

Course Syllabus: AEB 4325
Contemporary Issues in Agribusiness Management

Period 9 (4:05 – 4:55) on Monday, Wednesday, and Friday

Classroom: [LAR0330](#)

Instructor: Dr. Misti Sharp,
Instructional Associate
Professor and
Undergraduate
Coordinator, Food and
Resource Economics

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Instructor: Dr. Caleb Stair,
Instructional Assistant
Professor and Honor's
Coordinator, Food and
Resource Economics

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Course Description (from Catalog): A capstone course utilizing economic concepts to address the interaction between the political process that legislates domestic agricultural, environmental and international trade policy, micro and macroeconomic principles, private business decisions taken by firms in response to public policies, and ethical considerations in developing and implementing public policy.

Pre-Requisites: This is a departmentally controlled course that you must be put into by the academic advisor in your final (graduating) semester within the Food and Agribusiness Management and Marketing (FAMM) concentration. It is a required “finishing” course in the major. Other students may be added into the course with the permission of the undergraduate coordinator and/or professor. AEB 4138: Advanced Agribusiness Management and AEB 4342: Agribusiness and Food Marketing Management are co-requisite courses that are to be taken either with this course or prior to this course.

Communication: E-mail is the best way to reach Dr. Sharp and Dr. Stair. Any issues that require action **MUST** be handled by email so that there is a written record of need. Email both instructors to ensure a timely and consistent response. Make sure to [enable emails for course announcements](#) and read this syllabus thoroughly! We post important announcements sparingly (no more than 1 per day and usually much less) and will not answer questions by email that are already answered via canvas announcements or the course syllabus.

Course Description: The idea surrounding this class is that issues that are current change from semester to semester. As such, there is fluidity built into this course as we emphasize a thinking framework which provides a lens to understand and provide solutions to modern (contemporary) issues. It is assumed that you have a firm understanding of problems facing the modern food system and agribusinesses. It is further assumed that you can apply economic models to contemporary issues facing society. The emphasis in this class will be to focus not on specific economic and business theories, but rather to focus on how to **think** and **provide solutions** using systems thinking while leveraging your foundational knowledge within FRE. As such, there are many potential right answers to the problems facing society. The only wrong answers are those that are NOT supported by data and theory. Previous teachings of this course have used systems thinking to contextualize topics such as identifying and understanding imperfect competition, business adaptations to COVID-19, and rapid changes in

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our financial, economic, and natural systems. Each student will come at these issues from different perspectives and each of these perspectives is valued in this classroom. It is expected that you will treat all peers, instructors, and teaching assistants with respect and civility as we grapple with some of society's more voracious problems.

Course Objectives:

After successful completion of this course, each student should be able to:

- 1) Apply systems thinking, economic criteria and business strategy in agribusiness decision making.
- 2) Assess how policies and current events impact industries, businesses, and brands.
- 3) Incorporate diverse perspectives in the discussion of an economic, natural resource, or business problem.
- 4) Evaluate a *wicked* problem and consider possible avenues of progress in a visual medium.
- 5) Understand one's role in the workplace as an economist, leader, manager and/or analyst.
- 6) Efficiently and effectively present arguments in both oral and written formats.

Required Course Materials:

- **E-learning:** can be accessed via <http://elearning.ufl.edu> using your Gatorlink username and password. If you are having difficulties accessing E-learning, please contact the UF Computing Help Desk by calling (352)-392-HELP or email helpdesk@ufl.edu. This will be where you submit some of your work and where I will post grades on a regular basis.
- **Plectica Account:** The Cabrera Research Lab at Cornell University provides Plectica as a free, online mind mapping app. Students will be expected to sign up for a Plectica Account to access the software app via the internet. This will be used for memos and projects. Sign up for Plectica:
 - Open an internet browser and navigate to <https://www.plectica.com/>.
 - Click on the Sign up for free and get started icon in the center of the page.
 - Sign in with Google or enter your email and create a password.
 - Click Agree and create my Account
- There are [two textbooks](#) that will be used heavily in this class and each costs \$30.
 - **Required Text:** [Systems Thinking Made Simple \(STMS\): New Hope for Solving Wicked Problems](#) (2018) Cabrera and Cabrera; this book emphasizes the method of DSRP for breaking down complex adaptive systems. This will be used throughout the semester.
 - **Recommended Text:** [Flock not Clock \(FNC\): Design, Align, and Lead to Achieve your Vision](#) (2018) Cabrera and Cabrera; this book emphasizes systems thinking within businesses and organizations to bring about change and growth by harnessing culture. This will be used for the first half of the course but there are two chapters in STMS (Chapter 11 and 12) that form the basis of this textbook so you don't necessarily have to buy FNC if you get STMS.

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Class Structure: This is a face-to-face class meaning that you are expected to be in class each day to ensure you have accurate notes, to work on active learning assignments, and to take reading quizzes. Classes will involve a mixture of lecturing, discussion, and various active learning activities all designed to help increase your understanding of the course topics.

