

The “ABC’s” of Gateway Success
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Course: BUS 302
Title: *The Gateway Experience* (3 units)

“You have to both make the numbers and live the vision.”
---Jack Welch (1935-)

About Behavior Control:

A truly educated individual can be actively engaged with the thoughts of others, even if that individual completely disagrees with the other parties. Also, behavior modification is extraordinarily difficult in practice. In fact, modifying one’s behavior (either to leverage skill “fits” or rectify skill “gaps”) is a lifelong pursuit for most individuals. And with respect to BUS 302 specifically, you need to demonstrate improvements in behavior control in a relatively short period of time (that is, the time I have to observe you and evaluate you).

Attitude (drives) Better Competencies:

Numerous management studies have shown that groups outperform individuals (even experts) on nearly all kinds of difficult problems. Further, a critical success factor is the composition of the group with respect to its charter or mission. In BUS 302, the instructor chooses the groups, the cases, the deliverable dates, the performance measures, etc. What the instructor doesn’t choose is how each individual student will react and perform. This scenario very closely matches the “probation” period common in entry-level positions in our knowledge economy. A positive attitude is critical.

All (about) Better Communication:

Learn something that the working professionals in class already know. That is, most problems in organizations are caused by a lack of frequent, persistent, and consistent communication. If you learn nothing else in this class, learn that. Also, do yourself a favor and learn it in class (the “easy” way) as opposed to on the job (the “hard” way).

Assumptions Bury Contingencies:

You may have heard the old slang phrase “If you assume, you make an ass out of you and me.” In BUS 302, assumptions, especially assumptions related to individual performance, can generate hidden contingencies. For example, a group member says that he or she “...will email her or his part of the project to the rest of the team by Friday.” The other group members place their faith and trust in that statement and may make other logistical plans that pivot on that deliverable assumption. In effect, the assumption leads to a contingency. And every contingency, or rather, set of contingencies, needs to be managed. For all intents and purposes, the discipline of “risk management” is really just another name for managing a set of contingencies. Be especially carefully of inadvertent, hidden contingencies in your project workflow and group interaction.

Aligned, But Critical:

Your group discourse needs to be wary of “groupthink.” A cohesive group (really, a cohesive *team*) can discuss and debate all sides of any issue genuinely and openly. Your twin challenges are 1), to keep an open mind, and 2), to articulate your perspective in a purposeful manner. BUS 302 is less about “winning a debate” and more about “nurturing the discussion.” A related issue is that of learning from your student colleagues. Each individual has something to learn from another individual.

An (ethical) Behavior Code:

There is no shortage of articles in the recent press about the lack of ethical decision-making on the part of some business managers and senior executives. These articles tend to highlight large companies and visible wrongdoings, but this is just the “tip of the iceberg.” Making ethical decisions, even on the “smallest” of issues that “nobody will notice” is crucial. Among other things, such an ethical stance demonstrates a visceral understanding of the trust placed in business professionals and also the wider “system effects” (what the economists often refer to as “externalities”) that occur over the long run.

Assurance, Best (practices, and) Commitment:

Assurance is about the warranty that the College places on you as a student professional. This is similar to the warranty that you will make to others for your work as a business professional.

In general, there are a relatively large number of ways to fail (“worst practices”). By contrast, there are significantly fewer ways to succeed (“best practices”). Also, “common” practices are not “best” practices. Best practices have survived the twin tests of rigor (transparent accuracy) and relevance (applicability to performance).

Commitment is a visible manifestation of motivation. Commitment is also about longer term success. That success partially lies at the intersection between your performance as a professional in the market (regardless of industry or firm) and your performance as a professional in an organization (regardless of your specific job position). COBAE student professionals learn to visibly excel at both of these commitments. Commitment is especially important in our global, knowledge economy, because one may not be able to support, fund, and control every aspect of one’s professional development over time.

“A” (students can do) “B” and “C” (work):

How? Success is defined somewhat differently in BUS 302 than in lower-division courses. To earn strong scores in BUS 302, you need to excel at both technical work (“hard” skills) and organizational/communication work (“soft” skills). In addition, you need to excel at both individual performance and group performance. You need to know when to excel at leadership and when to excel at follower-ship. You need to know when to persuade and when to compromise. COBAE faculty believe that the best way to develop these skills is to immerse student professionals in those situations that will engender the best learning environment for these critical skills. Excel at *both* skill types.