

## 1. Course Description

Today's communications environment is endlessly complex. From broadcast to microtargeting, digital to grassroots, branding to persuasion and everything in between, the modern communications professional can drown in a sea of alternatives. Students who take this class will learn to think in a new way, a strategic way, to prepare to build strategic communications plans that target the right audiences with the right messages at the right times and through the right channels. The class will cover a range of strategic thinking tools and students will learn to apply those tools through a series of case studies and practical exercises.

## 2. Course Objectives

By the end of this class, students can expect to:

- Develop skills in three models that structure strategic thinking for communications planning

## 3. Required Readings

The readings for this class will be a mix of articles, book excerpts, cases, and one book:

*Ahead of the Curve: A Guide to Applied Strategic Thinking*

By Stephen J. Stowell and Stephanie S. Mead

It's readily available online, including on Amazon.com.

The articles and book excerpts will be distributed via the class google group listserve.

Students will need to purchase and download cases directly from the Harvard Business School (HBS) case library. The cases cost between \$2.30 and \$3.95 each. Details are noted in the schedule. To access the HBS downloads, you have two options:

### Register as a student on the HBS publishing website

1. Visit the course URL - <http://cb.hbsp.harvard.edu/cb/access/5018698>
2. You will be prompted to create a login as an authorized student.
3. All materials listed below are listed in that course.

### Search by Product Number:

1. Go to <http://hbsp.harvard.edu/>
2. In the search bar at the top, type in the Product Numbers listed below or the case or article title.
3. Purchase one copyright license and follow the instructions to download the case. Note that if you team up with your classmates to buy multiple licenses you can save a small amount of money.

## 3. Google Group

Throughout the semester, we'll use a google group extensively. I'll distribute readings, clarify class discussions, make announcements, etc. through that group. In addition, a significant portion of the class grade is based on participation in the google group. You'll need a google account, which is free to sign up for.

As soon as possible after the first class meeting, visit the group, sign in and request to join (the link says "Sign in and apply for membership"): <http://groups.google.com/group/strategy-fall10/>

#### 4. Course Schedule

<p><b>Week 1:</b> <b>January 14</b></p>	<p><b>Course Overview, Syllabus Review, and Introductions</b>  <i>Discussion: What does “strategy” mean? How do you know if you’re thinking, observing, and planning strategically? What separates a strategist from a tactician? What is this class about... and what isn’t it about?</i></p>
<p><b>Week 2:</b> <b>January 21</b></p>	<p><b>The “Strategic Environment” – Factors in Strategic Thinking, Planning, and Decision-making</b>  <i>Discussion: In the context of planning for strategic communications, what are the critical factors? What do we need to know? What do we often know? What is nice to know, but not often available? How do we manage uncertainty, limited resources, and limited information?</i></p> <p><b>Read:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stowell &amp; Mead, Chapters 1, 2, and 3</li> <li>• Distributed via google group: Bai, M. (2004, November 21, 2004). <i>Who Lost Ohio?</i> New York Times Magazine. Retrieved online.</li> <li>• Distributed via google group: Hamel, G. (July-August 1996) <i>Strategy As Revolution</i>. In Harvard Business Review. Reprint number 96405.</li> <li>• Online series: <i>Relentless: How Barack Obama Outsmarted Hillary Clinton</i>, by Roger Simon. <a href="http://www.politico.com/relentless/">http://www.politico.com/relentless/</a></li> <li>• Download from HBS: Argenti, Paul; Howell, R., and K. Beck. <i>The Strategic Communications Imperative</i>. Product number: SMR174</li> </ul> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Self-assessment 1:</b> Are you a strong strategic thinker? What are your strengths and weaknesses when it comes to strategic assessment, planning, and action? If you could improve one thing in this regard, what would it be?</li> <li>• <b>Post a question about or reaction</b> to the readings as they relate to the topic of this week and last. Focus on the differences between strategy, planning, and tactics, and how each came into play in the 2008 elections. You may also (or instead) focus on the role of strategy in communications and operation. For example, how does strategic thinking work differently in communications than in business process planning?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 3:</b> <b>January 28</b></p>	<p><b>Structuring for Strategy: Overview of the Models and How We Might Use Them</b>  <i>Discussion: What are the basic questions all of the models hope to help us answer? How can the models help guide better strategic thinking and decision-making?</i></p> <p><b>Read:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case for discussion: <i>AARP and AARP Services, a Multi-Sector</i></li> </ul>

