# MGT 8123 Strategic Business Consulting

**Fall 2013**

**Instructor:** Natasha Wilkins Randle, Ph.D., SPHR

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Credit Hours:</th>
<th>3 credit hours</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Prerequisites:</td>
<td>BQA 8233, MKT 8153, EC 8103, ACC 8112, FIN 8112, FIN 8122, MGT 8112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Instructor:</td>
<td>Natasha Wilkins Randle, Ph.D., SPHR</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(601) 484-0254</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><a href="mailto:nrandle@meridian.msstate.edu">nrandle@meridian.msstate.edu</a></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mississippi State University-Meridian Division of Business</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>MSU-Meridian Downtown Campus</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Office 306</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2212 Fifth Street</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Meridian, MS 39301</td>
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<tr>
<td>Classroom:</td>
<td>Distance via Blackboard</td>
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<tr>
<td>Virtual Office Hours:</td>
<td>I am available Mondays: 10:00AM – 11:00AM, Wednesdays: 10:00AM – 11:00AM and 2:00PM – 4:00PM, or anytime working or nonworking hours that we agree to talk. Note that I can be contacted through e-mail anytime. I will respond to emails within 24 hours, Monday-Friday. I check e-mail several times daily. I am willing to “meet” with you online as well, just e-mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Time Zone:</td>
<td>All times listed are Central Standard Time (CST)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Course Format</td>
<td>Distance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Website:</td>
<td><a href="https://mycourses.msstate.edu">https://mycourses.msstate.edu</a></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Course Description:</td>
<td>A study of strategic management covering environmental analysis, competition between firms, competitive advantage, and strategy implementation culminating in a consulting project with participating organization.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Required Text:</td>
<td>You may choose ANY strategic management text to purchase (2007 © - present)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>I will reference:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategic Management, David, 12e, ISBN: 0136015697</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Crafting &amp; Executing Strategy, Thompson, et. al., 16e, ISBN: 9780073381244</td>
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<tr>
<td>Other Materials:</td>
<td>Wall Street Journal or other Business News Sources.</td>
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<td></td>
<td><a href="https://www.mckinseyquarterly.com">https://www.mckinseyquarterly.com</a> is a good website to visit and join for relevant business strategy articles</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Course Overview:
The Strategic Business Consulting course is the capstone course in the MSU MBA program. Unlike other business courses that concentrate narrowly on a particular function or piece of the business, the strategic management portion is a big picture (capstone) course. It encompasses the entire spectrum of business and management. The center of attention is the total enterprise -- the industry and competitive environment in which the company operates, the long-term direction and strategy, the company’s resources and competitive capabilities, and its prospects for success. The first six weeks of the course will be the strategic management portion and consulting project formation. The remainder of the course, the consulting project portion, allows you to apply this big picture view to an actual business in the community. In this capstone course students will:

- Utilize the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired in previous undergraduate and graduate level business administration courses
- Analyze the external environment and conduct an industry analysis to understand the competitive forces affecting a company and how to gain a competitive advantage
- Evaluate company resources and capabilities and determine what is required to build the resources necessary to support the company’s long-term direction
- Appreciate the difficulties involved in executing business strategies and how leadership and culture play a key role in execution

This course provides the opportunity for MBA students to gain applied consulting experience while providing a valuable service to the business community. This class will utilize what you have learned from this class, previous classes, and work experience. All of the work will be done by you, the student, in a team environment.

This portion of the course is probably unlike any you have experienced. Your responsibility will be to satisfy the needs of a client. You are expected to solve their problem, not inform your professor of a possible solution. Students take the lead on all aspects of the projects, identifying the project itself.

Do not take the project or the lack of formal classroom structure lightly. Even though there are minimal formal class sessions, expect to put in many hours of effort. You will most likely work harder and have more fun in this course than any other course in your MBA studies.

