**Portland State University**

**School of Business Administration**

**BA 301: Research and Analysis of Business Problems**

Section 003 – CRN 60237 (MW, 0800-0950, SBA 140)

Section 006 – CRN 60233 (MW, 1215-1405, SBA 160)

Section 002 – CRN 60235 (T, 1740-2120, Cramer 158)

**Professor:** Chuck Nobles  
**E-mail:** [canobles@msn.com](mailto:Brian.McCarthy@verizon.net) (best way to reach me)

**Web Site:** http://web.pdx.edu/~charlesn/

**Office Hrs:** Monday/Wednesday from 1000-1145, Tuesdays from 1600-1700

**Office #:** SBA Room 436

This course may be unlike any other that you have taken at PSU, particularly in terms of classroom activities and assignment variety. Please do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions about course requirements or grading standards. Waiting too long to have your questions answered will likely have unfortunate consequences.

### Course Description

The School of Business Administration identifies three core competencies necessary to ensure success in the workplace – problem-solving, theory to practice and long-term perspective. This course will help you to enhance those competencies, focusing on problem-solving, and build a strong set of tools and skills for the remainder of your formal business studies. You will spend a great deal of time solving problems and making decisions in your future business careers. This course will help to make you better at it.

The course content and structure focuses on the six step PSU SBA framework for problem-solving. Although similar to other methodologies, the PSU approach adds some elements that make it a bit more complex, but also more comprehensive and useful in the real world and in day-to-day business decision making and problem-solving. With a combination of reading, writing, lecture and group activities, BA 301 should help to provide a strong foundation for knowing not only how to use the framework, but when to use it.

### Course Materials

### This course uses a custom text, available free of charge as a PDF on the course website, written originally by PSU Professor Kristi Yuthas. Please download it as soon as possible. It's fairly short and can easily be printed for reference.

### Learning Objectives

* Understand why you need to develop formal skills in problem-solving.
* Learn and practice a unique process for exploring and solving problems in real-world business situations.
* Understand the importance of data analysis and critical-thinking in problem-solving, and enhance your abilities to gather and analyze relevant data for problem-solving from credible sources using a number of qualitative and quantitative tools.
* Explore how to use a comprehensive set of approaches for identifying, describing and prioritizing business problems.
* Practice different techniques for enhancing business creativity, improving not only your ability to properly define a problem but also to develop a more extensive range of alternative solutions.
* Review and practice oral and written methods of presenting logical and persuasive business cases for your chosen solutions.

**Expectations**

***Workload***

This class requires weekly effort. There are a few short quizzes, but no midterms and no final exam. Class attendance and participation are critical for success. You’ll get the best grade by putting a strong effort into **each** of the four grading components – the research paper, homework assignments/quizzes, group work, and attendance/participation.

This is a student-centered, process-oriented class. The lectures are short and the readings are brief. Learning comes through repeated practice in applying conceptual material to problems – most often in small groups. **You can expect several hours of homework every week completing the reading, the homework assignments, and the group work (although most of the group work is completed in class).** PSU expects you to spend a minimum of 2-3 hours outside class for every hour spent in class. You may spend more than that if you have below-average skills in focused, critical thinking or in English writing. Even if your skills in these areas are strong, other course requirements such as library research or statistical analysis may cause problems for you or take more time that you expect.

**If you can’t make it to most of the classes or you don’t think you can complete the homework on time, I would suggest that you reschedule the course to a future term.** Dropping out of the course during the term wastes money and time. In addition, it will cause problems for others in your group as they complete course requirements without your help. If you take the class this term, **please make the commitment to complete the course.**

***Course Documents***

To save paper and to ensure that you have the latest versions, important course documents, including project instructions, are available only on the web and will not be handed out in class – although I will hand out some of the more critical materials.

Documents posted on my faculty web page at <http://web.pdx.edu/~charlesn/> include:

1.) Research Paper instructions and a layout/structure template

2.) Weekly assignment instructions and quiz questions

3.) Group Activity Instructions

In addition, spreadsheet templates, links to useful web sites, and other course information will be posted at the site. I will often add materials to the web site. You should make a habit of checking often, as I update the site every week.

I may also communicate changes and other important information via email, so it is important that I have your email address and that you check messages often.

***Preparation and Planning***

The class requires you to integrate conceptual material from course readings and discussions with hands-on application through activities, homework and projects. To accomplish the course learning objectives, it is very important that you keep upwith assignments and readings, and **come to class prepared**. Believe me, missing class and lack of preparation will impact your grade.

Class assignments involve a variety of activities such as: searching various databases for useful data, selecting and summarizing information, performing descriptive and statistical analyses, and presenting arguments and data in written format. You will perform these activities in class and for homework assignments. The amount and depth of effort required for these activities is hard to predict, and unanticipated difficulties can arise in the course of your work.

