



**Georgetown University  
School of Continuing Studies  
Master of Professional Studies in Human Resources Management  
Course Syllabus, Fall 2014**

**Course:** Strategic Thinking in Human Resources  
(MPHR 802 01)

**Dates:** August 27 – December 15, 2014

**Class Time:** Mondays, 5:20 PM – 7:50 PM

**Location:** 640 Mass Ave. Rm. C 204

**Instructor:** Professor John Gill

**Office:** Georgetown University  
640 Mass Ave.  
Washington, DC 20057

**Office Hours:** By Appointment before class

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**Course  
Description:**

The most concise definition of “strategy” is also the most elegant: a strategy is an integrated set of choices. Creating an integrated set of choices and then implementing them can be a powerful prescription for change, but doing so is also fraught with challenge. Among other things, the capable strategist must:

- See past the presenting problem(s).
- Unearth the underlying problem(s).
- Employ systems thinking, which includes understanding that in organizations, nothing operates in a vacuum. Rather, any one element affects every other element. “If you pick up one end of the stick, you pick up the other.”
- Complete a comprehensive analysis—often quantitative and qualitative—of factors contributing to the underlying problem(s).
- Draw thoughtful conclusions from the analysis, and use those conclusions to create a strategic solution to the underlying problem(s), often one that considers the impact of the solution now and over the long-term.
- Articulate specific and detailed tactics and action steps that directly support the strategic framework.
- Communicate, socialize, and sell the strategic solution to key stakeholders, establishing commitment over compliance.
- Implement each tactic of the strategic solution with focus and discipline, often over a long time horizon.
- Monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of the strategic solution, course-correcting when necessary.

This approach is essential to the modern, 21<sup>st</sup> century HR practitioner, who is increasingly central to most organizations’ effectiveness. Today, organizations compete on three criteria: (1) ideas, (2) speed, and (3) talent, with talent being the lynchpin of the three. Talent gives rise to innovative ideas, and talent executes those ideas rapidly, enabling an organization to reach the market faster than its competitors. The principles also hold in the public and non-profit sectors. Hence, a strategic approach to Human Resources can enable a business and its employees to thrive and grow.

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**Course  
Objectives:**

On completion of this course, students will:

1. Learn how to think critically.
  2. Develop a strategic approach to Human Resources in the context of business issues.
  3. Exercise strategic thinking in real-world case studies.
  4. Create a strategic framework for a current HR issue in a real organization.
  5. Present to key stakeholders and persuade them to adopt strategic HR solutions.
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**Course  
Requirements:**

***Course Approach:*** We will use recent, real-world case studies as the cornerstone of the learning process. Specifically, we will discuss, debate, and analyze eight cases during the semester, supplemented by one required text and two cases contained there. In many HR issues, we face a problem, as opposed to a puzzle. A puzzle has one right answer—every piece fits and fits perfectly. Not so with a problem. A problem has no right answer, but many possible answers, of which some will be bad answers, some will be good answers, some will be better answers, and perhaps one or two will be the best answers one can craft in a given case. In this regard, case studies are ideal vehicles for developing a strategic approach to HR, as human resource issues are as complex as the humans involved in them, and sophisticated HR strategies take these complexities into account.

Hence, students must read the assigned case studies before each class as well as the supplemental reading, making notes and forming ideas and questions. Students are expected to participate vigorously in each class discussion, which can only happen through thorough preparation. Class participation will be a factor in determining final grades.

***Required Text:*** Concepts in Strategic Management & Business Policy: Toward Global Sustainability. Thomas Wheelen & J. David Hunger, (13/E); Prentice Hall. ISBN: 0132153351. (Paperback, without case studies in Appendix.)

***Required Text:*** Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Addition. American Psychology Association. ISBN: 1433805618. (Paperback, 2009).