Class Requirements:
1. Syllabus Quiz (must be completed to access class materials on Blackboard)
2. Review weekly lecture videos during Strategic Management portion of the class (will be posted by Tuesdays)
3. Meaningful class/group participation is required for this class
4. One examination (strategic management) DUE Sep 27 by 11:59 PM (20% of course grade)
5. Consulting project groups (3-4 ppl per group)
6. In teams students are to propose a consulting project based on problems/needs within a company. Team project proposals must be submitted to the Instructor by Sep 6 and will be approved by Sep 10
7. Project timeline email (Sep 22)
8. TWO Written summaries of project progress (with supplementary materials (Oct 14 and Week of Nov 11) no later than 3 hours prior to the team/Instructor conference call – Oct 14 is a full class conference call. Week of Nov 11 is a team conference call that each consulting project team should schedule with the Instructor)
9. Final project with presentation and formal report to client (must be completed by Dec. 9)
Blackboard
Blackboard is the online class management format used at MSU. It is imperative that students reference the website frequently. All cases, articles, and lecture notes will be located (or referenced) on Blackboard. Communication capabilities are also available. These include the discussion board, email, and Blackboard Collaborate (live class format which can be used for team meetings and final presentations).

Discussion Questions. Distance Learning (DL) students will use the Blackboard discussion board to facilitate class discussions. **TWO** discussion postings are required per week during the strategic management portion of the course (weeks 1, 2, 4, and 5). Discussion postings should be made in a timely manner relative to each week’s lecture topic and class readings. Discussions will be graded based on the discussion grading criteria (Appendix C). You will be expected to make your weekly discussion board postings within each class week (and on the appropriate week’s discussion board). For example, during the class Week 1 (August 19), I will not count (grade) postings made after Monday, August 26 (5:00PM) for your class participation grade for that week. However, you are welcome to continue making discussion postings throughout the semester.

Examination
BEFORE any class material can be accessed (other than the syllabus and introduction discussion board) each student **MUST** take the syllabus quiz and pass it with a grade of 100. *Multiple attempts are allowed.* The syllabus quiz will be available August 16, 2013(6:00AM) – August 21, 2013 (11:59PM). *The syllabus quiz grade will NOT be used to calculate your final course grade.*

There will be one essay exam required for this course. The exam will include a case analysis. The exam will be posted on Sep 20 and DUE on Blackboard on Sep 27, 2013 by 11:59 pm.

Final Project Topic and Team Selection
Students will generally work in 3-4 person teams to complete the consulting project portion of the course. While team assignments will be made by the Instructor, I am open to student special requests. Steps to the process are:

1.) By August 21, 2013 complete “INTRODUCTIONS” posting on the discussion board. This will allow your classmates and Instructor to determine the most complimentary fit for team selection.
2.) Each student should immediately begin drafting a proposal (no more than one page) of a potential consulting project (information is below) that will be submitted to your team.
3.) Team assignments will be made by September 3, 2013. A private discussion board will be created for each team to use, *if desired.*
4.) Team members discuss individual project proposals and decide on one team proposal to submit to the Instructor for approval. Team proposals must be submitted to the Instructor via email no later than September 6, 2013. Teams will be notified of approval or necessary revisions by September 10, 2013. *Note: If teams submit proposals earlier than the deadline, they will be approved earlier than the deadline.*

Consulting Project Proposal
Each team is responsible for identifying consulting projects within your organizations or an organization with which you are familiar. During your first team meeting draft consulting project proposals (no more than one page) should be submitted by each team member and discussed. Each team will then decide the one proposal (potentially with team edits) that will be submitted to the Instructor no later than Sep 6. Proposals should outline a pressing issue within the student’s company or another company with which a team member is familiar (e.g., new marketing strategy for a product, strategies to enter new business, declining profits, market analysis, etc.). Additionally, students must identify and provide title and contact
information for the “client” (i.e., a member of management within the organization who will be the primary contact person for the project and will be available to review the written report, participate in the final presentation, and complete the client evaluation). Projects will be approved by Sep 10. Team proposals submitted to the Instructor should be no longer than three single-spaced pages.

