

**DIGITAL PRODUCT MANAGEMENT LAB**  
**B7632**  
**3 CREDITS**

**Chris LaSala**

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**COURSE/TEACHING ASSISTANTS**

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Office Hours and Communication Preferences

- Please email me to request a meeting (virtual or in person) for office hours.
  - Monday, Wednesday and Friday: Virtual office hours only from 10:00am to 5:00pm
  - Tuesday and Thursday: 11:30 to 2:00 (in-person office hours only)
- Communications from the professor and teaching assistant about the course will take place through Canvas. Students should make sure they regularly check for announcements and messaging notifications.

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**COURSE DESCRIPTION**

The ‘digitization’ of business has radically transformed entire industries and created new ones, with speed, force, and in ways that could not be imagined two decades ago. Current foundational changes (web3, crypto/blockchain) are only accelerating the pace of change, putting even more pressure on firms to innovate quickly. The Product Manager has become the central player in leading technology firms to innovate and stay relevant, responsible for identifying, building and delivering products in hyper-fast development cycles.

As the “CEO of the Product” Product Managers must be proficient in a wide range of capabilities which have been introduced in the Introduction to Product Management and Product Management II classes. This Lab class will provide students with the opportunity to put those best practices and frameworks into practice by applying them to real problems and opportunities offered up by sponsor companies. Students will be assigned to teams and will work with executives from outside companies on the company’s specific product challenges and be responsible for completing assignments (as noted below) across most stages of the product development cycle, from ideation through commercialization. Projects will vary based on the needs of the partner company, and the following are example problem statements offered up by companies that have participated in the past:

- **Snap:** The CDC has reported a spike in mental health conditions in teenagers since the advent of COVID, due to limited opportunities to get together in person with friends and missing out on normal social outlets. How do we encourage teenagers to go outside and meet each other in real life?
- **Hulu:** How can Hulu create more opportunities for a user to organically identify and update their ad preferences?
- **Google:** Recent trends, such as regulatory changes and platform policies, are exerting downward pressure on the amount of revenue ads can generate for content creators. How can Google help publishers diversify their revenue streams beyond ads?
- **Lyft:** How can Lyft improve transportation at large events?

The course culminates in a formal recommendation to company executives with the suggested MVP, commercialization thesis, and business rationale.

This course is geared toward students that aim to work at medium to large sized companies as a product manager or leader, where firms are expected to innovate and launch new products and features as a means of ensuring they retain market relevance or expand into new markets based on current capabilities. We will cover the product development cycle from ideation to commercialization in that context. This course is not geared toward start-ups or new ventures, even if some of the concepts are applicable.

## PRE & CO-REQUISITE COURSES

This course is offered to students who have completed the 3 credit Product Management course. The pace of the class will be swift, and we will refer to concepts learned in the earlier courses to complete the course work. Students who have not completed the Product Management course, but have prior experience as a product manager (e.g., held a role as a product manager in a technology company or have founded a technology start-up) should fill out [this form](#) prior to request approval before registering for the course.

Although not a requirement for registering for the Lab, students who have taken other electives that are relevant to building digital products will have the opportunity to put those frameworks into practice in this class as well. For example, students will have the opportunity to (not an exhaustive list):

- Apply frameworks to drive ideation (as learned in Foundations of Innovation, Innovate Design Thinking)
- Deploy qualitative and quantitative customer research techniques to get customer feedback (as learned in Strategic Customer Insights, Modern Econometrics for Business)
- Recommend commercial strategies that reflect the networked strategic frameworks (as learned in Technology Strategy, Growth Hacking)

## STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES

The specific objectives of the Lab are to:

- Deploy product management frameworks, tools and best practices that were learned in the prerequisites, on a current problem or opportunity faced by a member company.
- Experience the pace and complexity of what it takes to be a product manager in an ecosystem that is rapidly evolving, covering most aspects of the product life cycle (evaluating market needs, sourcing customer feedback, ideating on new products that achieve market and company fit, building roadmaps, driving prioritization decisions, developing MVP prototypes and building commercialization plans and business models).
- Apply strategic thinking to product design that naturally leverages the use of data and technology to build a competitive advantage.
- Influence without authority and negotiate with stakeholders by working in a team setting where team members will be accountable to each other for quick progress and success.
- Communicate effectively via presentation to member company executives.

## **CLASSROOM NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS**

### **Core Culture**

Students are expected to adhere to [CBS Core Culture](#) in this class by being Present, Prepared, Participating.

### **Inclusion, Accommodation, and Support for Students**

At Columbia Business School we believe diversity strengthens any community or business model and brings it greater success. The School is committed to providing all students with equal opportunity to thrive in the classroom by providing a learning, living, and working environment free from discrimination, harassment, and bias on the basis of gender, sexual orientation, race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, or ability.

Students with documented disabilities may receive reasonable accommodations. Students are encouraged to contact the Columbia University's Office of Disability Services for [information about registration](#).

Columbia Business School adheres to all community, state, and federal regulations as relate to Title IX and student safety. Read more about CBS' policies to support [Inclusion, Accommodations and Support for Students here](#).

### **Honor Code and Academic Integrity**

The [Columbia Business School Honor Code](#) calls on all members of the School community to adhere to and uphold the notions of truth, integrity, and respect both during their time in school, and throughout their careers as productive, moral, and caring participants in their companies and communities around the world. All students are subject to the Honor Code for all of their academic work. Failure to comply

with the Honor Code may result in [Dean's Discipline](#). Here you can review [examples of Academic Misconduct](#) which may result in discipline.