***Collaboration***

You are strongly encouraged to work with other students and share ideas and resources. Your interaction with peers can be an excellent way to strengthen your own knowledge and skills. Just make sure that your collaboration **supplements** rather than **substitutes for** your own independent thought. In the end, all of the work you submit for the course must be your own independent work. Work that is too similar to that of other classmates suggests a lack of independent thought and will be penalized. Don’t hesitate to ask me if you have questions regarding appropriate collaboration and plagiarism.

***Special Needs***

Please notify me if you have a disability or require special assistance with this course.

**Grading**

There are no exams in this course. Your final grade will be comprised of your performance in the following four areas, explained in more detail later in the syllabus:

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| --- | --- |
| **Course Components/Assignments** | **Percentage** |
| 1.) Research Paper (due end of term) | 35% |
| 2.) HW Assignments & Quizzes | 25% |
| 3.) Group Work (& Group Report) | 25% |
| 4.) Participation and Class Attendance | 15% |

The good news is – there are no big tests. The bad news is – there are no big tests. It may be difficult to know how you are doing until the end of the course. I will grade homework assignments and quizzes throughout the course, and I will give you a mid-term grade approximation, if you wish it. My suggestions – do the homework on time, prepare for the quizzes, come to class and work actively with and contribute to your group, and don’t wait until the last minute for your Research Paper. You will also receive regular feedback from your peers. And, you can always come and talk with me about how you’re doing.

The class is not graded on a curve, and it is theoretically possible for all students to earn A’s or F’s. In general, students who exceed expectations earn A’s, those who meet expectations earn B’s, those who demonstrate effort throughout the course, but fall short of expectations in some important areas earn C’s, and those who fail to demonstrate effort or fall well below standards earn F’s.

The essence of A-level work is that it is excellent overall or outstanding in some way. It meets or exceeds all requirements and demonstrates strength in all grading areas and excellence in problem-solving performance.

The essence of B-level work is that it fulfills all course requirements completely and effectively. It demonstrates both strength and weakness, but the overall level of performance is strong.

The essence of C-level work is that it demonstrates concerted effort in meeting all course requirements. It demonstrates strengths in some areas and weaknesses in a number of important areas. The overall level of performance is acceptable, but lower than expected for a 300-level class.

**Details of Course Components & Assignments**

There are a number of assignments and projects in this class, all of which contribute to your final grade. We’ll talk more about these in the class, at the beginning of the term, and closer to when they are actually due. The following sections should provide a place to start and a good summary. More specific materials are available on the web site. If you’re confused – ask me! Don’t wait until the last minute.

1. ***Business Problem Analysis Research Paper***

One of the most challenging and demanding components of the course is the research paper. This project requires you to choose a challenging business problem in a real-life organization, and apply the problem solving framework (PSU SBA) as you develop a solution and a plan for implementation. Solving the chosen problem should consider implications for improving the social or environmental, rather than just economic, performance of the organization in question. Social and environmental performance are two aspects of CSR, or Corporate Social Responsibility. CSR is an active international effort at increasing managerial attention on corporate sustainability and the needs of a larger group of stakeholders during decision-making. Many of your other business courses focus on economic performance, i.e. profit, market share, etc. This course provides an excellent opportunity to look beyond economic performance, and to consider the larger role that organizations play in society.

The first step for this project is to choose a company from the Fortune 500 list (<http://money.cnn.com/magazines/fortune/fortune500/2010/full_list/201_300.html>), from position 201 to 400, in other words, the Fortune 201-400! This needs to be done by the second week of class, and can be written down on the Personal Information Sheet. We will also talk more about CSR and the research paper in class, so you will have plenty of opportunities for questions. My advice is to start early. The PSU SBA process is all about thoroughly understanding the problem before developing solutions. This requires research, creativity, critical thinking and time.

Keep in mind, this is a research project. For those of you without much experience doing research, we will have a lecture covering this during week 4. The paper should be **at least** ten (10) pages long (not counting cover sheets, table of contents or bibliography) with a bibliography/citation list (at least 10 citations) and proper MLA formatting. A template for the paper is on my website. This template provides detailed instructions about the structure and format of the paper, as well as information on grading criteria. It’s 35% of the grade – I would suggest that you read and follow it. In summary, your paper should be double-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman, with Arial 14-point Bold headlines – and **printed one-sided**, please. The paper is due on the last day of class (not Finals Week), and will not be accepted by email – no excuses.

