

STRATEGIC PLAN FOR LEARNING

GEB 4890 / Dr. Barnett

I appreciate it when students tell me that they enjoyed a class session, but the biggest compliment I can ever get is for a student to contact me several years after graduation and tell me that the course content helped in her career and in her life – that she learned something useful. I think this course can be very useful, should you choose to learn the lessons it has to offer. But I cannot “learn” you. No matter how well I teach, if you choose not to take advantage of the opportunity to learn, then you will not learn. My job is to teach. Your choice is to learn. You should expect my teaching to be of such a caliber that it provides you the opportunity to learn – and if it ever is not, you should call me on it. But I expect you to choose to learn, and I will call you on it if you do not. Most likely your grade will reflect this choice. Most definitely your grasp of strategic management will reflect this choice. And this is what matters. Don’t aim for a grade, or simply completion of the course. Aim for learning. A mere credential – completing the degree, earning a certain GPA – may help you a little in getting your foot in the corporate door. But if it turns out that you learned nothing along the way, your ignorance will soon come to light, and the door that the degree or GPA opened will slam on your foot. Don’t sacrifice the future for a little leisure time now. If you just “give in” and choose to learn, I firmly believe that you will be in a much better position in the future, and you will even enjoy the topic now – it’s interesting stuff, if you just give it a chance. But that’s your choice. Should you choose not to learn, because of senioritis or other events in life, then don’t expect to get much out of this class.

I hope that we can work together to learn much about this interesting topic, not work against each other. Should you choose to learn, here are 8 simple ways to maximize your learning.

1. Get in a learning mindset. Classroom education is a weird economic good. The less I provide, the happier many students are. For example, the thing that makes students the giddiest is to skip a chapter or to let class out early. To give you more of a sense of the oddity, consider a critical comment one student provided on the end-of-course evaluation one semester: “We were forced to read the chapters . . . he forced us to stay till the end.” This, to me, is not a criticism, but an example of how I provide value to you, how I facilitate a learning environment. Please consider this difference in perspective. Again, it’s your choice – *you can focus on how to maximize your grade while minimizing your effort, or you can choose to learn.* I strongly encourage you to choose the latter. I have structured the course to ensure that an earnest effort at learning is rewarded, and that apathy is not. If you don’t want to learn, I really don’t understand why you would choose to enroll – you have to ask yourself why you’re even bothering. There are easier ways to get a college degree, if that is all you want. And there are other ways to spend your time than being captive in a classroom. But if you’re happy to have the opportunity to learn, then take full advantage of it. Otherwise, you’re just wasting your time and money.

2. Prepare for every class. Read the entire book chapter and case – and *aim for understanding.* This may involve re-reading unclear parts, answering review questions in the text, investigating the case further through additional research, taking online quizzes, discussing topics with classmates, etc. If you really want to learn the content, merely scanning pages won’t do. Live it a little; act like it matters. Read the paper or watch the news to see if you recognize these topics. But don’t watch TV while you read. And don’t read and drive – that’s just plain dangerous.

3. Come to every class. We meet once per week. If this is too burdensome for you, you really should seek an alternative degree program – they’re available. Attendance is not required for my vanity, but for your learning. Strategic management is about critical and analytical thinking, and *these skills cannot be developed thoroughly by simply reading a textbook.* In class, we clarify the contents of the chapter & case through a variety of media, and we also extend these ideas into other domains. So come to class. You’ll learn a lot more, and it’s more effective than cramming for exams later. Plus, I pass out free candy. You can’t beat that. Unless *American Idol* is on.

4. Stay for every class and participate in every class. 10% of your grade is determined by your performance on the quiz that begins every class. 10% of your grade is determined by attendance taken at the end of every class. Some students game this – they come only for the first few minutes to take the quiz, or they come for only the last part of class to complete the feedback memo. Some come for the quiz, leave class in between, and come back at the end (Yes, I notice these things). Others simply zone out during class. That’s your choice. You will get the points, but you will learn little. So participate in class – *ask questions, clarify issues, be present and be heard.* If you do, exams will be a cakewalk, and it will take less total effort than cramming. You’ll get a better overall grade, and you’ll learn more – you can have your cake and eat it, too.

5. Follow up outside of class. If anything remains unclear, mention it in the feedback memo. I immediately post responses on the course’s discussion forum on Blackboard. So check Blackboard at least once per week. Moreover, contribute to the discussions – *Blackboard is your forum to continue class discussions, and so I expect students to run it.* If used properly it is a great opportunity to carry on interesting discussions. Most students ignore it, unfortunately.

6. Meet weekly (but not weakly) with your teammates. If you wait until the last minute to complete team projects, the stress will lead to in-fighting and shirking, and your project will be pretty lousy. You might even be tempted to cheat (see #8 below). If you simply meet once per week, perhaps before or after every class, you’ll be in a solid position to meet all the deadlines, and you are much more likely to assemble an insightful report. As a minimum, *your team experience will be much less dysfunctional, and dare I say, you might even have fun with it.*

7. Contribute fully (not fooly) to your team projects. Team projects form 35% of your grade. If you are part of a dysfunctional team, team projects will form 95% of your headaches. Don’t be the reason for all the headaches – do your part. Team projects are the one area where you have the most opportunity to shirk your duties. Some give into this temptation. The teammates you harm by shirking your duties will almost certainly let me know, and I will certainly lower your grade or flunk you for shirking. Instead, take the initiative, meet deadlines, and do quality work – turning in trash is worse than turning in nothing. *Just look at this as an opportunity to interact with friends and to study an interesting company – not as a big burden to run away from.*

8. Do not cheat. You might be good at it. You might get away with it. But I’m good at detecting cheating, and I am forceful at prosecuting it. *This is not the time to cheat – why throw away your degree now?* If I catch you cheating on anything, I will assign you a grade of “**FF**” for the entire course, and I will vigorously defend this grade. Really – I’ve done it before. It’s easier to use your skills for good than evil – and you’ll sleep better at night. Moreover, you’ll be smarter during the day – because you’ll have learned something, not cheated your way out of it.