SPS 300: Systems Thinking and Problem-Solving in Complex Organizations
College of Education and Behavioral Sciences
School of Professional Studies
WKU Web

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I will make every attempt to respond to your emails within 24 hours.

Office Hours: By Appointment – Please email and I will be happy to set up a call, video conference, or a face-to-face meeting with you.

Course Description:

An introduction to systems thinking methodologies and methods, the characteristics of complex systems, and the process of using a systems thinking perspective to solve problems in business organizations.
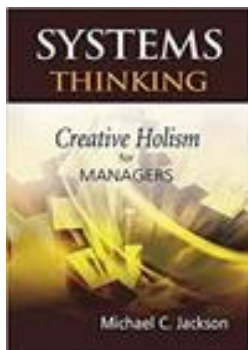
Course Material:

We will use the following textbook:

Jackson, M.C. (2003) Systems Thinking: Creative Holism for managers. Wiley
ISBN- 9780470845226
Here is a link for a free download of the book:
http://citeseerx.ist.psu.edu/viewdoc/download?doi=10.1.1.476.2858&rep=rep1&type=pdf

We also use articles on *applied systems thinking* I provide as reading assignments. Links to these articles will be provided on Blackboard's course site under the content area labeled "course material".

Pre-Requisites:

21 hours of Foundations & Explorations coursework or junior status.

Course Objectives and Student Learning Outcomes:
Upon successful completion, the student should be able to:

Learning Objective	Activities	Assessment
1. Define the systems thinking perspective and language.	Reading Assignments, Discussion Board Interactions (responding to the weekly discussion questions and replying to fellow leaners' posts).	Discussion Board activities and writing assignments.
2. Explain the systems thinking process.	Reading Assignments, Discussion Board Interactions (responding to the weekly discussion questions and replying to fellow leaners' posts	Discussion Board activities and writing assignments.
3. Identify and apply several systems thinking approaches.	Reading Assignments, Discussion Board Interactions (responding to the weekly discussion questions and replying to fellow leaners' posts	Discussion Board activities and writing assignments.
4. Analyze how systems evolve.	Reading Assignments, Discussion Board Interactions (responding to the weekly discussion questions and replying to fellow leaners' posts	Discussion Board activities and writing assignments
5. Compare the study of individual components to the analysis of entire systems.	Reading Assignments, Discussion Board Interactions (responding to the weekly discussion questions and replying to fellow leaners'85 posts	Discussion Board activities and writing assignments
6. Evaluate how system-level thinking informs decision-making, public policy, and/or the sustainability of the system itself.	Reading Assignments, Discussion Board Interactions (responding to the weekly discussion questions and replying to fellow leaners posts. A course project	Discussion Board activities and writing assignments.

Grading

Percentage Grade	Letter Grade
90% to 100% (450 to 500 points)	A
80% to 89% (400 to 449 points)	B
70% to 79% (350 to 399 points)	C
60% to 69% (300 to 349 points)	D
Below 60% (below 300 points)	F

Note: I reserve the right to make corrections to the grade book to keep it consistent with the course syllabus, thereby reflecting your true performance and not errors.

Assignment	Grade
Discussion Board Assignments	300 points (4 weeks @ 50 points per week and 100 points for the last assignment)
Course Project (Final Paper)	200 points
Total	**500 points**

Rules for Success:

1. Timely completion of all assigned coursework
2. Active participation on the Discussions Board
3. Professional etiquette on the Discussion Board; that is, replying and responding to posts with the utmost respect and courtesy

Class Assignments:

Responding to discussion board questions are not enough to earn a complete grade. Students are expected to respond to at least one student per question (a minimum of 3 replies per week as there are 3 questions per week). Responses to questions (main posts) are to be substantial with an average of 150 words per question. Merely agreeing and disagreeing with fellow learners' answers is not sufficient to be considered a replying post; you should justify your position. Individual posts related to the discussion questions are due no later than Thursday of every week; that should give your fellow learners enough time to respond to your post. However, you have all week (until Sunday midnight) to reply to your fellow learners. (See Grading Rubric below for points assigned for discussion questions and learner responses)

