

MLS 5321
Online Seminar
Aug. 28th - Oct. 20th
Fall 2023

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MLS 5321: LEADERSHIP IN COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
MASTER IN LEADERSHIP STUDIES

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course examines leadership in complex situations and operating environments, e.g., situations with multiple contexts, constituencies, and functions. Organizations of all types and sizes, government agencies, military organizations, and corporations face a variety of complex problems, many of which cross organizational boundaries. These situations may involve responding to unanticipated events, contending with rapid change in markets or technology, downsizing/rightsizing, or leading collaborative work in a shared-power world.

This course will study the nature of these unique and complex problems that organizations face and the ways in which they have been addressed. Frameworks that can assist leaders in managing these situations and organizational settings will be examined. Principles from texts and articles on organizational learning and collaboration will be applied to cases of current and previous public and private sector problems.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

At the end of this course, students will:

- *Understand* the nature of the unique and complex problems and operating environments faced by organizations.
- *Apply* a number of frameworks to complex problems and *evaluate* their usefulness.
- *Analyze* the strategies that organizations have used to address these problems.
- *Understand* and *apply* the principles of learning organizations to complex problems.
- *Identify* the habits of mind and behaviors of successful leaders in these situations.
- *Develop* integrative and collaborative leadership approaches to complex organizational challenges.

ASSIGNED MATERIAL

Required texts:

1. Dweck, Carol S. 2006. *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success; How We Can Learn to fulfill Our Potential*. New York: Ballantine Books. ISBN: 978-0-345-47232-8.
2. Senge, Peter M. 2006. *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organization*. New York: Currency/Doubleday. ISBN 978-0-385-51725-6.
3. Holmes, Jamie. 2015. *Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing*. New York: Broadway Books. ISBN 978-0-385-34839-3.

Various readings and media available on Blackboard.

COURSE STRUCTURE

This is an academically rigorous course with a considerable amount of reading. The course will be structured by week. For the first seven weeks, each week will include readings and a real-world crisis, disaster or success (a case study). Each week, discussion posts and response posts will ask you to apply principles, frameworks, lessons learned, etc. from the readings to the case study for that week. For the eighth and final week, you will focus on the final paper, which applies principles, frameworks, lessons learned, etc. from the course readings to a crisis, disaster, or success that *you choose* (a self-selected case study). You are strongly encouraged and expected to begin working on the final paper before the last week of class. More details concerning the discussion posts, response posts, and final paper are provided below.

ASSESSMENTS AND GRADING

Your grade will be based on the following assignments:

Assignment	Points	Percent of Grade
Netiquette	8	≈ 4%
Discussion Posts	70	≈ 40%
Response Posts	42	≈ 23%
Final Paper	60	33%
Total	180	100%

NETIQUETTE

Netiquette involves the rules that govern proper behavior or etiquette when communicating online. There is a tendency to believe that the proper behavior and etiquette of face-to-face communication does not apply to online communication. We are all familiar with stories about improper behavior surrounding emails, tweets, Facebook posts, blogs, etc. Netiquette is being civil online. We will practice proper netiquette. Please read the *Netiquette* document on Blackboard.

DISCUSSION POSTS

Each week, there will be two discussion questions. You are responsible for discussing each question. I prefer to receive one thread that includes both posts. Each post is worth 5 points, with a maximum of 10 total points available for the two posts each week. Over seven weeks, discussions posts are worth a total of 70 points.

Apply what you have learned from the readings to the case study for the week. Use the readings to engage in an analysis of the case study. Do not simply discuss your opinion. Do not simply regurgitate another student's post. You must provide substantive posts. A substantive post is one that: 1. makes me see that you have done the readings; 2. demonstrates that you have thought about the material; 3. analytically applies ideas and elements from the readings to the case study for the week; and 4. entices your fellow students to engage in further discussion and continue your analysis.

While there is no set word limit, strive to keep your discussion posts to 250-300 words. **Discussion posts are due on Friday at midnight (El Paso time).**

RESPONSE POSTS

Each week, you are responsible for responding to two of your fellow students' discussion posts. Each response post is worth 3 points, with a maximum of 6 total points available for the two posts each week. Over seven weeks, response posts are worth a total of 42 points.

As with your discussion posts, your response posts should be substantive posts.

While there is no set word limit, strive to keep your response posts to 200-250 words. **Response posts are due on Saturday at midnight (El Paso time).**

FINAL PAPER

In this 10 page paper (minimum eight pages of text, not counting the title page and references), you will apply principles, frameworks, lessons learned, etc. from the course readings to a crisis, disaster, or success that you choose (a self-selected case study). View the final paper as an expanded and more in-depth analysis of the weekly case studies we reviewed. Your self-selected case study cannot be one of the case studies examined during the course. Additionally, your self-selected case study must be approved by me.

There are many complex cases to choose from; below are only a few examples:

- Flint, Michigan water crisis
- Boston Marathon bombing (response is an organizational success)
- JP Morgan Chase debacle – the London Whale
- Hurricane Maria – Puerto Rico (response?)
- Homelessness crisis (San Francisco and Los Angeles)
- Blackhawk Down.