Project Timeline Email
Each team is to send me an email outlining a preliminary timeline for completion of tasks for your project with team member assignments. This is a preliminary effort. It can change. Please clearly highlight questions and concerns you may have. Send the email to nrandle@meridian.msstate.edu by midnight on Sep 22, 2013.

Written meeting reports
Written progress reports from each team are due Oct 14 AND during the week of Nov 11-17, no later than 3 hours prior to team/Instructor conference call. This report should show proof of progress. Reports should include (at minimum) the following sections:
  - Team information (names, each member’s responsibilities)
  - Team objective
  - Summary of progress to date (accomplishments, research/information gathered)
  - Major issues or concerns
  - Goals (tasks to be accomplished)
  - Supplemental materials (drafts of materials, e.g. survey instrument, financial statements, marketing plan, etc.)

Final Project and Presentation
The final project format will vary based on the client’s needs and team strategy. The final report should, at minimum, include a well-designed cover page, a table of contents, and an executive summary, followed by the full report. The project should be approximately 25-40 pages. The final report must provide complete documentation of the project so that the client may refer to it later. The final project will be bound. 2-3 copies of the bound report should be sent to the Instructor and 1 copy for each member of the client team. The client and Instructor MUST have hard copies of the final project in hand at the time of the presentation. All team members must be present (virtually, is acceptable) and actively contribute to the presentation. Failure to attend and participate in the final presentation to the client will result in a failing grade. Project = 60% and presentation = 10% of the final class grade.

The final presentation location/format may vary by group. You may utilize Blackboard Collaborate, SKYPE, Webex, Gotomeeting.com, or other technology. Logistics of presentation format, date/time, and location should be determined and approved by mid Nov. Students MUST USE PRESENTATION TECHNOLOGY WHICH WILL ALLOW A VISUAL OF THE PRESENTER (e.g., Skype, Blackboard Collaborate with webcam, etc).

Final Project Evaluation:
The final project will be evaluated based on the following criteria:

1. Technical merit: how well you develop the solution and the quality of the solution and the paper.

2. Implementation success probability: assessment of the real impact your effort will have on the client’s operations and success.

3. Professionalism: how you deal with your client, teammates, and faculty mentor.
4. Presentation: quality and professionalism of the final presentation to client; question responses

5. Practical Business Relevance: inclusion of at least a brief section discussing the practical business relevance of the project. This should be achieved by utilizing business news articles (i.e. Wall Street Journal).

6. Presentation Skills: verbal/nonverbal cues, professional appearance, content, visual aids. MUST USE PRESENTATION TECHNOLOGY WHICH WILL ALLOW VISUAL OF PRESENTER (e.g., Skype, Blackboard Collaborate with webcam, etc).

The interim email and written progress report will not affect your final grade unless it is submitted late, not submitted at all, and/or is incomplete or unacceptable for MBA quality work. If any of the aforementioned conditions exists, your final grade will be reduced by 5 points for each occurrence.

Guidelines for Written Assignments:
All written assignments are due the day found in the syllabus unless we agree to change the dates (See Appendix A). All written work must be word processed, corrected for typing, grammatical, and formatting errors. Professional quality work is expected and grades will be assigned accordingly. Appropriate citations (internal and reference page) must be used in your final client project paper. Written submissions must be double-spaced, using 12-point Times New Roman font.

Team Member Evaluations:
You will evaluate yourself and your team members. The form is located below (Appendix B). Everyone must participate in every part of the project including the presentation. The evaluation criteria will include:

- Participation
- Preparation
- Knowledge Acquisition
- Reasoning
- Interpersonal Skills

Once team member evaluations are completed AND the consulting project reports have been graded, each student’s final project grade will be calculated as their consulting project final project grade multiplied by their team member evaluation. This means that it is very possible (highly probable) that each team member will earn a different grade for the final project portion of the class.

