

MLS 5321  
In Person Seminar - Room 104  
January 20 – March 13  
Spring 2026

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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.

### **REQUIRED MATERIAL**

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. Holmes, Jamie. 2015. **Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing.** New York: Broadway Books. ISBN 978-0-385-34839-3.

Optional:

3. **The Art of Thinking Clearly**, by Rolf Dobelli ISBN: 9780062219688

## 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, class discussions and occasional hybrid posts will ask you to apply principles, frameworks, lessons learned, etc. from the readings to the case study for that week. The course will culminate with a final paper (or reading) 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:

Class Participation	60
Hybrid Participation	20
Discussion Posts/In Class Activity	70
Final Paper	60
<b>Total</b>	<b>210</b>

Grading Score:

A=180-210

B=150-179

C=110-149

D=80-109

F=Below 80

### CLASS PARTICIPATION

Class Participation will be graded off attendance and awareness in class. This grade is not determined by speaking in every class and answering every question. Rather, this grade is determined by appropriate participation, listening, and engaging with your classmates, timeliness, and communication regarding attending class, etc.

### HYBRID PARTICIPATION

Hybrid Participation includes weekly discussion posts on Blackboard, specific and other Blackboard assigned reading and required posts to be completed prior to the listed due date.

### DISCUSSION POSTS/IN CLASS ACTIVITY

Each week, there will be discussions in class with an activity. There may be follow-up needed. You are responsible for managing your own class activity and discussion contributions, that includes choosing to participate in class with application of the reading, and also allowing your classmates to do the same.

## **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.

## **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 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**

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](mailto:cass@utep.edu). Students can also apply for accommodations online via the CASS AIM portal.

### **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 12. 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 (Jan 20 – Jan 27)*

Required Reading:

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

*Week Two (Jan 27 – Feb 3)* **HYBRID WEEK**

Required Reading:

Dweck, Carol S., *Mindset*  
Chapter 4: Sports: The Mindset of a Champion  
Chapter 5: Business: Mindset and Leadership  
Chapter 6: Relationships: Mindsets in Love (Or Not)

*Discussion Questions over Blackboard on Dweck Chapters 1-3, week of January 27<sup>th</sup>, no in class meeting this week.*

*Week Three (Feb 3 – Feb 10)*

*Nonsense & The God Complex*

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  
Chapter 3: Shocks & Tremors: The Problem With Urgency  
Chapter 4: Fifty Days In Texas: Why Intentions Are Misread

*Discussion Questions in Class on Feb 3 on Dweck Chapters 1-6*

*Week Four (Feb 10 – Feb 17)*

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  
Chapter 7: Building a Better Ducati: The Case of Uncertainty

Dobelli: *The Art of Thinking Clearly*  
Perception and Everyday Biases (Chapters 1–33)

Sample Case Study Research Topics:

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

*Discussion Questions in Class on Feb 10 on Holmes Chapters 1-4, Paper topics selected, Paper Requirements shared*

*Week Five (Feb 17 – Feb 24)*

Required Reading:

Holmes, Jaime, Nonsense: The Power of Not Knowing  
Chapter 8: The Puzzle Man: Where To Find Hidden Answers  
Chapter 9: The Art of Contradiction: What Diversity Offers

Dobelli: The Art of Thinking Clearly  
Dobelli: Decision-Making Pitfalls (Chapters 34–66)

Groups Assigned

*Discussion Questions in Class on Feb 10 on Holmes Chapters 5-7, Dobelli Chapters 1-33, Paper Writing week*

*Week Six (Feb 24 – Mar 3)*

Required Reading:

Dweck, Carol S., Mindset  
Chapter 7: Parents, Teachers and Coaches: Where Do Mindsets Come From?  
Chapter 8: Changing Mindsets

Dobelli: Consequences and Debiasing Strategies (Chapters 67–99)

*Discussion Questions in Class on Holmes Chapters 8-9, Dobelli Chapters 34-66, Paper writing continues*

*Week Seven (Mar 3 – Mar 10) No In Class Meeting – Paper writing focus.*

Paper Due March 6, 11:59 pm, Blackboard.

Grades Due: March 13, 2026