The paper must include three parts: 1. a relatively short description of the case study; 2. an analysis of the leadership efforts (quality, effectiveness, etc.), or lack thereof, using appropriate principles from the readings; and 3. a discussion on the leadership lessons to be learned. The analysis and discussion (parts 2 and 3) should constitute the main part of the paper. If you cannot locate enough research material to address parts 2 and 3, choose another topic. It is important to identify and draw upon high-quality academic resources.

Additional guidelines for the final paper will be available on Blackboard. A sample final paper will also be made available on Blackboard.

The final paper is a significant assignment as it constitutes one-third of your final grade. **It is due on October 21st at midnight (El Paso time).**

QUALITY OF WORK

This is a graduate course and you are expected to produce quality work. Quality work requires being prepared and encompasses both substance and presentation (style, organization, grammar, etc.). Poor presentation distracts from what it is you are trying to communicate. Quality work also includes submitting discussion posts, response posts, and the final paper on time. Barring exigent circumstances, work submitted late will not be accepted. Producing quality work requires more than a minimum effort. In all cases, quality trumps quantity.

COURSE COMMUNICATION

UTEP Email

Important course information will primarily be communicated through email. There may also be times when I communicate through “Announcements” within Blackboard. Note: your “miners.utep.edu” email address is the only email address I will use when communicating important information via email. Students are responsible for regularly checking their official UTEP email and

the “Announcements” section within Blackboard. It is not a valid excuse to say, “I did not receive the email” or “I forgot to check the ‘Announcements’ within Blackboard.”

COURSE POLICIES

ACCOMMODATIONS

The University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations and auxiliary services to students with documented disabilities in order to provide them with equal opportunities to participate in programs, services, and activities in compliance with sections 503 and 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, as amended, and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act (ADAAA) of 2008. Students requesting accommodations based on a disability must register with the [UTEP Center for Accommodations and Support Services](#) (CASS). Contact CASS at 915-747-5148 or email them at cass@utep.edu. Students can also apply for accommodations online via the [CASS AIM portal](#).

COVID-19 ACCOMMODATIONS

Students are not permitted on campus when they have a positive COVID-19 test, exposure or symptoms. If you are not permitted on campus, you should contact me as soon as possible so we can arrange necessary and appropriate accommodations. We can further discuss what accommodations are needed should you miss assessment deadlines because you are sick with COVID-19. Your health takes priority.

WITHDRAWAL POLICY

To be withdrawn from the class, students must take appropriate actions on or before UTEP’s deadlines. Automatic withdrawals will not be made by the instructor. A student may officially withdraw from this class with an automatic ‘W’ at any time **before October 5th**. According to UTEP policy, no withdrawals will be allowed after this date. You will receive a failing grade if you simply stop participating in class and do not take appropriate actions to withdraw from the course.

SCHOLASTIC DISHONESTY

Scholastic Dishonesty will not be tolerated.

I am required by the Handbook of Operating Procedures for The University of Texas at El Paso to report “all alleged acts of scholastic dishonesty...to the Dean of Students for disposition.” (See Section III of the Handbook of Operating Procedures for UTEP (*Academic Policies and Faculty Personnel Matters* 4.14a.))

As stated in Section II of the Handbook of Operating Procedures for UTEP (*Student Conduct and Discipline* 1.2.3(a)): “Any student who commits an act of academic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Academic dishonesty includes but is not limited to cheating, plagiarism, collusion, the submission for credit of any work or materials that are attributable in whole or in part to another person without giving sufficient credit, taking an examination for another person, or any act designed to give unfair advantage to a student or the attempt to commit such acts.”

Please refer to UTEP’s Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution at <https://www.utep.edu/student-affairs/osccr/student-conduct/academic-integrity.html>. You should read the *Avoiding Plagiarism* handout available on their site, which is also available on Blackboard.

COURSE SCHEDULE

The schedule below outlines what will be covered in this course. It will be followed to the extent possible in meeting the instructional goals and needs of the course. For the discussion posts and response posts, try to keep your posts on-point for each week. You may want to refer to principles or frameworks from a prior week, but strive to stick with the readings for the current week. In other words, each week should be self-contained. When it comes to the final paper, however, you are strongly encouraged and expected to incorporate principles, frameworks, lessons learned, etc. from all of the weeks' readings and apply what you have learned to your self-selected case study.

Aside from the required texts, other book chapters, articles, and media are available on Blackboard and the internet. I reserve the right to alter this schedule as needed.