	<p><i>Approach to Social Change</i>, HBS Product Number: SI91</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case for discussion: <i>The September 11<sup>th</sup> Fund</i>, HBS Product Number: SI61</li> <li>• Case for discussion: <i>Manchester Products: A Brand Transition Challenge</i>. HBS Product Number: 4043</li> </ul> <p><b>Due:</b>  <b>Post a question about or reaction to the readings</b> as they relate to the topic of the week. Focus on the elements of strategy, planning, and tactics in one or more of the cases. What stands out as well done? As poorly done? As particularly challenging from a strategic perspective?</p>
<p><b>Week 4: February 4</b></p>	<p><b>Strategy Model 1: Step-By-Step</b>  <i>Discussion: In what circumstances is the measured, step-by-step model of strategic planning appropriate? What kinds of situations is it ideal for? When is it difficult? How can it be implemented, and what are roadblocks to implementation? What kinds of critical thinking and observational skills must one have to do it well? What strategic planning problems does the scenario model solve? What problems does it create?</i></p> <p><b>Read:</b>  All distributed via google group:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stowell &amp; Mead, Chapter 4</li> <li>• Annie E. Casey Foundation. (2007). A guide to measuring advocacy and policy. Baltimore, MD: Resiman, J., Gienapp, A, &amp; Stachowiak, S.</li> <li>• The Spin Project. (2005). <i>Strategic Communications Planning</i> [Brochure]. San Francisco, CA.</li> <li>• Communications Consortium Media Center. (2004). <i>Strategic Communications Audits</i>. Coffman, J.</li> </ul> <p><b>Due:</b>  <b>Post a question about or reaction to the readings</b> as they relate to the topic of the week. Focus on the areas of overlap and disconnects between the approach recommended by the Casey Foundation and Communications Consortium readings and the approach encapsulated in the Spin Project model. An alternative focus is the application of the Stowell and Mead targeting discussion to more successful communications planning.</p>
<p><b>Week 5: February 11</b></p>	<p><b>In-Class Group Step-by-Step Exercise</b>  We'll take the first 10 minutes of class to review the assignment and answer questions about the Group Exercise process, then we'll jump into the exercise.</p> <p><b>Read:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cases for group exercise: Boston Fights Drugs (A): Designing Communications Research, HBS Product Number: 588031</li> </ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Boston Fights Drugs (B): Converting Research to Action. HBS Product Number: 588032</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 6: February 18</b></p>	<p><b>Presentations and Debrief Group Step-by-Step Exercises</b>  Each group will present their step-by-step plan, discuss their group process and hurdles, and discuss the exercise as a whole with the class.</p> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group exercise deliverable</b> (one per group, with every member's name on it)</li> <li>• <b>Self-assessment 2:</b> How did you fare with the step-by-step model? What challenges did it help resolve, and which ones did it create? How well do you think it can be applied as we've learned it to communications planning you do as a professional?</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 7: February 25</b></p>	<p><b>Model 2: Scenario Planning</b>  <i>Discussion: In what circumstances is the scenario model of strategic thinking appropriate? What kinds of situations is it ideal for? When is it difficult? How can it be implemented, and what are roadblocks to implementation? What kinds of critical thinking and observational skills must one have to do it well? What strategic planning problems does the scenario model solve? What problems does it create?</i></p> <p><b>Read:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Stowell &amp; Mead, Chapters 7 and 8</li> <li>• Online scenarios: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PriceWaterhouseCoopers on HR: <a href="http://bit.ly/PWCpeople">http://bit.ly/PWCpeople</a></li> <li>• Shell Oil: <a href="http://bit.ly/ShellScenarios">http://bit.ly/ShellScenarios</a></li> </ul> </li> <li>• Wired article on scenario planning: <a href="http://bit.ly/WiredScenarios">http://bit.ly/WiredScenarios</a></li> <li>• Moving from scenarios to action: <a href="http://bit.ly/ActionScenarios">http://bit.ly/ActionScenarios</a></li> <li>• Download: <i>Scenario Planning Reconsidered</i>. HBS Product Number U0605D</li> </ul> <p><b>Due:</b>  <b>Post a question about or reaction to the readings</b> as they relate to the topic of the week. Focus on the process of creating scenarios, and the differences between "plausible futures" and "predicted futures." Consider what enduring major forces have an impact on how our communications efforts succeed or fail.</p>
<p><b>Week 8: March 4</b></p>	<p><b>In-Class Group Scenario Planning Exercise</b>  We'll take the first 10 minutes of class to review scenario planning and answer questions about the Group Exercise process, then we'll jump into the exercise.</p> <p><b>Read:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Case for group exercise: Starbucks and Conservation International, Product Number: 9-303-055 (from Harvard Business School)</li> </ul>