Course modules:

Part 1: Systems thinking for organizations

Module 1: Systems Thinking in a Business World

Module 2: Business Culture and Organizational Learning

Part 2: Systems thinking in economics

Module 3: Food Market Polarization

Module 4: Systems Thinking for Wicked Problems

Your grade is composed of the following:

Business Strategy Project: Throughout the semester we will discuss businesses in terms of vision, mission, capacity, and learning (VMCL) as well as business strategy and corporate social responsibility. This project has you look at a business that you choose¹ to assess company culture, business strategy, and how this company creates a competitive advantage in a world where businesses must take a stance on social issues. There are various components to this project with different due dates throughout the semester:

Part	Points	Due Date
Business Overview: Assess vision, mission, capacity, and learning of company. Suggest a strategy to improve company culture.	40	January 31, 2024
Corporate Social Responsibility: Compare and contrast how the company you have identified is dealing with social issues compared to their competitors.	40	February 16, 2024
Policy and Strategy: Explore how current events or policies are impacting the business and identify potential biases that may impact competitiveness.	40	March 22, 2024
Looking Forward: How could this business address some of the most wicked problems that we face and turn it into an area of competitive advantage?	40	April 5, 2024
Final Presentation: You will present to the class about what you learned about your company throughout the course of the semester.	40	April 19, 2024

Perusal (Best 4 out of 5): Each module in this course has some readings that are somewhat “summative” of the concepts covered. As such, we are assigning a “close reading” of these summative papers in addition to or in lieu of a course lecture. For these assignments, you will need to login to eLearning and go to the Perusal tool. Here are the [help pages](#) in case you need them and a [getting started guide](#).

¹ Everyone must have a unique business and business sign-ups are here:

https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1oInk_fCaryAOVpyIWpLUQsLArY0e4QCUQt_30V2nDkA/edit?usp=sharing

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Reading quiz (best 10): This class emphasizes learning how to think and to do this, you will need some background information on both the method itself (systems thinking) and on the topics we will be discussing in class. These reading quizzes will be short and will be given randomly throughout the semester. Some may be announced in advance. Students will only be allowed make-up quizzes in the event of University excused absences with advanced notice.

Task Force Meetings: Businesses are constantly confronting “culture wars” due to a rapidly changing world. How companies adapt to these challenges either ends up giving them a comparative advantage or digs them a trench from which they must climb. You will be assigned a “role” on a taskforce within a given business facing a “crisis” that the company must meaningfully manage. You should represent your assigned role as described in the prompt and the team needs to come up with a proposed solution to the problem collectively within one class period. You will be graded based on properly representing your role, contributing to the conversation and solution, and reflecting on the task force meeting. A grading rubric will be provided.

Wicked Problem Roundtable: Like businesses, our world is constantly facing threats such as climate change, political instability, and rampant inequality which tear at the social fabric of society as they seem to have no meaningful solution that does not cause more problems than it fixes. Nevertheless, we must grapple with these problems if we are to progress as a society. You will be assigned a “perspective” on a roundtable addressing a wicked problem facing society. You must represent your perspective fully and the team needs to come up with a proposed solution to the problem collectively within one class period. You will be graded based on properly representing your perspective, contributing to the conversation and solution, and reflecting on the roundtable meeting. A grading rubric will be provided.

Course Grade Composition:

Category	Total Points	% of Total Grade
Business strategy memos (4) and presentation	200 points (40 points each)	50%
Perusal (Best 4 out of 5)	40 points (10 points each)	10%
Reading quiz (best 10)	80 points (8 points each)	10%
Task Force Meeting	40 points	10%
Wicked Problem Roundtable	40 points	10%
Total	400 points	100%

There may be additional opportunities to earn bonus points in this class. These opportunities will be announced on eLearning and/or in class.

Grades and Grade Points: Grades will be assigned as follows

Student Evaluation: Grades will be assigned as follows

Grade	Percentage	Total points	Grade Points
A	93% or more	≥ 372	4.00
A-	90.0 – 92.9%	360 - 371	3.67
B+	86.0 – 89.9%	344 - 359	3.33
B	83.0 – 85.9%	332 - 343	3.00
B-	80.0 – 82.9%	320 - 331	2.67
C+	76.0 – 79.9%	304 - 319	2.33
C	73.0 – 75.9%	292 - 303	2.00
C-	70.0 – 72.9%	280 - 291	1.67
D+	66.0 – 69.9%	264 - 279	1.33
D	63.0 – 65.9%	252 - 263	1.00
D-	60.0 – 62.9%	240 - 251	0.67
E	59.9% or less	≤ 239	0.00

****Please note that grades are not 'rounded' or 'adjusted' at the end of the term.****

Grades and Grade Points: For information on current UF policies for assigning grade points, see <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic-regulations/grades-grading-policies/>

