership/Upper Echelons Theories


Week 11 (10/29): Corporate Governance/Agency Theory II


**Week 12 (11/5): Power & Politics in Organizations**


**Week 13 (11/10), date changed due to SMA: Strategy Process & Schumpeterian/Dynamic Views of Strategy**


Week 14 (11/19): Student Presentations

Week 15 (11/26): Thanksgiving Break, No Class

Week 16 (12/2): Review/Meta-Analysis Articles of Your Choice…What are you interested in?

Week 17 (12/8): Final Papers Due by 5 p.m. Monday evening

Extra Reading of Assorted Topics: Corporate Strategy, Diversification & International Strategy


