MLS 5321: LEADERSHIP IN COMPLEX ORGANIZATIONS
THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO
MASTERS OF 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:

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 upon the following assignments:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Points</th>
<th>Percent of Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Netiquette</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>≈ 4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discussion Posts</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>≈ 40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Posts</td>
<td>42</td>
<td>≈ 23%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Paper</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>180</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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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, other social media apps, blogs, etc. Netiquette is being civil online. In this course, we will practice proper netiquette.

Discussion Posts
Each week, there will be two discussion questions. You are responsible for discussing each question. 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. Analysis/comment on the leadership lessons to be learned. The analysis (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.

The final paper is a significant assignment as it constitutes one-third of your final grade. **It is due on March 14th 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 POLICIES**

**CLASS ENVIRONMENT**

I will strive to provide a class environment appropriate for academic instruction and discussion. For this to occur, make sure you read the assignments and complete the discussion and response posts, as scheduled. We will welcome and encourage different ideas and viewpoints. Some topics are controversial and students should feel comfortable expressing their thoughts. We will respect what others have to say – we do not have to agree with them – and avoid personal insult and rudeness.
We will avoid becoming politically charged when discussing sensitive topics. We will practice Netiquette.

**ACCOMMODATIONS**
If you have or suspect a disability and need accommodations, you should contact UTEP’s Center for Accommodations and Support Services (CASS) at 915.747.5148 or at cass@utep.edu or stop by Union Building East Room 106.

**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 February 28, 2020**. 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 1.2.2.1): “Any student who commits an act of scholastic dishonesty is subject to discipline. Scholastic 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, taking an examination for another person, 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. The handout will also be available on the Blackboard site for this 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 and articles are available on Blackboard and the internet. *I reserve the right to alter this schedule as needed.*
**Week One** (Jan. 21 - Jan. 25)
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
  - Chapter 2: A Perfect Failure: The Bay of Pigs
  - Chapter 6: The Cuban Missile Crisis

**Discussion Posts due Friday, Jan. 24 at midnight**
**Response Posts due Saturday, Jan. 25 at midnight**

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**Week Two** (Jan. 26 - Feb. 1)
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
  - Chapter 4: Keystone Habits, or the Ballad of Paul O’Neill: Which Habits Matter Most

**Discussion Posts due Friday, Jan. 31 at midnight**
**Response Posts due Saturday, Feb. 1 at midnight**

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**Week Three** (Feb. 2 - Feb. 8)
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”

**Discussion Posts due Friday, Feb. 7 at midnight**
**Response Posts due Saturday, Feb. 8 at midnight**
### Week Four (Feb. 9 - Feb. 15)
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

  - [https://slate.com/technology/2016/09/bp-is-to-blame-for-deepwater-horizon-but-its-mistake-was-actually-years-of-small-mistakes.html](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, Feb. 14 at midnight**
**Response Posts due Saturday, Feb. 15 at midnight**

### Week Five (Feb. 16 - Feb. 22)
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, Jeffery. 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)

**Discussion Posts due Friday, Feb. 21 at midnight**
**Response Posts due Saturday, Feb. 22 at midnight**

### Week Six (Feb. 23 - Feb. 29)
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

• Kettl, Donald F. 2009. The Next Government of the United States: Why Our Institutes Fail Us and How to Fix Them
  o Chapter 3: Irresponsible Government

Discussion Posts due Friday, Feb. 28 at midnight
Response Posts due Saturday, Feb. 29 at midnight

Week Seven (March 1 - March 7)

Required Reading:
• Holmes, Jaime, Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing
  o Chapter 5: Overtested USA: When to Resist Momentum
  o 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

  o Conclusions of the Financial Crisis Inquiry Commission

• Short YouTube Videos
  o The Awareness Test
  o The Observation Test

Discussion Posts due Friday, March 6 at midnight
Response Posts due Saturday, March 7 at midnight

Week Eight (March 8 - March 14)
No Required Reading

Final Paper due Saturday, March 14 at midnight