***Required Article:*** Learning by the Case Method. John S. Hammond. Harvard Business Review, Article 9-376-241.

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	<i>Topics</i>	<i>Advance Reading</i>	<i>Deliverables</i>
8/27 (Week 1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Introductions</li> <li>• Syllabus Review</li> <li>• Learning by Case Study</li> <li>• Assignments</li> <li>• Expectations &amp; Grading</li> </ul>	“Learning by the Case Method”	
9/8 (Week 2)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Transforming the HR Function - <u>Simulation</u></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Wheelen: Chapter 1, “Basic Concepts of Strategic Management”</li> <li>• Simulation Case</li> </ul>	
9/15 (Week 3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Structural Thinking &amp; the Discipline of “Creating” in Strategy Formulation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case 1: “Taking HR Seriously in Minneapolis”</li> <li>• Wheelen: Chapter 12, “Case Analysis”. p.p.373-390</li> </ul>	
9/22 (Week 4)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Creating a Strategic Response to Retention Issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case 2: “Why Are We Losing All Our Good People?”</li> <li>• Wheelen: Chapter 2, “Corporate Governance”</li> </ul>	Teams formed for Assignment Three
9/29 (Week 5)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Group Discussion &amp; Analysis of Assignment One</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case 3: “Tough Guy”</li> </ul>	Assignment One Due

10/6 (Week 6)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a Strategic Response to Succession Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case 5: “Succession Planning: RWE Ready”</li> <li>Wheelen: p.p. 301-311 Chapter 4, “Environmental Scanning &amp; Industry Analysis”</li> </ul>	
10/13 (Week 7)  <b>Holiday (no class)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Assessing an Organization</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wheelen: Chapter 5, “Internal Scanning: Organizational Analysis”</li> <li>Part 2 Case: “Boeing Bets the Company”</li> </ul>	Assignment One Graded & Returned
10/20 (Week 8)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a Strategic Response to Career Management</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case 4: “Thomas Green: Power, Office Politics, &amp; a Career in Crisis”</li> <li>Part 1 Case – “Blood Bananas”</li> </ul>	
10/27 (Week 9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Presentation &amp; Discussion: HR Strategy at Rolls-Royce</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Wheelen: Chapter 6, “Situation Analysis &amp; Business Strategy”.</li> <li>Chapter 9, “Organizing for Action”</li> </ul>	
11/3 (Week 10)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a Strategic Response to Compensation Issues</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case 6: “Compensation Reform at Denver Public Schools”</li> <li>Wheelen: Chapter 8, “Functional Strategy &amp; Strategic Choice”.</li> </ul>	Assignment Two Due
11/10 (Week 11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Creating a Strategic Response to Workforce Reduction</li> <li></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Case 7: “Downsizing the Company Without Downsizing Morale”</li> <li>Wheelen: Chapter 10, “Staffing and Directing”.</li> </ul>	

11/17 (Week 12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR's Role in M&amp;A Managing the Strategy Implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case 8: "The Breakfast of Champions"</li> <li>• Wheelen: Chapter 11, "Evaluation &amp; Control" pp. 328-355</li> </ul>	Assignment Two Graded & Returned
11/24 (Week 13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• HR Strategy in Non-Profits</li> <li>• </li> </ul>	Non Profit research – targeted domains	
12/1 (Week 14)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Trends in Human Resources</li> <li>• Course summary</li> </ul>		

12/8	<b>Assignment Three Presentations</b>		<b>Assignment Three</b>
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*All case studies can be found via [hbr.org](http://hbr.org):*

<b>Case Study Name</b>	<b>Case Study Code Number</b>
<b>1. Taking HR Seriously in Minneapolis</b>	<b>PEL-055 and PEL 010</b>
<b>2. Why Are We Losing All Our Good People?</b>	<b>R0806A</b>
<b>3. Tough Guy</b>	<b>UV0896</b>
<b>4. Thomas Green: Power, Office Politics, and a Career in Crisis</b>	<b>2095</b>
<b>5. Succession Planning: RWE Ready</b>	<b>UV0858</b>
<b>6. Compensation Reform at Denver Public Schools</b>	<b>PEL-002</b>
<b>7. Downsizing the Company Without Downsizing Morale</b>	<b>SMR310</b>
<b>8. The Breakfast of Champions (A and B)</b>	<b>UV 0856 and UV 0860</b>



