

A. Statement of Teaching Strategy and Philosophy

Teaching is one of my most important professional responsibilities, and I take it very seriously. I try to prepare students for the complex, dynamic world of business that awaits them and to do so at a level that allows them to compete with “the best of the best” anywhere in the world. My students, their parents, and the citizens of the state deserve no less. While the content and delivery differ, my courses tend to provide a “big picture” perspective with seven common pedagogical elements:

Adopting a complex, dynamic systems approach. A fundamental aspect of my pedagogical approach is to treat organizations as complex, dynamic systems, which are holistic and multilevel in nature as well as situated in time—the very same approach I take in my research. First, I adopt a holistic or gestalt approach, treating organizations as systems composed of interdependent sub-systems (e.g., strategy, culture, structure) and embedded in environments (e.g., competitive, technological, sociocultural). This approach provides an overarching framework so that students can understand the “whole” from the beginning, see how the “parts” relate to the “whole” every step of the way, and integrate all the “parts” into a coherent “whole” in the end. Second, I adopt a multilevel approach because complex organizational systems are hierarchically structured, from individuals and groups of individuals to organizations and networks of organizations to industries and broader technological and institutional environments. Third, I adopt a temporal approach, exploring, for example, why managers are often constrained by the past, how their organizations and environments change over time, and where they should take their organizations in the future.

Integrating multiple viewpoints. Another important part of my pedagogical approach is to incorporate multiple perspectives, disciplines, and functions—just as I have done in much of my research. First, because of the complex and multifaceted nature of organizations and the particularly abstract nature of the subject matter, I use multiple metaphors to help students gain unique insight into different aspects of organizations. For example, I use machine, organism, human brain, termite colony, and psychic prison metaphors to help students understand, diagnose, and evaluate organizations from multiple perspectives. Second, because the management field has been built largely from ideas borrowed from other disciplines, I integrate concepts from such disciplines as architecture (e.g., Frank Lloyd Wright’s “organic” architecture), biology (e.g., self-organizing behavior in termite and ant colonies), economics (e.g., determinants of industry structure), meteorology (e.g., predictability of weather and seasonal patterns), psychology (e.g., escalation of commitment), and sociology (e.g., cultural beliefs and artifacts). Third, because one of the objectives of the capstone course in strategic management is to integrate the functional disciplines of business (i.e., accounting, finance, marketing, management), I incorporate and tie together such disparate concepts as activity-based costing and the “balanced scorecard” from accounting, profitability and liquidity measures from finance, market segmentation and customer perceptions from marketing, and human resource and information systems practices from management.

Employing visual methods. Because much of the material in strategic management and organization theory is not only complex but also rather distant from the experience of many students, I use a lot of visual imagery to help convey concepts—just as I have done in some of my research. Indeed, pictures, videos, and other visual images convey significant meaning beyond the spoken or written word, as suggested by the aphorism that “a picture is worth a thousand words.” Examples of this important aspect of my teaching include (1) videos featuring (a) business leaders at such companies as Garage Technology, Southwest Airlines, and IDEO, (b) business practices at such companies as Coca-Cola, General Electric, Yahoo!, Whole Foods, and Zag, (c) leading business

thinkers from Harvard, Oxford, and Stanford, (d) social movement leaders such as John F. Kennedy and Martin Luther King, Jr., and (e) natural processes such as how termite and ant colonies self-organize; (2) film clips illustrating concepts such as functional structure, organizational vision, and core competencies; and (3) various visual approaches, including (a) analytic techniques such as “organigraphs,” (b) props such as “skwish” toys, and (c) visually intensive presentations with images designed to reinforce key conceptual points.

Connecting theory and practice. As a faculty member in a professional school, I believe students must not only learn the basic language, fundamental concepts, and theoretical frameworks, but also be able to apply these abstract ideas to real organizations and the practice of management. Consistent with the dictum that “there is nothing more practical than a good theory,” I believe there is nothing more valuable in management education than using theory to understand, diagnose, and evaluate real organizational situations. To link theory and practice, I use a mix of mini-cases based on business press articles and classic pieces such as “The Honda Effect,” small-group and individual exercises based on real organizations (e.g., McDonald’s, Club Med), guest speakers, and a detailed “real case” analysis of an actual organization. Although many teachers effectively employ cases, exercises, and guest speakers, using a “real case” approach is unique to my teaching. In fact, this approach serves as the anchor point of my strategic management course and an important part of my organization theory course. As a result of bringing theory and practice together, especially through the use of “real cases,” my students develop the “hard” skills necessary to conduct strategic and organizational analyses of real companies. Such skills can help my students succeed in their business careers, as the following email account attests: “Your course was the most valuable one I took... It has enabled me to talk the talk with senior executives at many companies in the last few years, which also accelerated my movement up the corporate ladder. ... I’ve used the knowledge taught from [your] undergraduate course...with a great deal of success.” Moreover, such skills can help students succeed in their immediate job search, as the following email accounts attest: (1) “I speak of your class in all of my interviews.” (2) “I have been on many interviews since graduating in May, and most of the questions...I am able to relate to my experiences in your class. Many of the companies are very impressed when I tell them about this course and the analysis that I had to perform on Anheuser-Busch.” (3) “I have been showing parts of my Capstone project in my interviews and it has been very successful in helping to get my 2nd interviews.”

