LIBERAL ARTS FOR BUSINESS LEADERS

The 21st century will perhaps be remembered one day as the age of humanistic approaches to business. An increasing number of studies show that classic management education (with its focus on quantitative analysis, and functional and technical skills) is no longer sufficient for the complexities of our 21st-century global world. In the real world that business leaders face today, human-created problems from conflict and terrorism to inequality and climate change impact their businesses and require new forms of leading and managing. Even core business questions such as understanding who your customers are or how to get employees to work more efficiently require increasingly creative and supple approaches that go beyond numbers and maths and take into account the full range of human behavior, values and emotions.

Thinkers and scholars in the Humanities have reflected for centuries on what it means to be human. Drawing on this deep and broad scholarship (and on a range of disciplines from the Humanities and qualitative Social Sciences, from philosophy and history to poetry and music), this course provides key perspectives on how the Humanities can bring value to business in several classic areas: Leadership development, Organizational Behavior and Management, Advertising and Marketing, and Strategy.

Course Readings

Required Books

Please purchase the following book (available for purchase on Amazon, at the Gleacher Center bookstore, etc.):


Please start reading them early, so you are prepared for our discussions in week 5 and week 8 respectively.

Other Course Readings

All other required course readings will be made available on the course CANVAS website. Please study those texts carefully in advance for discussion in class. Make sure you have the
texts available on the day they are discussed in class, either by printing them out or by bringing electronic versions.

COURSE CALENDAR

Introduction

Week 1: **What value can the humanities bring to business?**

Read for this class:

As optional readings, there is also a module on CANVAS that contains selected press stories on various aspects of liberal arts/humanities and business.

**Brief Assignment** (1-2 pages):
Think about a particular business- or work-related problem which you have encountered and for which a humanities perspective was or might have been helpful. If you already found a solution to the problem, please explain the steps of how precisely you found and implemented that solution. If you have not yet found a solution, all the better: With your permission we can try and discuss the issue in class. **Please submit** this to me via CANVAS **by Wednesday of week 3.**

Module 1: Understanding the humanities

Drawing on a wide range of disciplines from the humanities and qualitative social sciences, including literary studies, history, philosophy, music, art history, gender studies and anthropology, we will discuss particularly influential ideas, methods, approaches and key thinkers. This course module is structured around themes that have been much debated over the years.

Week 2: **Otherness, power, discourse, orientalism, subject/object**

Read for this class:
- O’Farrell, “Chapter 8: Power and Culture” (from *Michel Foucault*, 2005)
- Said, “Introduction” (from *Orientalism*, 1978)
- Kristeva, Chapter 1 “Toccata and Fugue for the Foreigner” (from *Strangers to ourselves*, 1988)
- Rilke, “Apollo’s Archaic Torso”
• Ryan, “Summary: Theory for Beginners” (from An Introduction to Criticism: Literature/Film/Culture, 2012)

(Some of the readings for the first 4 weeks may be more difficult to understand at first glance than others. It’s best to read slowly, and look up unfamiliar words in a dictionary/online. Please note whatever questions might come up and we will try and address them in class.)

**Brief Assignment** (1-2 pages):
Thinking of your workplace, describe a situation in which you experienced discrimination because of gender, race or other factors, either personally or as a witness. How did you feel? How could that situation have been avoided?
**Please submit** this to me via CANVAS by **next Wednesday, 12 noon**.

**Week 3: Gender/Race/Class**
Building on our discussion of otherness the week before, in this class we will explore the concepts of gender, race and class.

Read for this class:
• Butler, excerpts from Gender Trouble (1990)
• Jenkins, “Culture, Status and Distinction” (from Pierre Bourdieu, 1992)
• Ryan, “Ethnic, Post-Colonial, and Transnational Criticism” (from An Introduction to Criticism: Literature/Film/Culture, 2012)

Also watch this video for class: The danger of a single story | Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg)

**Week 4: Beauty and the interpretation and appreciation of art**
What are stories? What is poetry? How can knowledge about beauty and the appreciation of art add value to business?