## Assignments

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### **Assignment One:**

Review and analyze the case, “Tough Guy.” Write a paper that addresses the following:

*Due 9/29*

*5 pages in length  
(cannot exceed  
6 pages)*

*APA style*

*15% of Final  
Grade*

- What is the presenting problem?
  - What is the underlying problem(s)?
  - What factors are contributing to the underlying problem(s)?
  - What are two or three possible solutions to the underlying problem(s)?
  - What are the strategic implications of these solutions?
  - Provide a clear and thoughtful answer to the final question in the case: “Now what, if anything, should [Frazer] do?”
- Be prepared to discuss your paper and defend your solutions in class on 9/24.

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### **Assignment Two:**

Select a case not already discussed in this course from hbr.org or similar.

*Due 11/3*

*10 pages in  
length (cannot  
exceed 12 pages)*

*APA style*

*At least three  
sources cited*

*40% of Final  
Grade*

When making your selection, consider the HR topic itself. What aspects of HR are you interested in exploring more deeply? What HR issue is particularly relevant to professional challenges you face in your current role? Once you have selected your case, write a paper that addresses the following:

- Identify the presenting & underlying problem(s).
- Research and describe the HR issue itself.
- Discuss the implications of the HR issue to strategic thinking.
- Identify the key stakeholders and their relationship to this issue.
- Explore how to address the underlying problem(s), providing at least three scenarios, the merits of each, as well as any strategic implications of each.
- Discuss how to establish commitment from key stakeholders for your strategic solution(s).
- Provide a thoughtful conclusion that effectively resolves the underlying problem(s).
- Connect strategy to tactics to transactions wherever possible.

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**Assignment  
Three:**

Create a team of four students. You may select your team mates on your own—teams will not be assigned to you. Teams should be formed and the professor advised by 9/17.

***Due 12/8***

***Two Deliverables:  
(1) Presentation  
(2) Work Product***

Ideally, at least one member of your team is currently employed and can use a current, real-world HR issue as the focus of this team-based assignment. If so, the HR issue at play in the student's organization must be substantive—that is, it must be complex enough so as not to have a clear or obvious solution, and include both presenting and underlying problems. You should also have access to the right kinds of data and people in the organization to enable successful completion of this assignment. (Names can be changed to protect confidentiality, if appropriate.)

***40% of Final  
Grade***

The ultimate goal of this assignment is to devise a long-range strategic plan that effectively addresses the HR issue. To do so, your team must create two deliverables—a presentation and a work product (not a paper)—that artfully summarizes the following:

- Problem Description: both presenting & underlying.
- Analysis: devise an analytical method to gather data and insight about the problem (surveys, focus groups, one-on-one interviews). Design the instruments and conduct the analyses.
- Conclusion: draw clear and compelling conclusions from your analysis.
- Strategic Plan: create a long-range strategic plan that addresses your conclusions. This should be a high-level strategic framework depicted graphically.
- Tactics: articulate specific tactics/action steps that flow naturally from your strategic framework. Your tactics should be substantive (e.g., what, why, how, timeframe, resources needed, costs, risks, steps to mitigate risks, anticipated outcomes, etc.).
- Communication: plan for communicating, selling, socializing, and ultimately securing commitment for your strategic plan. Consider: Who are the key stakeholders? What do they need and want? What is their relationship to and affinity for the HR issue? How will your plan benefit the key stakeholders? How will you secure their commitment? What if you can't? Will their compliance suffice? Who in the organization could (and would) effectively champion this strategy?