### Course Attendance Policies

Students from all programs should review and be familiar with the [MBA Core attendance policy here](#). Students are expected to be present in all class sessions, including the Lab Working sessions (typically the second meeting of the class in a given week). Failure to attend class will negatively impact participation grade.

### METHOD OF EVALUATION

Your overall grade will be based primarily on the team based company project assignments and individual participation, according to the percentages noted below. I may decide to include one or two individual assignments, and if so, will adjust the weighting of the Company Problem to be Solved Team Project downward:

Individual Participation, including <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>In class participation (recorded by course assistant)</li> <li>Individual team project contribution (via peer evaluation)</li> </ul>	<b>20%</b> 10% 10%
Individual Assignments ( <i>There will be several short assignments that consist of a few questions that tie a current event to class learning objectives. Each topic to be determined based on current events.</i> )	<b>20%</b>
Team Project: Company Problem to be Solved <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Market Requirements Doc</li> <li>Prototype</li> <li>Product Requirements Doc</li> <li>Final Presentation to Member Company</li> </ul>	<b>60%</b> 20% 5% 20% 15%

Letter grades for the course will be assigned in accordance with Columbia Business School's recommended grade distribution for elective courses. There will be several "deliverables" to be turned in at various points in the course, but the class discussions and activities in the course and in discussion forums are very important aspects of the course and the learning experience. Thus, grades will be based both on assignments that are turned in and on your performance in the classroom and off-site discussions. I will try to get feedback to you regarding your write ups as quickly as possible, so it is important that these deliverables be submitted on time. Late submissions will impact grades.

Given each student team will be working on different company sponsored projects, there are no 'right answers' for the purpose of grading. Accordingly, we will assign grades to the individual components of the Team Project as follows:

H (95)

- Shows clear mastery of the course material, exhibits depth of thought beyond the basics.
- Work is outstanding, exceeding the majority of the class in quality.

HP (85)

- Shows a solid understanding of the course material, and applies the principles in an appropriate way.
- May have areas that could be elaborated on and/or incorrect or inaccurate thoughts or assumptions driven by an evolving mastery by the student of the course material.

P (75)

- Bare minimum requirements of assignment are completed or work is not complete or fails to follow the guidelines.
- Student(s) may have shown less than the required effort or skill expected.

Grades in between these levels (e.g. 100, 92, 87, etc.), or lower, may be given at the discretion of the professor.

### **COURSE ROADMAP/SCHEDULE**

Given the expectation that the core Product Management frameworks have been previously learned, this course will be primarily focused on working on the Company "Problem to be Solved." Expect greater than 50% of your in-class time to be dedicated to working on the project with the support of the professor and TA.

Although teams will have the opportunity to make progress on their final course projects during class time, the expectation is that there will be substantial work outside of class required to satisfactorily complete the sponsor company project, and you should plan accordingly.

The remaining less than 50% of the course will be a mix of lecture (a refresh of the core PM frameworks to be applied to the project), discussion and guest speakers. Throughout the course, students are expected to come to class prepared. This typically implies achieving a good understanding of the material covered in previous classes as well as of any assigned readings.

The course schedule will *roughly* follow the timeline below:

### **Pre-Class Assignment**

- Read the participating Company briefs and rank your preferences in a sponsor company preference survey. This survey will be used to create teams and assign teams to companies and we will do our best to align students with their preferred companies.

### **Week 1: Course Introduction**

- Overview of course objectives, assignments, and trajectory of the class
- Finding Fit - Understanding Customers, Company and Market Context
- Lab Work:
  - Course project assignments & company kick-off meetings
  - Understand company objectives (mission, vision, strategy)

### **Week 2-4: Customer Discovery**

- Central to delivering value to the sponsor company will be ensuring that your final product recommendation solves a clear user problem. You will identify the Jobs-to-be-Done for the company's users via qualitative & quantitative research.
- Lab Work:
  - Craft surveys and/or interviews for seeking customer input
  - Complete customer research, synthesize insights

### **Week 5-6: Developing Opportunity Thesis & Generating Ideas**

- Ideas can come from many places. You will employ methods for ideation & prioritization to identify several workable solutions for consideration.
- Lab Work
  - Diverge: Identify many ideas via a well-run brainstorming session.
  - Converge: Narrow the possible solutions by applying a relevant prioritization framework to the
  - Submit final Market Requirements Doc (MRD)

### **Week 7-8: Building prototypes & MVPs**

- Once you've agreed to a product/feature idea as a team, it is important to seek feedback on your idea before moving on to the build phase of the effort.
- Lab Work
  - Determine MVP feature requirements
  - Build a high-fidelity prototype and seek feedback from users
  - Submit Prototype and insights from customer input

**Week 9: Identifying Technology Requirements**

- Building prototypes for testing without building products
- Lab Work
  - Document the user journey at a more granular level
  - Identify key system requirements that engineering teams would likely have to address
  - Document data and systems architecture

**Week 10-11: Develop business requirements and go-to-market plan**

- Determine how you would recommend the company acquire active users of the new product or feature that you are recommending, including business model considerations, sales & marketing plans, among other considerations.
- Lab Work
  - Determine the product's commercialization needs and what cross-functional team engagement is required.
  - Define success criteria and agree on the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).
  - Submit final Product Requirements Doc (PRD)

**Week 11-12: Prepare for final presentations with company executives**

- You will do a dry-run presentation to get feedback from the prof and TA.
- Lab Work
  - Finalize presentation

**Week 13: Final presentation to sponsor company executives**