Academic Honesty: As a student at the University of Florida, you have committed yourself to uphold the Honor Code, which includes the following pledge: *“We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.”* You are expected to exhibit behavior consistent with this commitment to the UF academic community, and on all work submitted for credit at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: *“On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.”* It is assumed that you will complete all work independently in each course unless the instructor provides explicit permission for you to collaborate on course tasks (e.g. assignments, papers, quizzes, exams). Furthermore, as part of your obligation to uphold the Honor Code, you should report any condition that facilitates academic misconduct to appropriate personnel. It is your individual responsibility to know and comply with all university policies and procedures regarding academic integrity and the Student Honor Code. Violations of the Honor Code at the University of Florida will not be tolerated. Violations will be reported to the Dean of Students Office for consideration of disciplinary action. For more information regarding the Student Honor Code, please see: <https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/process/student-conduct-code/>

Examples of cheating: copying the homework of a peer, copying and pasting from a source without quotations and source attribution, paying someone else to do your homework/project/exam, dividing work amongst you and your peers and then all submitting the same document, giving or receiving material from peers. Using generative AI to entirely write a class memo.

Attendance and Make-Up Work: Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments and other work are consistent with university policies that can be found at: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/UGRD/academic->

[regulations/attendance-policies/](#) In general, you are expected to be in class each day and submit all work on time on e-Learning.

Students Requiring Accommodations

Students with disabilities who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the [Disability Resource Center](#). It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

Course Evaluation

Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/>. Students are notified when the evaluation period opens, and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via <https://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/>. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at <https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/>.

In-Class Recording

Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled.

The only allowable purposes are: (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A “class lecture” is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To “publish” means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third party note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

University Honesty Policy

UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: “On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.” The Conduct Code specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the

possible sanctions. [Click here to read the Conduct Code](#). If you have any questions or concerns, please consult with the instructor or TAs in this class.

Software Use

All faculty, staff, and students of the University are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against University policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate. We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to uphold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honesty and integrity.

Student Privacy

There are federal laws protecting your privacy with regards to grades earned in courses and on individual assignments. For more information, please see the [Notification to Students of FERPA Rights](#).

Campus Resources:

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit [U Matter, We Care website](#) to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: [Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website](#) or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or [visit the Student Health Care Center website](#).

University Police Department: [Visit UF Police Department website](#) or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; [Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website](#).

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the [UF Computing Help Desk](#) at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources.

Teaching Center: Broward Hall, 352-392-2010 or to make an appointment 352- 392-6420. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138. Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Student Complaints On-Campus: [Visit the Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code webpage for more information.](#)

On-Line Students Complaints: [View the Distance Learning Student Complaint Process.](#)

Lauren's Promise: I will listen and believe you if someone is threatening you.

Lauren McCluskey, a 21-year old honors student athlete, was murdered on October 22, 2018, by a man she briefly dated on the University of Utah Campus. We must all take actions to ensure this never happens again. Any form of sexual harassment or violence will not be excused or tolerated at the University of Florida.

If you are experiencing sexual assault, relationship violence, or stalking, you can take the following actions:

- If you are in immediate danger, call 911.
- Report it to me, and I will connect you to resources.
- Seek confidential sources of support and help:
 - [UFPD Office of Victim Services](#): 51 Museum Road, 352-392-5648
 - [Sexual Assault Recovery Services \(SARS\)](#): Infirmary Building, 352-392-1161
 - Alachua County Rape Crisis Center (confidential): 352-264-6760

Tentative Course Schedule

Week	Topic	Readings	Assignments Due
1	Syllabus / Pre-Test / Mental Models	STMS: Ch 1, All methods are wrong	Pre-test
2	Organizations as Systems (MLK-January 15, 2024)	Crux of Organizational Learning , STMS: Ch 2	
3	Flock not Clock / VMCL	STMS: Ch 11 and/or Flock not Clock: Ch 1 – 3	Guest lecture bonus
4	Capacity and Learning	Service Profit Chain , Capacity; STMS: Ch 3	Memo 1, Perusall 1
5	Business Ethics, CSR	Values-Based Leadership	
6	Businesses & Movements / Changing the Game	Gharajadaghi: Ch 1 , STMS: Ch 4	Memo 2, Perusall 2
7	Task Force Meetings		Taskforce Meeting Reflections
8	Business Cycle and Supply Chains	Norwood and Peel, Forecasting an Uncertain Market	
9	Systemic Issues	Barkley and Barkley: Ch 4 - 5	Perusall 3
10	Spring Break		
11	“Good” versus “Bad” Agribusiness	TBD	Memo 3
12	Dealing with Crisis	TBD	Perusall 4
13	Wicked Problems	Weber and Khademan, Wrestling down wicked problems	Perusall 5
14	Wicked Problems Round Table		Roundtable Meeting Reflections
15	Unintended consequences and workplace readiness	TBD	Final Presentation Due
16	Final Business Overview		In-class presentation

Note: The instructors reserve the right to change the terms and dates stated in this course syllabus at any time.

****By enrolling in this course, you are agreeing to the terms outlined in this syllabus!****

We look forward to a fun and productive semester with you all!