Digital Transformations—Capstone/Practicum Course

**Digital Transformations**

Professors: Joel Appel and Madhavan Parthasarathy

Office: Jake Jabs Center, 5501 Business School or Virtual

Office Hours: 5:00-6:00 pm Thursdays or by appointment

Phone: (303) 619-57334 (Joel); (303) 315-8445 (Madhavan)

Email: joel@zdzone.com; madhavan.parthasarathy@ucdenver.edu

Today’s most valuable companies have created digital products and platforms that we use every day. The market capitalization of the so-called FAANG stocks far exceeds an investor’s wildest dreams of only a decade ago. The development of digital technologies that is driving this shift in in the way we live our lives and build a business is only beginning. The decades ahead will include more innovation, growth, and more disruption based on digital technologies.

This class will focus on strategies for using digital technology to add value to a company’s products and services. A major portion of the class will be spent with entrepreneurs who created and lead some of Colorado’s top digital technology companies. These companies are thriving in this new world. Some are even creating new platforms that are disrupting their entire industry.

As a current or future executive, this course will help you develop a framework for evaluating whether a business is effectively leveraging new technologies or if it is ripe for disruption. This will help you make good decisions and lead a business, hopefully reducing the risk of becoming irrelevant (or less relevant) like so many of our great companies in the past (E.g. Sears, GE, The Yellow Pages, Campbell’s Soup).

This is a capstone course and will cut across functional areas. Therefore you will be expected to apply principles from several MBA disciplines including marketing, finance, accounting, management, and operations in your class discussions and homework. You will be expected to produce thoughtful, real-world work and ideas that you could apply in a real world business situation.

The class will consider some of key questions:

1. What factors make a business ripe for digital disruption? Are there some businesses or processes that may never digitize? Why not?
2. How to spot inefficiencies and ‘Friction’ in a marketplace and how entrepreneurs are working to create efficiency.
3. The role of the Smartphone. Have we even begun to tap its potential power?
4. Is all of this change creating anything radically new? Or are these new technologies and businesses making existing processes and activities better and more efficient?
5. What is a Platform? What is the Network Effect? What strategies do companies use to drive adoption of new technologies so that they can achieve scale?
6. What are some of the dangers of all of this ‘digitization?’ How do you keep your business secure?
7. Is business more or less ‘democratic’ with these changes?
8. Are there ‘left behind’ resources that we can utilize for future opportunities?
9. Novelty vs. Value-add…don’t get confused.

We will explore these topics from a general perspective and while visiting with executives from the community whose companies are leading the charge.

You will notice that there are some big digital topics that this class will not spend much time on such as digital currency, blockchain, healthcare, and 3D printing. These topics are important and exciting. However, we believe you will find it even more exciting to learn from the entrepreneurs whose companies are changing the world in big and exciting ways!

The Class will consist of:

1. Classes + Discussions;
2. Guest Lectures;
3. Four 1-page Assignments Based on Guest Speaker Presentations and Readings;
4. Two tests;
5. A personal journal ;
6. A Capstone Project.

**Readings**

In keeping with the contemporary nature of the course, readings will consist primarily of links to relevant articles. Please see the course schedule for details. Most digital strategy textbooks are outdated by the time they are published, given the fast-changing nature of Colorado’s digital economy. Books will be replaced by top leaders of companies actually disrupting the space.

**Grading**

Class participation and attendance: 25%

Guest Speaker Assignments: 20%

Two tests: 20%

Journal: 10%

Final Project: 25%.

Class Participation and Attendance

Since this is a practicum class that is heavily guest-speaker focused, it is impossible to make up in-class information via the readings or “extra” activities. Therefore, class attendance and participation are particularly important.

Class participation will be assigned on an “overall” basis based on the instructors’ *subjective opinion* of your participation efforts. In order to get participation points it is necessary for you to discuss *constructively* and actively in class as well as make a significant contribution during your final presentations. Please be aware that the correlation between “talking” and “participation” is sometimes spurious.

Physical attendance in class is expected for the entire duration of each class, and will be taken every night. After the first class missed, you will automatically lose 2 percentage points for each additional class you skip, whatever be the reason.

Please note that attending class remotely, i.e., via skype or similar processes, while encouraged, does not constitute “attendance”. Long story short: if you expect to miss several classes, please consider taking this class in a different semester.