One more thing about the paper. You must turn in a term paper in order to pass this course! In other words, if you do pretty well in the other grade components (the homework, group work and attendance/participation) and think that you can skip the paper and still get a C, think again**. If you fail to turn in a term paper, you will not get higher than a D+ for the course.**

For those of you who are a bit out of practice in writing research papers, there is an excellent supplemental text available at the bookstore and through Amazon, etc. It’s called “The Curious Researcher”, by Bruce Ballenger (ISBN-13: 978-0-205-66611-9). I will try to place a couple of copies on reserve.

1. ***Weekly Homework Assignments & Quizzes***

There are three written homework assignments due during the term. These assignments require you to apply parts of the problem-solving framework to specific questions, work with some simple statistical tools (remember that stuff?), as well as answer some other course-related questions. There is a write-up for each assignment on the website, and each one has specific questions that need to be answered. Due dates are shown on the class schedule. **And you must use the basic format found on the website for the assignments.** Although I’m normally quite flexible, in this case there can be no late homework, and it should be turned in during class. If you will not be in class, please make sure that you slip it under my door (SBA 436) before the end of the day it is due, or place it in my mailbox in the Faculty Services office. Medical or legitimate family emergencies with written documentation are the only possible excuses for late homework. And – **NO HOMEWORK BY EMAIL!**

So, of what use are these homework assignments other than a way to ruin your week? Some of the questions provide the opportunity to apply problem solving tools to personal issues. When you work on your own problems, concepts become more relevant and salient, and you may be more likely to remember them and integrate them with existing knowledge. Because you have a better awareness of the contextual factors that influence your own problem-solving activities, you develop a better understanding of the complexity of business problems.

There will also be two quizzes during the term. They will be focused on the lectures and readings and will have a short answer format. I will give you a list of five to six questions prior to the quiz. I will choose two to three from that list the morning of the quiz. I would suggest that you prepare all of them, although I’m sure some of you will play the odds. Let me know how that works out for you.

1. ***Participation and attendance***

**You are required to attend and participate in every class session**. Attendance will be taken. Problem-solving skills are best learned when you both intellectualize and practice them. Class sessions involve classroom discussions and participation in group problem-solving exercises. To participate effectively, **you must come prepared to each class session**, which includes completing all required reading and homework prior to class. This will enhance class discussions, benefiting all members of the class. It will also provide the foundation that allows you to meet the expectations of your group for participation in group activities.

Here’s the deal - if you attend all of the class sessions, you’ll get a B for this portion of your grade. Seems simple, right? If you also participate **actively**, your grade for this portion goes up – maybe to an A. If you miss some classes your grade goes down. And there are various combinations of this scheme. If you have questions, ask me.

1. ***Group Work***

You will be assigned to a group for the duration of the class. There will be group activities during each class, and you can find the instructions on my web site. **Please download these instructions early in the term so they will be available for you to review in class before and during the activities.** Most of the group activity can be accomplished during class, as I realize you have other groups that require meetings outside of class. Each group is required to keep notes and records of the results of your group discussions and activities. **You will turn in your group work at the end of the term.**  The records for each day’s activities will consist of two parts – 1.) handwritten notes and activity results/answers, and 2.) an **analysis** of the day’s activities written by the assigned group scribe for the day. I will expect everyone to serve as scribe throughout the term – multiple times.

What is an **analysis**, you ask? It is a summary of how you felt about the activity and the relevant lecture materials for that activity. It’s a critical analysis. Was it relevant to you? Why or why not? What did you think of it? Do you think you would ever use the techniques in real life? It’s not just a regurgitation of the day’s notes. I can read your notes. And I will. Use critical thinking skills to go beyond the obvious. I might look at your group records halfway through the class in order to give you an idea as to how you’re doing. I don’t care how you organize your group records – just make sure they **are** organized and easy for me to review. I’ll talk more about this in class, as I’m sure it sounds confusing. Each group will receive a grade, and individual grades will be adjusted based on peer evaluations completed at the end of the class.

**Academic Integrity**

Standards of academic conduct are set forth in the university’s academic integrity policies. By registering for this course, you have acknowledged your awareness of these policies, and you are obliged to become familiar with your rights and responsibilities as defined by the policies. Violations of the academic will be treated seriously, and disciplinary action will be taken should violations occur. Please see the instructor if you have any questions concerning the academic violations in general or as they relate to particular requirements for this course. Please refer to the following web page for the Code of Student Conduct and Responsibility:

http://www.pdx.edu/dos/psu-student-code-conduct

**Tutoring**

The 301 class is very demanding in the use of basic skills such as reading, writing, and research. If you need help with any aspect of the writing process, you can get it at The Writing Center, 188F Cramer Hall, 725-3570, www.writingcenter@pdx.edu. The writing center offers workshops and individual assistance. You may need to sign up in advance for these services. The Skills Enhancement and Tutoring Center, 425 Smith Center, 725-4448, [www.setc.pdx.edu](http://www.setc.pdx.edu) can also help with writing and many other issues. You can ask questions on line, or work with peer tutors who are available on a drop-in basis.