For instance:
- Final project receives a grade of 90
- Team member evaluation % (also includes student’s evaluation of him/herself) = 88%
- \[ 92 \times 0.88 = 81 \]; Therefore this student’s final project grade will be an 81.

Course Grade and Evaluation:

20% Exam
10% Discussion/Participation
60% Final Project
10% Final Project Presentation
100%

Grading Scale
A = 90 - 100%       B = 80 - 89%       C = 70 - 79%       D = 60 - 69%       F = 59 and below

Honor Code: Before proceeding with your first regular assignment, copy the following to a
document, read it, sign it, and submit it to me as you would any other assignment.
This is a pass/fail assignment, and you will not have full access to course content
and grades until this assignment has been submitted.

“As a Mississippi State University student I will conduct myself with honor
and integrity at all times. I will not lie, cheat, or steal, nor will I accept the
actions of those who do.”

Upon accepting admission to Mississippi State University, a student immediately
assumes a commitment to uphold the Honor Code, to accept responsibility for
learning, and to follow the philosophy and rules of the Honor Code. Students will
be required to state their commitment on examinations, research papers, and other
academic work. Ignorance of the rules does not exclude any member of the MSU
community from the requirements or the processes of the Honor Code. For
additional information, please visit: http://www.honorcode.msstate.edu

“I have read and understand the Honor Code. On my honor, as a Mississippi State
University student, I will neither give nor receive unauthorized assistance on any
academic work.”

Student Signature: _________________________________

Any student in violation of the honor code on an assignment/exam will receive a
grade of zero for that assignment/exam and will be subject to university
disciplinary action. Any student in violation of the honor code on more than one
assignment/exam, will receive a grade of zero for the course and will be subject to
university disciplinary action.

For additional information, please refer to: Charles Lipson. Doing Honest Work in
College: How to Prepare Citations, Avoid Plagiarism, and Achieve Real Academic

Attendance: You are expected to attend all class conference calls, team meetings, and your
client final presentation.

Campus Resources: Library: http://library.msstate.edu/
Distance MBA Office: http://www.distance.msstate.edu/mba/
Academic Outreach & Continuing Education (AOCE): http://distance.msstate.edu/
Support Services: Any student who feels s/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss specific needs. Student Support Services is available to assist in determining accommodations that are most appropriate for students with disabilities based on documentation of their disability. The Student Support Services Website is http://www.sss.msstate.edu/

Course Schedule: See Below
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Topics</th>
<th>Readings/Assignment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Week 1: Aug 19 | • Intro  
• Syllabus  
• Discuss Consulting Projects  
• Overview of Strategic Management  
• Strategy Formulation (Mission/vision) | INTRODUCTION discussion board posting, no later than Aug 21, 2013  
• ARTICLE: Read “Are you sure you have strategy” - Hambrick and Frederickson, 2005  
• ARTICLE: Read “The Perils of Bad Strategy” - Rumelt, 2011  
• ARTICLE: Read “The social side of strategy” – Gast and Zanini-2012  
• Read textbook chapters covering weekly topics |
| Week 2: Aug 26 | • External Environment Assessment  
• Internal Environment Assessment  
• SWOT Matrix | • ARTICLE: Read “The Competitive Forces that Shape Strategy “ – Porter, 2008  
• ARTICLE: Read “The Office of Strategy Management”– Kaplan and Norton, 2005  
• CASE: Read Under Armour case - posted on Blackboard  
• SWOT Matrix handout –David  
• Read textbook chapters covering weekly topics |
| Week 3: Sep 2 | NO CLASS LABOR DAY | CONSULTING PROJECT TEAM PROPOSAL DUE TO INSTRUCTOR BY SEP 6 (11:59PM) – approval by Sep 10 |
| Week 4: Sep 9 | • Financial Ratios  
• Business Level Strategy (Cost Leadership, Differentiation, Focus)  
• Innovation | • ARTICLE: Read “When companies underestimate low-cost rivals” – Ryans, 2010  
• ARTICLE: Read “How companies approach innovation” 2007  
• Read textbook chapters covering weekly topics |
| Week 5: Sep 16 | • Strategy Implementation  
• Strategy Evaluation | • CASE: Read Chipotle case  
• ARTICLE: Read “How to put your money where your strategy is - ” Hall, Lovallo, Musters, 2012 |
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week 6: Sep 23</th>
<th><strong>Exam</strong>- will be available via assignments link on Sep 20</th>
<th>• Exam DUE Sep 27 by 11:59 PM</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Week 9: Oct 14</td>
<td>Conference call to discuss consulting project. Conference call # is 720-279-0026, PIN is 819549#.</td>
<td>• Written update of business consulting project progress with supplemental materials. DUE no later than 3 hours prior to the conference call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Week 13: Nov 11-17</td>
<td>Conference call to discuss consulting project (<strong>each team will schedule a team conference call with the Instructor</strong>)</td>
<td>• Written update of business consulting project progress with supplemental materials. DUE no later than 3 hours prior to the conference call</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>by Dec 9</td>
<td>Final presentations to client</td>
<td>• Final Project due</td>
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APPENDIX B: MGT 8123 Confidential Peer Evaluation Form

