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Course Instructors: Prof Chris DORAN
Department of Management
Email: cjsd@ust.hk

Teaching Assistant:

Class time: Tuesday 1:30pm-3:20 and Thursday 1:30pm-3:20
Venue: LSK 1003

Course Overview

This course is designed to teach you how to solve business problems and communicate your recommendations. These skills will help you succeed in your first job. You will also find these skills helpful for your participation in international case competitions.

This will be a demanding case-based course where you will learn the tools, skills and approaches adopted in leading management consultancies.

Approval from course instructor is required prior to enrolling in the course.

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Is this course for me?

Course Learning Objectives

Major Objective: Students will learn fundamental business problem-solving skills and develop their ability to communicate in a compelling, professional business-like manner

These skills will assist students in getting and succeeding in their first job.

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

1. Apply a structured approach to problem-solving, as used in top management consulting companies
2. Prepare clear, fact-based business recommendations in Powerpoint, with a robust storyline and high quality charts;
3. Present professionally, improving skills through peer and instructor feedback
4. Work more effectively in a team setting;
5. Apply business judgment to new situations;

Student FAQ

Q: *"This course looks interesting, but it will be too much work."*

A1: (Rational, quantified answer) The workload for this course has been quantified in detail. At 11 hours per week, it is similar to most of your other courses.

A2: (High risk/high return answer) "What does not destroy me, makes me stronger."

Friedrich Nietzsche

Q: *"I'd like to take the course, but I need to get the best grades I can to get a good job. It will be harder to get a good grade because all the best students are on the course."*

A: This course does attract the best students and so a correspondingly disproportionate number of A grades are awarded. If you really care about getting a good job, many employers are looking for the problem solving, teamwork and presentation skills that this course develops and consider them more important than marginal grade differences.

Q: *This course is not relevant to me, I don't want a consulting job or to go on case competitions."*

A: The primary objective for this course is to build skills that will assist students in getting and succeeding in their first job, not preparing for case competitions or consulting careers. All management jobs require problem-solving, preparing recommendations, presenting professionally and effective teamwork.

Student selection

This will be a demanding course. Not every student will be able to keep up. To make sure every student obtains maximum value from the course, all students are subject to instructor approval. Preliminary approval will be based on past grades with final approval subject to class performance in the first two sessions. Do not take this course if you have any doubts about your ability to handle the workload.

Assessment

Your performance will be evaluated by the instructor and your classmates.

	Graded by Instructor	Graded By Peers
Team - Case Presentations	45%	0%
Team – GenAI Challenges	15%	0%
Individual – Team Contribution	0%	20%
Individual – Class Participation	20%	0%
TOTAL	80%	20%

Teams

All the course work is conducted in teams.

Students will be assigned into 4-6 teams of 3-5 students each. Teams will be changed at the halfway point to ensure you experience working with different people.

Teams need to get off to a fast start, since the first team presentation is due in session 3. Please be fair to your classmates, and drop by the end of the second session if you don't want to take the course. The first teams will be finalized at this point.

Academic Integrity

The University takes all allegations of cheating, copying and plagiarism very seriously. It is your responsibility to familiarize yourself with the guidelines for academic integrity posted on the University website: <http://www.ust.hk/vpaa0/integrity>. In order to avoid any hint of plagiarism, please ensure that you are familiar with the guidelines for proper referencing and acknowledgement of sources for written assignments. The academic integrity website has an online guide to proper citation: "A Guide to Good Referencing Skills" which explains the issues. Lack of knowledge or understanding of the rules will not be accepted as an excuse under any circumstances.

Learning Environment

It is the goal of HKUST to promote an enjoyable learning environment for both students and instructors. For further details, please refer to:

http://www.ust.hk/vpaa0/conduct/good_learning_experience.pps

COURSE CONTENT

Cases

We will cover one case per week, over 2 sessions, a total of 13 cases. Cases will be selected to ensure variety across industries, business situations and case styles. In general, we will start off with easier cases and move to harder cases.