<b>Week 9:</b> <b>March 11</b>	<b>Spring Break</b>
<b>Week 10:</b> <b>March 18</b>	<p><b>Debrief: Step-by-Step versus Scenario Planning, Applications and Filling in the Gaps</b></p> <p>Each group will present their scenarios, discuss their group process and hurdles, and discuss the exercise as a whole with the class.</p> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group exercise deliverable</b> (one per group, with every member's name on it)</li> <li>• <b>Self-assessment 3:</b> How did you fare with the scenario model? What challenges did it help resolve, and which ones did it create? How well do you think it can be applied as we've learned it to communications planning you do as a professional? How can it work with the step-by-step model, or how do they compete? Did it balance any of your weaknesses as a strategic thinker, or enhance any of your strengths?</li> </ul>
<b>Week 11:</b> <b>March 25</b>	<p><b>Strategy Model 3: Mapping</b></p> <p><i>Discussion: Good strategy takes into account all of the factors at play. Can mapping help communications strategists think through the eventualities and possibilities differently than the other structures we've discussed? How is it best applied to communications planning? Who are our "rivals"? Who belongs on our map?</i></p> <p><b>Read:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Download: Kaplan, R. &amp; Norton, D. <i>Having trouble with your strategy? Then map it</i> (2000). HBS Product Number: R00509</li> </ul> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <p><b>Post a question about or reaction to the readings</b> as they relate to the topic of the week. Consider focusing on the parallels between the notions of interconnected capabilities inherent in the Balanced Scorecard model and the interconnected capabilities we might need to succeed in communications.</p>
<b>Week 12:</b> <b>April 1</b>	<b>Easter Break</b>
<b>Week 13:</b> <b>April 8</b>	<p><b>In-Class Group Mapping Exercise</b></p> <p>We'll take the first 10 minutes of class to review scenario planning and answer questions about the Group Exercise process, then we'll jump into the exercise.</p> <p><b>Read:</b></p> <p>Case for group exercise. Choose one:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Starbucks and Conservation International, Product Number: 9-303-055 (from Harvard Business School) Nike, Inc.: Developing an</li> </ul>