Your Name: __________________________ Your Signature (e-sign is acceptable): ____________________

Please rate each member in your team (INCLUDING YOURSELF) on each of the attributes below. This evaluation will not be directly shared with the group members but may be summarized in aggregate. In addition to rating each attribute, you must decide how the 5 attributes go together to determine the person’s OVERALL CONTRIBUTION. Remember, it is not important that everyone contribute the same in every dimension, but that everyone contributes their own particular strengths to the overall benefit of the group. DUE within 24 hours after the final project presentation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>PEER RATING</th>
<th>Names of Group Members (include yourself)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>PARTICIPATION: Attends meetings, is active contributor throughout the project. Takes the lead in discussion and moving the group learning forward. Facilitates participation of fellow group members.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PREPARATION: Demonstrates high level of preparation beyond that minimally required for project. Takes initiative to find high quality resources.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KNOWLEDGE ACQUISITION: Demonstrates excellent command of facts and principles in project; answers to questions and volunteered information shows insight and understanding.</td>
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<td>REASONING: Insightful, creative thinker. Presents logical and clearly formulated arguments. Outstanding ability to synthesize and integrate information. Has a knack for seeing the heart of a problem and for helping others achieve a higher level of reasoning. Able to apply facts and principles to new project problems.</td>
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<tr>
<td>INTERPERSONAL SKILLS: Always considerate of group members and respectful of group process. Displays unusual perceptiveness and sensitivity to the feelings of others. Makes effort to facilitate participation by others; resolves conflicts. Responds to criticism gracefully; takes effective action to correct own weaknesses.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>OVERALL CONTRIBUTION (sum of scores above)</td>
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COMMENTS: (add additional pages as needed; please sign all pages)
APPENDIX C:

Discussion Board Grading Criteria

**TWO** discussion postings are required per week during the strategic management portion of the course (weeks 1, 2, 4, and 5). Grading Criteria:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>Excellent</td>
<td>Comment adds valid new information or perspective to week’s topic; communicates a clear understanding of class reading(s); encourages additional conversation; ties into other comments or points made during class discussion; if possessing opinion, well supported; comment is well written; timely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90</td>
<td>Above Average</td>
<td>Missing one or more of the qualities above but makes a significant above average contribution to class learning; timely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80</td>
<td>Average</td>
<td>Missing more than two qualities above and only makes an average contribution. Personal opinion without support; timely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Barely Satisfactory</td>
<td>Void of new information, but timely</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>0</td>
<td>Unacceptable</td>
<td>No posting; posting after the discussion week period ends</td>
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