Week	Topic	Detail of the session
1 Tue 3 rd Feb	Introduction	Introduction to the course Issue tree revisited
1 Thu 5 th	Crafting a Brand Plan	Calyx Issue tree Quick Calculations Target Segment selection
2 Tue 10 th		FMCG Presentation <i>Style: Full guidance</i>
2 Thu 12 th	Crafting a Strategic Recommendation - self researched	Profit Tree Charts
3 Tue 17 th		Digital Strategy Crafting a storyline
3 Thu 19 th		CNY - NO CLASS
4 Tue 24 th		CNY - NO CLASS
4 Thu 26 th		US Turnaround Presentation <i>Style: Self-researched; current; creative</i>
5 Tue 3 rd Mar		US Turnaround Presentation <i>Style: Self-researched; current; creative</i>
5 Thu 5 th		Creating a VC pitch
6 Tue 10 th	Solving an Operational Problem	Manufacturing Presentation <i>Style: Interim presentation; deep Q&A and backup</i>
6 Thu 12 th	Presenting industry digital transformation recommendation	Process Mapping Shareholder Map
7 Tue 17 th		Digital Transformation Presentation <i>Style: Consulting client discussion; Interim presentation</i>
7 Thu 19 th	Creating a VC pitch	Present Venture Plan <i>Style: Passionate, credible</i>
8 Tue 24 th		Present Venture Plan <i>Style: Passionate, credible</i>
8 Thu 26 th	Solving a complex problem through modelling	Data purchase Designing Model Structure
9 Tue 31 st		Commodity Presentation

		<i>Style: Quantitative; explaining something complex simply</i>
9 Thu 2 nd Apr	Organisational recommendation	Healthcare Presentation <i>Style: 2-on-1; paper pack; 3 hour case</i>
9 Tue 7 th		NO CLASS - Mid-term break
9 Thu 9 th	Planning post-merger integration	M&A Example Presentation PMI Tips
10 Tue 14 th		Internet/Retail Presentation <i>Style: Competition case; objective; 24 hour case</i>
10 Thu 16 th	Pitching a PE deal	Valuation refresher Why leverage matters Presenting PE financials
11 Tue 21 st		Present PE Buyout <i>Style: Financial heavy</i>
11 Thu 23 rd	Running a motivational event	TBD
12 Tue 28 th		NPO Event <i>Style: No-ppt; high-emotion, low-fact, high participation</i>
12 Thu 30 th	Practicing for case competitions	TBD
13 Tue 5 th May		ESG Presentation <i>Style: Competition case; 24 hour case</i>
13 Thu 7 th	Wrap-up	Future scenarios Close the course
TBD May	Show what you can do! ALL TEAMS	GBUS CASE COMPETITION <i>Style: Competition case; 24 hour case</i>

Team debrief

After each presentation, and reviewing the immediate feedback, each presenting team will debrief in order to consolidate their learning. Upload 1 page debrief to Canvas covering:

- What worked well
- What we learnt
- What we would do differently next time

Teams not presenting

Teams not presenting will have an assignment so they achieve the learning objective too:

No.	Topic	Assignment for non-presenting teams
1	Brand Plan	NA
2	Strategy	NA
3	Manufacturing	Regression model and root cause analysis>New key question
4	VC Pitch	NA
5	Digital Transformation	Stakeholder Map; role play preparation
6	Commodity	Demand Model

7	Healthcare	Stakeholder analysis
8	Machinery	Critique of team delivery
9	PE	Financial Model
10	Non-profit	Role-play
11	Banking	Critique of team

Red/Blue: First half team; Second half teams

- > for 3-hour cases will be released at 6am the presentation day
- > for 24-hour cases will be released at 6am the preceeding day
- > for the rest cases will be released 7 days before the presentation date

Class Expectations

Team presentations will usually be on Tuesday. Preparation and debrief sessions will usually be Thursday. Each session will last 1 hour 50 min with no breaks.

Please inform our TA IN ADVANCE if you are going to miss any class.

100% attendance is expected and a 5% grade deduction will be applied for each and every class missed where approval was not granted in advance. Do not take this course if you will miss more than 2 sessions.

I believe that you learn the most in a demanding environment. You will build your ability and confidence in business problem-solving by tackling a variety of cases. Most of the learning you get from the case will be from each other, as you prepare each case as a team.

In class, even if you are not presenting, everyone is expected to be familiar with the case, and cold-calling will be used to ensure all students participate.