**Career Services**

SBA Career Services helps business students develop the skills they need to manage their careers.  If you are interested in an internship, need career counseling, or would like to participate in other career development programs including the Mentor Program, Mock Interviews, and Workshops on resume writing and other topics, visit the Undergraduate Programs Office in SBA 240 or go to the web at www.careersrvs.sba.pdx.edu/# and choose Student Resources. Go to www.sba.pdx.edu/undergradlist.asp to sign up to receive information via email about currently available internship and job opportunities in your option area.

**About the Instructor**

Chuck Nobles is an instructor in management and marketing at Portland State University, with over 25 years experience in senior management, strategic planning, marketing, communications, advertising client service and Internet consulting. With a BS in Electrical Engineering and an MBA from Northwestern University, he most recently ran his own Internet creative services firm, Paris France, Inc., winning international recognition for a number of web projects. Chuck spent 13 years as a Senior Vice President at a Portland advertising agency, handling a variety of technology and consumer accounts, and managing the Account Services and Internet Services groups.

**Course Schedule (Spring 2011)**

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| Week | Monday (or 1st Half Night Class) | Wednesday (or 2nd Half Night Class) |
| 1  MW- 3/28, 3/30  T- 3/29 | Introduction to BA 301  Reading— Introduction  Syllabus Review, Course Requirements | Introduction to BA 301  Reading— Introduction  Activity—0.1 Problem-solving review |
| 2  MW- 4/4, 4/6  T- 4/5 | Lecture — **POSITION:** Mission, Vision, Values  Readings—Chapter 1 (Position), pgs. 9-10  Activity 1.1— Mission & Vision Statements | Lecture — **POSITION:** Stakeholders, CSR  Reading— Chapter 1 (Position), pages 10-11  Activity—1.2: Mission & Stakeholders |
| 3  MW-4/11, 4/13  T- 4/12 | Lecture — **POSITION:** Decision models, impediments  Reading— Chapter 1 (Position), pages 11-13  Activity—1.3: Cognitive Bias | Lecture — **SENSE:** Find, Define & Prioritize Problems  Reading— Chapter 2 (Sense), pages 14-19  Activity—2.1: Problem Finding & Prioritization  ***ASSIGNMENT 1 DUE*** |
| 4  MW-4/18, 4/20  T- 4/19 | Lecture — Research & Data Analysis,Pt. 1 - Research  Reading— Chapter 3 (Uncover), pages 23-26  Activity A—Group Research Activity | Lecture — Research & Data Analysis, Pt. 2 - Stats  Reading— Chapter 4 (Solve), pages 28-31  Activity B— Statistical Analysis  ***QUIZ # 1*** |
| 5  MW-4/25, 4/27  T- 4/26 | Lecture — Research & Data Analysis, Pt. 3 – Charts/Graphs  Reading— Chapter 4 (Solve), page 31  Activity C— Presenting Numerical Data | Lecture — **UNCOVER:** Causes & Alternative Solutions  Reading— Chapter 3 (Uncover), pages 20-23  Activity—3.1: Causes & Alternatives  ***ASSIGNMENT 2 DUE*** |
| 6  MW-5/2, 5/4  T- 5/3 | Lecture — **SOLVE:** Decision-Making Tools  Reading— Chapter 4 (Solve), pages 32-33  Activity—4.1: Decision Making Tools | Lecture — **BUILD:** Ethical Screening  Reading— Chapter 5 (Build), pages 34-35  Activity—5.1: Ethical Screening  ***QUIZ #2*** |
| 7  MW-5/9, 5/11  T- 5/10 | Lecture — **BUILD:** Cost-Benefit Analysis  Reading— Chapter 5 (Build), pages 36-37  Activity—5.2: Cost/Benefit Analysis | Lecture — **BUILD:** Argumentation, Making the Case  Reading— Chapter 5 (Build), pages 38-39  Activity—5.3: Argumentation |
| 8  MW-5/16, 5/18  T- 5/17 | Lecture —**ACHIEVE:** Implement & Evaluate  Reading— Chapter 6 (Achieve)  Activity—6.1: Project Management  ***ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE*** | Activity — **Class time will be devoted to final group work on case presentation**  ***ASSIGNMENT 3 DUE*** |
| 9  MW-5/23, 5/25  T- 5/24 | Activity—**Term Paper Peer Reviews (groups)**  Activity — **Class time will also be devoted to final group work on case presentation** | **Group presentations – Part 1** |
| 10  MW-5/30, 6/1  T- 5/31 | HOLIDAY - No Class! | **Group presentations – Part 2**  **Group Activity Notebooks DUE**  **Research Papers DUE**  Last Day of class! |