Your team's presentation cannot exceed 30 minutes in length, and must include time for questions and probing from the class. You may use any media for conveying your ideas (slides, flip charts, handouts, etc). You may organize your presentation in any way you like,

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provided that you are able to effectively address each aspect of the assignment. Failure to address any aspect of the assignment in a substantive and thoughtful way will affect the team's final grade.

On the day of your team's presentation, you must submit a work product that effectively summarizes the work of your team and each aspect of the assignment described above. Note that this need not be a group paper—executive summaries, bulleted lists, sample instruments, reports, graphics, and appendices are all appropriate. Think of the work product as more of a business report than an academic paper. Additionally, there is no particular length requirement for your work product.

Please do not assume, however, that because the requirements of the work product are flexible, your team can submit a poorly conceived or poorly organized deliverable. The work product should be something you would be proud to submit to your organization's CEO. Anything less than that will be reflected in your team's final grade for this assignment.

Finally, note that no member of the team can “coast” while other team members carry the brunt of the workload. Your team members will submit anonymous peer evaluations on your contributions for this assignment. And while positive peer evaluations cannot raise your letter grade higher than that of the rest of the team, a negative consensus can lower your letter grade below that of the rest of the team.

This assignment will showcase your ability to act as real-world consultants, think strategically about complex HR issues, and raise the organization's understanding of and commitment to the solutions your team provides. And because your solutions have little value if no one adopts them, your presentation skills—your team's ability to articulate, share, and convince—will be as important as the content you present. Note that practice does not make perfect—perfect practice makes perfect. Your content should be complete well in advance of the due date, leaving your team sufficient time to rehearse.

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**Class****Contribution:**

***5% of Final  
Grade***

Being “present” during case discussion, expressing views supported by facts or inferences, It is not how much you say, but the substance of what you bring to the class. Full engagement in Assignment Three (see above).

## Grading

Strategic thinking is both art and science—it requires quantitative and qualitative acumen. To that end, the ability to write well is a cornerstone of strategic thought. Clear writing is indicative of clear thinking. If your content is strong but your writing is weak, your final grade will suffer accordingly. If writing is a struggle for you, discuss this with me early in the semester. We can secure a writing coach to help improve your skill in this area.

Regarding the letter grade “A”—this is reserved for truly outstanding work. That is to say, the work must “stand out” from the crowd. By definition, if an entire group stands out—then, in fact, no one stands out. Therefore, the majority of the class cannot receive an “A.” If you receive an “A” in this course, it is because you worked very hard for it. Also note that strong work assignments coupled with middling class participation will not yield an “A” for the semester. The reverse is also true.

The following criteria serve as guides for all assignments in this course. There is no grade of “D.”

<b>A</b>	100-95 percent
<b>A-</b>	94-90
<b>B+</b>	89-87
<b>B</b>	86-83
<b>B-</b>	82-80
<b>C</b>	79-70
<b>F</b>	69 and below

### **A 95-100%**

Clearly stands out as excellent work. An “A” grade work could be used as a model for other students to emulate. Shows excellent grasp of subject matter and conceptual integration. The presentation shows excellent in-depth analytical thinking and an elegantly innovative application. It is very well written and organized. Additional input is provided, relevant to the subject, from outside sources or personal experience.

### **A- 90-94%**

Represents high quality performance. Shows excellent grasp of subject matter and conceptual integration. Shows a high level of thinking, analysis and application. It is very well written and organized. Additional input is provided, relevant to the subject, from outside sources or personal experience.

### **B+ 87-89%**

Represents very good work. Shows thorough grasp of subject matter and effective application. Shows good thinking and analysis. It is well written and organized. Additional input is provided, relevant to the subject, from outside sources or personal experience.

**B 83-86%**

Represents satisfactory work. Shows adequate level of thinking and analysis. Standard of presentation, organization and appropriateness of application is adequate. Some level of additional input is provided.