*For your final assignment, you will write an 8-page double-spaced paper. **I will post instructions to the writing assignment on Blackboard under the content area labeled "Assignments"**. In the paper (course project), you will argue for a solution, based on a system thinking approach, that addresses both opportunities and challenges faced by a high growth business company operating in a highly competitive environment.*

Blackboard

This course will be delivered via Blackboard, your online learning community, where you will interact with your classmates and with me. Within the course site you have access to learning materials, tutorials, and the syllabus. You can discuss issues, submit assignments, and email other students and me. Assistance and help are also available on the use of Blackboard.

Online Discussions:

To maximize your learning, you are expected to participate actively in the discussion to the extent of contributing a response of at least 250 words to each question I post and 50 words to at least two other students' posts per question. The responses should add substance, request clarification, or challenge the assertions made by providing real or hypothetical scenarios that the original posting did not cover. **Remember, the purpose of this methodology is to stimulate academic debate and not to verbally attack another student. Do not consistently wait until the last day to respond to questions, as this limits your class interaction with other students and class interaction is a portion of your grade.**

Discussion Etiquette:

Western Kentucky University is committed to open, frank, and insightful dialogue in all of its courses. Diversity has many manifestations, including diversity of thought, opinion, and value. We encourage all learners to be respectful of that diversity and to refrain from inappropriate commentary. The following are good guidelines to follow:

1. Never transmit, promote, or distribute content that is known to be illegal.
2. Never make a statement that is harassing, threatening, or embarrassing to any other students.
3. If you disagree with someone, respond to the subject, not the person.
4. Never make a statement that is harmful, abusive; racially, ethnically, or religiously offensive, vulgar; sexually explicit; or otherwise potentially offensive
5. If I believe that you have violated the above guidelines, I will address that concern in a private email to you.

Blackboard Discussion Objectives and Grading Rubric

➤ The discussion questions provide students with a context to:
  - Demonstrate written communication skills;
  - Apply critical thinking skills;
  - Evaluate one's learning.

➤ Grading Rubric

Assignment	Quality	Grade
3 Discussion Questions	Substantial answers that draw from documented sources.	10 points each for a total of 30 points
3 replies to fellow learners (replies must be for different questions)	Replies are expected to add substance, request clarification, or challenge assertions.	4 points each for a total of 12 points
Responses timeliness	Responses to the DQs are due by Thursdays. Replies are open for the whole week.	8 points
Total		**50 points**

COURSE CONDUCT

For this class to work in the way that it is most effective, we must build and maintain a climate of respect and trust. Activities that diminish the learning environment will not be tolerated. Examples of such behaviors include (but are not limited to):
- Disrespectful or inappropriate posts or replies
- Cheating (giving, using, or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information, or devices in any academic exercise).
- Copying from another student's written assignment or allowing a student to copy your own work.
- Plagiarism (work worded too closely to a source other than your own)

Severe penalties will be associated with undertaking any of the aforementioned behaviors. Any incident of cheating will result in **FAILING** the course.

ADA ACCOMMODATION

In compliance with University policy, students with disabilities who require academic and/or auxiliary accommodations for this course must contact the Student Accessibility Resource Center located in Downing Student Union, Room 1074. The SARC can be reached by phone number at 270-745-5004 [270-745-3030 TTY] or via email at sarc.connect@wku.edu. Please do not request accommodations directly from the professor or instructor without a faculty notification letter (FNL) from The Student Accessibility Resource Center.