Stressing teamwork. The use of small groups in which students work as a team to complete assignments, most notably the exercises and the “real case” project, is an important aspect of my approach to teaching. This approach is especially important in a business school because most students will be working in teams, including cross-functional teams, throughout their careers. I have developed a number of tools and techniques to facilitate the effectiveness of student teams, including (1) processes, guidelines, and parameters to help students make good decisions in selecting group members and companies; (2) a “due diligence” exercise for collecting company and industry data, which includes a detailed checklist, explicit ground rules, and a required consultation with me; and (3) “documents of understanding,” peer evaluations, workshops, multiple checkpoints with feedback, and electronic discussion boards to help groups manage their time, their meetings, and their members’ behavior. As a result of this team-based approach, my students develop critical “soft” skills necessary for career success, including interpersonal communication, time management, and conflict resolution skills. Such skills also help my students succeed in their job search, as the following email account attests: “I used your class to answer any project management or teamwork question in interviews. Your class has given me a lot to say in interviews.”

Emphasizing writing and speaking. Fundamental to my pedagogical approach are two important ways, as research suggests, of getting students to think more clearly. The first is *writing*. I use a number of techniques including essay exams and written assignments in my organization theory class, a major 80- to 100-page report in my strategy class, and a research paper in my doctoral seminar in strategy. A noteworthy point about the undergraduate strategy class is my use of multiple checkpoints, which allows me to provide feedback along the way so that students can improve their writing (and hence their thinking) as the semester unfolds. I also use such a reiterative process in my doctoral seminar, and additionally developed a unique session on “writing for scholarly publication” the last time I taught this seminar. The second fundamental approach I use to get students to think more clearly is *speaking*. In addition to encouraging active involvement in class discussions and exercises, I provide a number of structured opportunities for speaking in class, including two checkpoints in both my organization theory and strategy classes, and session leadership roles in my doctoral seminar in strategy. Like my approach to writing, this recursive process allows me to provide detailed feedback along the way so that students can improve their speaking (and hence their thinking) as the term progresses. As a result of this writing- and presentation-intensive approach, my students develop critical thinking skills necessary for career success, honing their ability to persuasively communicate complex organizational problems and situations. Such skills (along with the others noted above) help my students successfully land their first jobs, as the following email account illustrates: “Some of the skills required for the position include: the ability to prioritize work to meet deadlines, good oral and written communication skills, [and] good problem solving skills...I just wanted to thank you for preparing me for what’s to come.”

Having high expectations. Because I teach a required capstone course, an upper-division undergraduate elective course, and a doctoral seminar, *and* because I think it’s the right thing to do, I have high expectations and a relatively heavy workload that challenges my students and pushes them to excel. This approach gives students not only a realistic preview of the highly competitive worlds of business and academe, but also the pleasure and satisfaction that come from pursuing excellence and achieving what initially seemed more than they thought possible. Indeed, I find it incredibly rewarding to see my students beaming with pride over their accomplishment on a major report, presentation, or paper. Moreover, I take it as a compliment when students’ comments reflect that the course was very demanding and more work than other courses, but that they learned so much from the experience. Finally, my high expectations have led my students to produce work that continually teaches me better ways to analyze companies, understand complex realities, and frame arguments, making me a better teacher to those who follow in their footsteps.

To conclude, my approach to teaching directly addresses a number of concerns raised in a recent U.S. Higher Education Reform Report about the state of higher education (U.S. Secretary of Education, June 22, 2006), including the following: (1) “We fear that university standards have become diluted and teaching methods outdated.” (2) “Employers report repeatedly that the new graduates they hire are not prepared to work, lacking the critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills needed in today’s workplace.” (3) “Simply put, many undergraduates are being shortchanged at a time when they should be developing essential writing, critical thinking, and quantitative skills.” By having high standards, adopting innovative methods, and providing ample opportunities for critical thinking, writing, speaking, problem-solving, etc., I try to ensure that my students enter the complex, dynamic world of business prepared to compete with the “best of the best.”