**B- 82-80%**

Work is below graduate level expectations, marginally passing. Presentation is rather general, superficial, or incomplete and not very well written. Indicates minimal level of individual thought or effort with inadequate attempts at application.

**C 70-79%**

Work is clearly unsatisfactory. It is poorly written and presented, shows poor analysis, misses important elements and lacks any noticeable attempts at application.

**F 69% and below**

Fails to meet minimum acceptable standards.

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***Attendance***

**Students are expected at all meetings of the course.** We do understand that from time to time, family, personal and work or work emergencies may arise. In those circumstances, please contact me immediately. A student who misses more than two classes is subject to withdrawal from the class by Dean Metzler and a final grade of “F” in the course.

***Punctuality***

**Students are expected to arrive on time for every class without exception.** There is no distinction made between one minute late and 15 minutes late—anything other than being seated and ready to begin class at 5:20 PM is considered late. Walking in the door at 5:20 PM is considered late. As with the attendance policy above, a student who is late more than twice is subject to withdrawal from the class by Dean Metzler and a final grade of “F” in the course.

***Use of Digital Devices in Class***

Students may use a laptop computer, digital tablet, etc. to take notes during class, if desired. Students may not use any digital device to surf the web, interact with others via social media, send text messages, send emails, play games, shop, make to-do lists, talk on the phone, or anything not explicitly related to the topic being discussed in class. All digital devices must be silenced at the start of every class as a courtesy to other students.

***Late Papers***

**Except in rare circumstances, late papers are not accepted. In case of an emergency, this rule can be waived with appropriate documentation and cause. Requests for extensions must reach me no later than a week before the paper is due.**

### **Incompletes**

Incompletes are given in only the most extraordinary circumstances and with appropriate documentation. Where an incomplete is granted, a grade of “N” shall be granted until the work is handed in and, then, the grade shall be changed accordingly. In no case shall work submitted after the announced date (date will be announced in class) be granted an incomplete. The work shall be delivered no later than 4 p.m. on that day. Failure to adhere to this rule will result in an F.

### **Citation System**

Students must use APA style in all papers submitted in the course.

### **Using SafeAssign on Blackboard**

Students agree that by taking this course all required papers will be subject to submission to SafeAssign via Blackboard for detection of plagiarism.

### **Students with Disabilities Policy**

- Students with documented disabilities have the right to specific accommodations that do not fundamentally alter the nature of the course. Some accommodations might include note takers, books on tape, extended time on assignments, and interpreter services among others. *Students must obtain an official letter from the Academic Resource Center listing the exact accommodations needed.*
- Students with disabilities should contact the Academic Resource Center (ARC) (Leavey Center, Suite 335; 202-687-8354; [arc@georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@georgetown.edu); <http://ldss.georgetown.edu/index.cfm>) before the start of classes to allow their office time to review the documentation and make recommendations for appropriate accommodations. If accommodations are recommended, you will be given a letter from ARC to share with your professors. You are personally responsible for completing this process officially and in a timely manner. Neither accommodations nor exceptions to policies can be permitted to students who have not completed this process in advance.

### **Honor System**

All students are expected to follow Georgetown’s honor code unconditionally. If you have not done so, please read the honor code material located online at:

<http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/honor/system/>

### **The Honor Pledge**

*In pursuit of the high ideals and rigorous standards of academic life I commit myself to respect and to uphold the Georgetown University honor system;*

*To live out a commitment to integrity in all my words and actions;*

*To be honest in every academic endeavor;*

*And to conduct myself honorably, as a responsible member of the Georgetown community as we live and work together;*

*To live out the ideals of Georgetown University, I commit myself to be a person for others in my daily life, respectful of difference and disagreement;*

*To care for this venerable campus and all of those with whom I share it;*

*And to fulfill in all ways the trust placed in me to carry on the Georgetown tradition.*