If you attend class regularly but never participate in discussions, you will get, at most, half of the participation/attendance points. It is therefore necessary to attend and regularly participate to get full points.

SHOWCASE classes

Some of the classes, labeled SHOWCASE classes, will be part of the “Best of Colorado” speaker series offered by the Jake Jabs Center for Entrepreneurship. During these special sessions, we will invite guests from outside class to attend as well. Since our classroom cannot accommodate extra people, these classes will be held on the 5th floor Laube Commons. Please see the course schedule regarding the dates for these SHOWCASE classes. As a special bonus, food and drink will be provided by the Center on these dates.

The SHOWCASE event will only be during the first half of the class. During the second part, we’ll head back to our classroom for the rest of the discussion.

Guest Speaker Assignments, 4 Required

During the course we will hear from approximately 8-10 business leaders in the community who are in the process of disrupting their industry. Most are working on a national and international scale. You will get to hear how they created their company, the market forces that influence their success, and how they plan to thrive in the future.

You will need to complete the following **1-PAGE** single-spaced assignment (do not attach additional pages, do not use a font smaller than 12 pt.) for any 4 of these speakers and turn it in at the BEGINNING of the class at which they speak. Late assignments will not be accepted.

**Please be sure to include your name, the due date, and the guest speaker’s name at the top of the assignment so that you can receive credit.**

Please discuss each of these questions in your 1-page paper, following a Questions-Answer format. Some questions may not apply to a particular guest speaker’s business or industry, so please use your discretion and skip those questions.

1. What industry (or industries) is the company disrupting? Please be specific.
2. Competitive Advantage—Who are their competitors? How do they win? Is it more efficient, easier, or cheaper, etc. for their customers to use them vs. other options?
3. Why is it important for this business to achieve a ‘network effect?’
4. Have they become a ‘Platform?’ Discuss why or why not?
5. What is the company’s revenue model? Do you see additional revenue opportunities?
6. What challenges do they face? What suggestions can you offer?

Tests (see course schedule for dates)

Two multiple-choice tests will be provided on the dates indicated in the course schedule. Material covered will include readings, class discussions, guest speaker presentations, and any other material covered during class or otherwise assigned.

Makeup tests will be provided only under exceptional circumstances such as ill-health (university-acceptable proof will be required). Please arrange your work and personal schedules appropriately to ensure that you are available to take the tests on the scheduled dates.

Journal, due November 27, 2018

Please write about 3 big and important ideas from *all of our guests* that resonated with you. These big ideas can be from their personal journey, their entrepreneurial journey, or their business journey. The important thing here is that the ideas are insightful to you and will one day be helpful in your life or career. The journal entries do not necessarily have to be long, but must be meaningful to you, and elaborate enough to make sense.

Project, due December 4, 2018

***The class project will be an 8-page single-spaced study of a business or industry that you believe is ripe for digitization.*** You are encouraged to do this project in small groups of two (ideal) or three individuals. We suggest you create a visual to help tell your story. This may be a video, app, website, PowerPoint, or other to help illustrate your concept, and may be used during your final presentation.

You will be expected to contact at least 2 industry executives and interview them. Explain that you are an MBA student at CU Denver and you need their help. Connect via telephone, email, linked in, WhatsApp, WeChat, or any other means you chose.

Critical thinking and insightful work will be rewarded, so think deeply and present your ideas clearly. The ideas that you will be expected to consider include:

1. **Situation Analysis**: what business or industry are you evaluating? How is this need fulfilled today in the marketplace? Are there specific companies or individuals doing the work? How large is the business in size and scope? What if any innovation has the business or segment experienced in the recent past? Be specific.
2. **Who is the consumer**?
3. **Your Proposed Business Model**: How can technology provide a competitive advantage? What business practices can be updated and improved by existing and emerging technologies? Tell us about the new business, and discuss the role of scale and network effect in your business’s success.
4. **Marketing**: How will you attract customers? What marketing and promotional strategies and tactics will you employ? Is there an opportunity to create a new ‘platform?’
5. **Timing**: Why is now the ideal time to disrupt this business or industry?
6. **Risks**: What risks and dangers can you see in your plan? How can you manage and govern these risks in creating your new business?
7. **Execution Plan**: Provide a realistic plan for how you would go about executing this new business. Tell us how you would develop the technology, secure funding, and recruit talent.
8. **Financials**: Provide a simple P/L with a forecast of revenue, costs, and market share for the first 3 years.
9. **Summary**: Provide a one-paragraph summary of your idea and why it is awesome!