Week One (Aug. 28 - Sept. 2)

Mindsets and the Kennedy Administration

Required Reading:

- Dweck, Carol S., *Mindset*
 - Chapter 1: The Mindsets
 - Chapter 2: Inside the Mindsets
 - Chapter 3: The Truth about Ability and Accountability

- Janis, Irving L. 1982. *Groupthink, Second Edition*.
 - Chapter 2: A Perfect Failure: The Bay of Pigs
 - Chapter 6: The Cuban Missile Crisis

Discussion Posts due Friday, Sept. 1 at midnight

Response Posts due Saturday, Sept. 2 at midnight

Week Two (Sept. 3 - Sept. 9)

Mindsets and Alcoa's Transformation

Required Reading:

- Dweck, Carol S., *Mindset*
 - Chapter 4: Sports: The Mindset of a Champion
 - Chapter 5: Business: Mindset and Leadership
 - Chapter 8: Changing Mindsets

- Duhigg, Charles. 2012. *The Power of Habit*.
 - Chapter 4: Keystone Habits, or the Ballad of Paul O'Neill: Which Habits Matter Most

Discussion Posts due Friday, Sept. 8 at midnight

Response Posts due Saturday, Sept. 9 at midnight

Week Three (Sept. 10 - Sept. 16)

Uncertainty, The God Complex, and NASA's *Columbia* Disaster

Required Reading:

- Holmes, Jaime, *Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing*

- Prologue
- Chapter 1: The Resolving Mind: How Sense Making Works
- Chapter 2: The Hidden A's: The Secrets of Sense Making
- TED Talk - Tim Harford: "Trial, Error and the God Complex"
https://www.ted.com/talks/tim_harford_trial_error_and_the_god_complex
- Langewiesche, William. 2003. "Columbia's Last Flight: The Inside Story of the Investigation and the Catastrophe it Laid Bare." *Atlantic Monthly*, November 2003

Discussion Posts due Friday, Sept. 15 at midnight
Response Posts due Saturday, Sept. 16 at midnight

Week Four (Sept. 17 - Sept. 23)

Learning Disabilities, Laws of the Fifth Discipline, Ducati, and Deepwater Horizon

Required Reading:

- Senge, Peter, *The Fifth Discipline*
 - Chapter 1: Give Me a Lever Long Enough...
 - Chapter 2: Does Your Organization Have a Learning Disability?
 - Chapter 4: The Laws of the Fifth Discipline
- Holmes, Jaime, *Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing*
 - Chapter 7: Building a Better Ducati: The Uses of Uncertainty
- Meigs, James B. 2016. "Blame BP for Deepwater Horizon. But Direct Your Outrage to the Actual Mistake." *Slate*, Sept. 30, 2016
<https://slate.com/technology/2016/09/bp-is-to-blame-for-deepwater-horizon-but-its-mistake-was-actually-years-of-small-mistakes.html>

Discussion Posts due Friday, Sept. 22 at midnight
Response Posts due Saturday, Sept. 23 at midnight

Week Five (Sept. 24 - Sept. 30)

Two Disciplines, Honda's Innovation, and GM's NUMMI Plant

Required Reading:

- Senge, Peter, *The Fifth Discipline*
 - Chapter 5: A Shift of Mind
 - Chapter 8: Personal Mastery
 - Chapter 9: Mental Models
- Rothfeder, Jeffrey. 2014. *Driving Honda: Inside the World's Most Innovative Car Company*
 - Chapter 1: The Honda Difference
 - Chapter 7: Honda's Innovation Machine
- NPR Audio - "NUMMI." *This American Life*. (Warning - 60 minutes)
<http://www.thisamericanlife.org/radio-archives/episode/403/nummi>

Discussion Posts due Friday, Sept. 29 at midnight
Response Posts due Saturday, Sept. 30 at midnight

Week Six (Oct. 1 - Oct. 7)

Uncertainty, Our Shared Power World, and Hurricane Katrina

Required Reading:

- Holmes, Jaime, *Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing*
 - Chapter 3: Shocks and Tremors: The Problem with Urgency
 - Chapter 4: Fifty Days in Texas: Why Intentions are Misread
 - Chapter 8: The Puzzle Man: Where to Find Hidden Answers
- Crosby, Barbara C. 2010. "Leading in the Shared-Power World of 2020." *Public Administration Review*, December 2010 Special Issue
- Kettl, Donald F. 2009. *The Next Government of the United States: Why Our Institutions Fail Us and How to Fix Them*
 - Chapter 3: Irresponsible Government

Discussion Posts due Friday, Oct. 6 at midnight
Response Posts due Saturday, Oct. 7 at midnight

Week Seven (Oct. 8 - Oct. 14)

Uncertainty, "Black Swans," Wicked Problems, and the 2008 Financial Crisis

Required Reading:

- Holmes, Jaime, *Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing*
 - Chapter 5: Overtested USA: When to Resist Momentum
 - Chapter 6: The Hemline Hassle: A Strategy of Ignorance
- Conklin, Jeff. 2001-2010. "Wicked Problems and Social Complexity." *CogNexus Institute*
- Taleb, Nassim Nicholas. 2008. Book chapter excerpt from *The Black Swan: The Impact of the Highly Improbable*. Published in the *N.Y. Times*
- Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission. 2011. *The Financial Crisis Inquiry Report*. Washington D.C.: Government Printing Office
 - Conclusions of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission
- Short YouTube Videos
 - [The Awareness Test](#)
 - [The Observation Test](#)

Discussion Posts due Friday, Oct. 13 at midnight
Response Posts due Saturday, Oct. 14 at midnight

Week Eight (Oct. 15 - Oct. 21)

No Required Reading | *Final Paper due Saturday, Oct. 21 at midnight*