TITLE IX/DISCRIMINATION & HARRASSMENT

Western Kentucky University (WKU) is committed to supporting faculty, staff and students by upholding WKU's Title IX Sexual Misconduct/Assault Policy (#0.2070) and Discrimination and Harassment Policy (#0.2040). Under these policies, discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct based on sex/gender are prohibited. If you experience an incident of sex/gender-based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct, you are encouraged to report it to the Title IX Coordinator, Andrea Anderson, 270-745-5398 or Title IX Investigators, Michael Crowe, 270-745-5429 or Joshua Hayes, 270-745-5121.Please note that while you may report an

incident of sex/gender based discrimination, harassment and/or sexual misconduct to a faculty member, WKU faculty are "Responsible Employees" of the University and MUST report what you share to WKU's Title IX Coordinator or Title IX Investigator. If you would like to speak with someone who may be able to afford you confidentiality, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159.

WKU Counseling and Testing Center
The university experience should be challenging, but not overwhelming. To this end, the WKU Counseling Center provides a variety of services to help strengthen students' capacity to tolerate distress, form healthy relationships, and seek healthy expressions of their ideals and values. If you would like to speak with someone, you may contact WKU's Counseling and Testing Center at 270-745-3159 or use their Here To Help service at https://www.wku.edu/heretohelp/heretohelpemail.php. If you need immediate help, please visit the Counseling Center in 409 Potter Hall or call the 24-hour emergency help line at 270-843-4357.

COURSE WORK SCHEDULE

I will monitor the discussion board from behind the scenes for substance, courtesy, and collegiality; and intervene only if I believe that I should do so to steer the discussions in a certain direction and/or challenge your critical thinking. I will contact you individually with private emails if I feel that I need to address issues pertaining to posting quality or any other issue.

Week	Activities (Reading Assignments)	Assignments
Week 1 7/13/thru 7/19	Click on the button labeled "discussions" on the course menu and reply to the Syllabus, Discussion questions grading rubric, and Response Methodology Forums. Go to the introductions forum and introduce yourself to your peers. **Read Chapter 1**: The Systems Language. **Read Michael Goodman's articles**: System Thinking as a Language & Systems Thinking: What, Why, When, Where, and How? **Study Chapter 2**: Applied Systems Thinking. **Study Chapter 4**: Hard Systems Thinking	**Respond to the discussion questions by Thursday the 16th (a minimum of 150 words per question) and reply to at least one of your fellow learners' posts per question by Sunday the 19th (a minimum of 50 words).**
Week 2 7/20 thru 7/26	**Study Chapter 5**. Systems Dynamics: The Fifth Discipline **Read Laurence Fisher's article**: The Prophet of Unintended Consequences. **Study Chapter 6:** Organizational Cybernetics **Study Chapter 7**: Complexity Theory	**Respond to the discussion questions by Thursday the 23rd (a minimum of 150 words per question) and reply to at least one of your fellow learners' posts per question by Sunday the 26th (a minimum of 50 words).**
Week 3 7/27 thru 08/02	**Study Chapter 8**: Strategic Assumption Surfacing and Testing **Study Chapter 9**: Interactive Planning **Study Chapter 10:** Soft Systems Methodology	**Respond to the discussion questions by Thursday the 30th (a minimum of 150 words per question) and reply to at least one of your fellow learners' posts per question by Sunday the 2nd (a minimum of 50 words).**

Week 4 & 5 8/03 thru 8/13	**Study Chapter 14**: Total Systems Intervention **Study Chapter 15**: Critical Systems Practice To help you address the learning outcomes targeted by your course project (your final written paper), weeks' 4 and 5 discussion question focuses on summarizing what we've learned thus far. That is, compare and contrast the different approaches of systems thinking covered in the previous weeks (i.e., methodologies, methods, uses, and managerial values). What approach seems to be more powerful in terms of tackling complex problems? You may want to check a short interview with Michael Goodman on how Systems Thinking has changed over the years: System Thinking Hits Its Stride by Kali Saposnick.	**Respond to the discussion questions by Sunday of Week 4 (8/9) (this a short essay-type of question; a minimum of 400 words is needed) and reply to at least two of your fellow learners' posts by end of Week 5 (8/13).**
Week 5	**Final Written Paper—Remember that your final course project is worth 40% of your grade.**	**Course Project Paper is due on Thursday, August 13th.**