Be aware that everything you state needs to be supported. Use appropriate citations where needed. This is not an exercise in creative writing, but rather a well-researched and supported paper. Remember, this course is about disruption and you are allowed and encouraged to be a (digitally) disruptive student. You are therefore encouraged, but not required, to create a website, app, video, or any other digital exhibits to support your work, which may also be used during your final presentations.

Final Presentation and Competition: At the end of the term, you are required to make a professional 5-minute (time limit strictly enforced) presentation of your project, particularly emphasizing the salient points and takeaways. If you develop any digital tools or exhibits, you may use them during the presentation as long as the total time doesn’t exceed 5 minutes. Presentations will be followed by 5 minutes Q&A. The best presentation (as voted by your classmates) will receive a special prize.

Peer evaluations: 25 percent of your project grade will be devoted to peer evaluation scores. A peer evaluation request will be sent out prior to your final presentations and will be due on the final class date.

**Grading Policies**

(1) No grades will be based on "extra work" which is not required of, or optional for, all students enrolled. Further, without exception, no late cases will be accepted.

(2) Course grades will be based on a weighted average of percentage scores from the assignments, project, participation, and the average on the exams according to the following scale:

 A 93.00 - 100 %

 A- 90.00 - 92.99

 B+ 87.00 - 89.99

 B 83.00 – 86.99

 B- 80.00 – 82.99

 and so on

**Academic Dishonesty**

All forms of academic dishonesty will be reported to the *Internal Affairs Committee* of the Business School for further action***.***  Typical academic dishonesty includes—but is not limited to—plagiarism, submitting a homework assignment or project that you did not write, submitting a previously written project, copying someone else’s assignment etc. Typical consequences for cheating are failure in the course and suspension for one semester