Read for this class:
• Vargas Llosa, “The Truth of Lies”
• Lorde, “Poetry is not a luxury” (1977)
• de Botton/Armstrong, “The Seven Functions of Art” (from Art as Therapy, 2013)

**Week 5: Today’s problems**
“Becoming the social arbiter for important issues and topics is the ultimate way to generate consumer engagement with your brand.” (https://medium.com/the-mission/25-business-trends-for-roi-in-2018-and-beyond-9227031f5a3f)
What are today’s most pressing global problems? What are corporations doing to address them?

Read for this class:

Brief Assignment (2-4 pages):
Pick one of the issues below and write about how that issue can impact humans and their environment both negatively and positively in the future. In the case of negative impact, how would you think of improvement from a humanistic perspective?
For all these topics, you will find vast resources online from youtube videos to websites and books.

(1) Climate change
Suggested approach: Begin by reading the work of Dipesh Chakrabarty.
(and further essay listed at https://history.uchicago.edu/directory/dipesh-chakrabarty)

(2) Artificial intelligence
Suggested approach: Study the robot Sophia developed by Hanson Robotics. You could begin by watching Sophia in youtube videos (including those where people express their fears about AI, and on sophiabot.com) and then find more information online.

(3) Architecture and megastructures
Suggested approach: Begin by studying the currently tallest building in the world, the Burj Khalifa, and the challenges of building it (https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GA3Ak7ZaNuo&t=1023s)

(4) War and politics between nations

(5) Bad human behavior (jealousy/envy, manipulating others, assholes…)

(6) The future of work/jobs

(7) The future of education

Please submit this assignment to me via CANVAS by Wednesday of week 7.

Week 6: Much ado about culture (Intercultural understanding and its pitfalls)

What is the role of culture in business? What is culture? Based on the two case studies of Germany and India, we will discuss the uses and limitations of intercultural communication.
Module 2: Understanding yourself

Week 7: Cultivating your leadership wisdom
Are leaders born or made? Can charisma be taught? Managers solve problems; leaders make sure problems don’t arise; they create momentum, inspire others and raise the bar. Great leaders have knowledge, curiosity, creativity, personality, culture, balance, resilience, humility, honesty, strategy, and vision. Great leaders do things others won’t. Or is all this bullshit?

Read for this class:
- Pfeffer, “Introduction: Things Are Bad” and “Chapter 8: Fixing Leadership” (from Leadership BS, 2015)

Week 8: Creativity
Creativity has been called “the premier skill of the 21st century” and a “differentiator”. What is creativity? How can we develop or enhance it?

Read for this class:

Module 3: Understanding others in practice
In order to keep some space for a continued discussion of issue that arise during the quarter, week 9 and 10 are kept somewhat open.

Week 9:
Understanding your employees (Organizational behavior and management)

“If you want to build a ship, don’t drum up the men to gather wood, divide the work, and give orders. Instead, teach them to yearn for the vast and endless sea.” (free translation)
Antoine de Saint-Exupéry
Understanding your customers (Advertising and Marketing)
Possible case study: Narrativity/Storytelling in advertising

Read for this class:
• Readings to be announced.

Concluding remarks

Week 10: Final discussion

Course Requirements and Expectations
Attendance at every class, careful preparation of all readings, active participation in the case study working groups, and active participation in class discussion are expected of all students and will count for 60% of the grade. The brief assignments throughout the quarter as indicated above will count for 40% of the course grade. Because of the brief assignments throughout the course, a final paper is not required. However, if you would like to write a final paper (8 to 10-pages maximum) in order to practice writing, please ask me about that.

Depending on the size of the class, students might also be asked to give one or more brief (about 5 minutes) oral class presentations on the course readings. Presentations will be factored into the participation grade.