For most cases 2 teams will make presentations each week. In the case presentation classes, two teams will present their recommendations, and the whole class will provide feedback. To ensure variety, each presentation will have a different focus:

1. 15 minute uninterrupted presentation, followed by Q&A – focus on presentation delivery
2. Detailed focus on charts, stepping through and providing feedback on each one
3. 15 minute presentation, interrupted for Q&A – focus on presentation content

We will use the non-presentation classes for a few short lectures, exercises on specific tools and follow-up discussions to ensure the previous case is thoroughly explored.

Presentations

Most presentations will be standard business format, consisting of a storyline, backed up with powerpoint charts. A good business presentation is one which contains insightful, relevant content and is delivered in a way which has impact. On this course, we will focus more on presentation content than on presentation delivery. It is, however, expected you will deliver highly polished, professional and business-like presentations and you will receive feedback and assistance to support this.

As many presentations as possible will be videoed for self- and peer-critique. If you feel you need more delivery practice, persuade our TA to organize out of class practices.

Please be as generous as possible with your in-class feedback “gifts”

Standard Slide Format

Consultants have an ability to very rapidly produce high quality packs. There are two secrets to this:

- Their personal bank of slides they repurpose and customize as necessary
- An archive of best practice which can be accessed and used on demand

We would like each one of you to leave this course with your own “slide bank” of well prepared slides for you to use in your future jobs (and case competitions).

A standard slide format offers many benefits:

- Independently prepared slides (from another person or from your slide bank) can be combined to produce a consistent looking pack without the need for reformatting

- Where necessary, the design of every slide in a pack can be updated with a single change to the underlying template
- It is easier to edit slides prepared by someone else if they follow a standard format

Generative AI Challenge

You should be building your skills in using Gen-AI as a thought partner

First Half – generating professional content

Generate a professional 20 minute You-Tube video of the industry in an AI world video

- Audience: Industry executives
- Goal: Lead generation for an AI consulting company
- Message: Provocative, have to create Ai-Native business models now

Use deep research, animation, infographics, image, script and voiceover generation tools

There are two deliverables:

- Outline for professor review
- Final website for peer/professor grading

Second Half – build a digital product/service

- Create an business educational experience (webapp plus)
- Create an agentic process – eg new product, strategy or marketing strategy development
- Create an app/tool with a RAG database for a business manager to use

There are two deliverables:

- Outline for professor review
- Final website for peer/professor grading

Generative AI policy

You are encouraged to use Generative AI as a thoughtpartner throughout this course, building your fluency in all use cases and tools in business analysis, problem solving and generating content.

Course Workload quantified

The workload for this course is estimated at 11 hours per week. Note that this includes everything, and is capped through various mechanisms (e.g. 3 and 24 hour cases). Initially cases may take you longer, but by the end you will be working productively in your team.

Type	Description	No.	Each	Total workload (hours)
Classroom	Classes	25	1 hour 50 min	46
Case Presentations	Full Presentations	4	8-12 hours	40
	2 24 hour preparation	2	8 hours	16
	1 3 hour preparation	1	3 hours	3
	Case Prep/Assignments	6	2-3 hours	15

GenAI Challenges		1	18-30 hours	24
Exams, revision, tests, projects, extra assignments, readings		0	-	0
TOTAL				144 hours 11 hours/week

Bio

Professor Chris Doran has over 25 years experience in consulting, working as a consultant in large and small firms, as an internal consultant in a staff role and as a client.

He learnt how to be a consultant at McKinsey & Co, the world's leading management consultancy. He was based in the London and Delhi Offices, rising from business analyst to associate to engagement manager.

He has been an internal consultant for 10 years within major multinationals. He has been Strategy Director for A.S.Watson (the retail division of Hutchison Whampoa), Lend Lease (one of Australia's largest Real Estate companies) and UDV, the US\$2 billion operating profit drinks division of Diageo plc. His responsibilities have included M&A, corporate strategy, new ventures and running the strategic planning process for over 50 business units in 34 countries. He therefore has first hand experience of the challenges and opportunities of consulting in a staff role and getting the best from consultants as a client.

He teaches strategy, M&A, consulting and business problem solving to ExecEd, EMBA, MBA and UG classes.

Prior to his MBA from INSEAD in France, he has a first class Masters degree in Manufacturing Engineering from the University of Cambridge in England.