**Tentative Class Schedule**

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Topic** | **Assignment/Reading** |
| 8/21 | Introductions, expectations, and overall framework for the course. Discussion of key themes: Improve efficiencies and remove friction in the world, Platforms, Adding Value vs. Novelty.Special guest speaker, Michael Gellman, CEO/Founder, Spire Digital, <https://www.spiredigital.com>, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/mgellman/> | Before class read “*A Talk By the Head of Daimler-Benz*” posted on canvas and <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/296684> and <https://www.csoonline.com/article/3289146/authentication/identity-eats-security-how-identity-management-is-driving-security.html?nsdr=true> (you may need to enter user info, feel free to create an alias) and <http://denver.crains.com/if-i-knew-then/andre-durand/ping-identity> , and <https://www.kleinerperkins.com/perspectives/internet-trends-report-2018>  |
| 8/28 | **A Brief History of the Digital World** | <https://www.wired.com/2013/11/is-the-mobile-dogfight-between-apple-and-google-just-like-the-one-with-microsoft/> and <https://bambooinnovator.com/2014/01/08/disruption-is-the-new-normal-after-google-maps-added-navigation-the-value-of-stand-alone-gps-makers-fell-by-as-much-as-85/> and review a few articles written by Michael at <https://www.spiredigital.com/news-views/>  |
| 9/4 | **How did we build all of this?**Special guest speaker, Nick Copola, Chief Product Officer, Spire Digital, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/coppolo/> | Read <https://www.entrepreneur.com/article/312820> and<https://www.bloomberg.com/view/articles/2018-08-12/american-ownership-society-is-changing-thanks-to-technology> |
| 9/11 | **Decorate Your Home—Havenly. The Gig Economy.****SHOWCASE CLASS**Special guest speaker, Lee Mayer, CEO/Founder, Havenly, [www.Havenly.com](http://www.Havenly.com),<https://www.linkedin.com/in/lee-mayer-06a9681/>  | Watch: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=daQoVUA0wD8> and <https://www.forbes.com/sites/amitchowdhry/2018/02/13/havenly/#71adb57d7750> and <https://www.digitalcommerce360.com/2018/06/07/houzz-com-grows-through-international-expansion-and-mobile-technology/>  |
| 9/19 | **Payment Platforms**Special guest speaker, Eric Remer, CEO/Founder, PaySimple and EverCommerce, [www.PaySimple.com](http://www.PaySimple.com), <https://www.linkedin.com/in/lee-mayer-06a9681/>  | <https://www.businesswire.com/news/home/20161020005847/en/PaySimple-Poised-Growth-115M-Investment-Providence-Equity> And <https://smallbiztrends.com/2018/04/paysimple-and-profit-rhino.html> and <https://www.accountingtoday.com/news/product-news-paysimple-integrates-with-intuit-quickbooks-online>  |
| 9/25 | **Tell them about it!—Digital Signage****SHOWCASE CLASS**Special guest speakers, Andre Durand, CEO/Founder, Ping Identity, <https://www.pingidentity.com/en.html>, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/andredurand/> David Levin, CEO/Founder, Four Winds interactive (FWI), <https://www.fourwindsinteractive.com>,  <https://www.linkedin.com/in/justin-borus-053172/>  | Apple vs. Google…<https://www.wired.com/2013/11/is-the-mobile-dogfight-between-apple-and-google-just-like-the-one-with-microsoft/> and <https://www.digitalsignageconnection.com/americanairlines-arena-overhauls-legacy-signage-systems> and <https://edtechmagazine.com/higher/article/2018/07/video-walls-bring-campus-highlights-big-screen>  |
| 10/2 | **Off—Jake Jabs Center Event****Work on your project ideas** |  |
| 10/9 | **Advertising in a Digital Age****SHOWCASE CLASS**Special guest speaker, Troy Lerner, CEO/Founder, Booyah Advertising, <http://www.booyah.com>, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/troylerner/> **TEST-1** | Apple vs. Google…Review <http://www.emarketer.com/Chart/US-Total-Media-Ad-Spending-Share-by-Media-2014-2020-of-total/186513> and <https://pagely.com/blog/advertisers-trends-2018/> Test will be conducted during the second part of class. |
| 10/16 | **Team Meetings with MP to discuss Projects. Schedule with MP ASAP.** |  |
| 10/23 | **Revolutionizing Consumer Finance**Special guest speaker, Tony Wilbert, Founder, Blinker <https://www.blinker.com>, and Startup HomeRun | <https://andrewchen.co/how-to-build-a-billion-dollar-digital-marketplace-examples-from-uber-ebay-craigslist-and-more/> and <https://www.pymnts.com/loans/2018/blinker-auto-buying-selling-car-sales-financing/>  |
| 10/30 | **Keep Your Company Safe!** Special guest speaker, Bret Fund, CEO/Founder, SecureSet Academy. <https://secureset.com>, <https://www.linkedin.com/in/brfund/>  | <https://www.forbes.com/sites/laurencebradford/2018/03/30/why-people-should-learn-about-cybersecurity-in-2018/#4a93cdfd5d00>, and <https://www.rapid7.com/globalassets/_pdfs/research/rapid7-threat-report-2018-q1.pdf>, and <https://www.csmonitor.com/World/Passcode/Security-culture/2017/0120/Can-cybersecurity-boot-camps-fill-the-workforce-gap> and <https://www.forbes.com/sites/alyyale/2018/08/01/are-real-estate-agents-still-relevant-in-the-age-of-tech/#32de111065ec>  |
| 11/6 | **Driverless Cars—Means What Exactly for an entrepreneurial MBA Student?****SHOWCASE CLASS**Special guest speaker, Justin Borus, CEO/Founder, Ibex Investors. <https://www.ibexinvestors.com>, https://www.linkedin.com/in/justin-borus-053172/ | Read “*Fifth Wall AV Presentation*” on Canvas, and <https://www.techradar.com/news/driverless-cars-explained>,  |
| 11/13 | **Revolutionizing Therapy for Teens—Meet them where they are!** Special guest speaker, Robin Glenn, CEO/Founder, Base Education. [www.base.education](http://www.base.education), <https://www.linkedin.com/in/robin-glenn-b4144b13/> **TEST-2** | Read *Alexa! Tell My Children to Behave*! And <https://www.edsurge.com/news/2017-02-08-want-social-emotional-learning-to-work-the-careful-balance-of-tech-and-relationships> and [http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/health/ct-treatment-depressed-teens-20180403-story.html#](http://www.chicagotribune.com/lifestyles/health/ct-treatment-depressed-teens-20180403-story.html) and <https://www.forsythnews.com/local/education/social-emotional-learning-the-next-step-in-educating/>  |
| 11/20 | **Fall Break** |  |
| 11/27 | **Presentations** |  |
| 12/4 | **Presentations/ Wrap-up** |  |