	<p>Effective Public Relations Strategy: HBS Product number 99C034</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Radiohead: Music at Your Own Price (A&amp;B) Product Numbers 508110</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 14:</b> <b>April 15</b></p>	<p><b>Debrief: Mapping Exercise</b>  Each group will present their mapping exercise, discuss their group process and hurdles, and discuss the exercise as a whole with the class.</p> <p><b>Due:</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Group exercise deliverable</b> (one per group, with every member's name on it)</li> <li>• <b>Class exercise proposal:</b> One page or less describing the real-life challenge you want the class to work through during Week 14.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Week 15:</b> <b>April 22</b></p>	<p><b>Class exercise: Choosing and Applying a Model to a Real-life Challenge</b>  <i>One challenge will be chosen from among those submitted by the class to work through from situation analysis to model choice to application of the model.</i></p> <p><b>Due:</b>  <b>Self-assessment 3:</b> Which of the models we applied was most helpful to you? Which do you envision using most in your life as a communications professional? How have you grown as a strategic thinker this semester? If you haven't grown, how could this class have better met your needs?</p>
<p><b>Week 16: April 29</b></p>	<p><b>Wrap Up and Class Evaluation</b></p>

## 5. Attendance

Students are expected to attend every class and arrive on time. If circumstances preclude you from attending a class or making it to class before it begins, it is your responsibility to notify me via phone or email prior to the start of class. Missing more than two classes will result in a final grade reduction of one level. Special circumstances should be discussed with me ahead of time. My email address and cell phone number are at the top of every page of this syllabus.

## 6. Grading

Weekly Participation	5 points per class meeting, 14 class meetings, = 70 points
Self Assessments (3)	20 points each = 60 points
Group Assignments (3)	25 points each = 75 points
<b>Total</b>	<b>165 points</b>

Grading scale:

- A: 155+ points
- A-: 149 - 154 points
- B+: 145 - 148 points

- B: 139 - 144 points
- B-: 132 - 138 points
- C: 116 - 131 points
- F: 115 and below

## 7. Assignments

### Weekly Participation

Students are expected to complete the weekly readings to enable active participation in classroom discussions. Participation is critical to this class, and students will receive a weekly participation grade.

The grade will be based on two factors:

- Students are required to join the Google Group setup for the class (<http://groups.google.com/group/strategy-fall09>) and post a question or reaction to the readings to the group as described above (2 points per week that a post is due)
- Students are required to attend class and actively participate in class discussions. (3 points per week).

### Self Assessments

Students will complete 3 self-assessments through the course of the semester, according to topics detailed in the course schedule.

### Group Assignments

There are three in-class group assignments. Groups will be self-selected or assigned the week before the group exercise. Each group exercise will result in a memo outlining a strategic approach to address the problem defined in the assigned case, based on the model under discussion. The memo will be due electronically at the end of the class period unless otherwise noted.

### Class Exercise Topic Proposal

During the second-to-last class of the semester, we will work through a real-life challenge from beginning to end. The topic of the class will come from class proposals, due by April 8<sup>th</sup>. If none are received, I will choose a current client challenge.

## 8. Class Policies

- Late Assignment Policy: Late work will be dropped one grade for each day it is late. If you have extenuating circumstances or need special accommodations please see me before the due date, and I do my best to accommodate you. Work is due at the beginning of class on the assigned date.
- I will not offer incomplete grades save in the most exceptional, unforeseeable circumstances. Job requirements do not qualify.
- Grammar, spelling, and and style matter.
- You are responsible for classroom information and instructions, whether you are present in class or not. If you must miss a class, it is your responsibility to make arrangements with your classmates to get class notes.

## 9. Ethics Statement and Honor Pledge

As signatories to the Georgetown University Honor Pledge, and indeed as good scholars and citizens you are expected to uphold academic honesty in all aspects of this course. You are expected to be familiar with the letter and spirit of the Standards of Conduct outlined in the Georgetown Honor System and on the Honor Council website. As faculty, I too am obligated to uphold the Honor System and report all suspected cases of academic dishonesty. For more information, please visit: <http://gervaseprograms.georgetown.edu/he/index/html>

## **10. Academic Resource Center**

If you believe you have a disability, then you should contact the Academic Resource Center ([arc@Georgetown.edu](mailto:arc@Georgetown.edu)) for further information. The Center is located in the Leavey Center, Suite 335. The Academic Resource Center is the campus office responsible for reviewing documentation provided by students with disabilities and for determining reasonable accommodations in accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) and University policies. All such accommodations must be arranged through the Center, not directly with me.