

PRODUCT MANAGEMENT (Full-Term) Spring 2024 Syllabus

INSTRUCTOR

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COURSE DESCRIPTION

Product management is a fast growing field born out of the need for a single person or small team of people within an organization to own the entirety of the end-to-end product development cycle while also understanding and reconciling product decisions with business needs. This course focuses specifically on digital product management and is intended as a primer for those interested in a product management career or those with a general interest in how software products are made. Those who want to play at the intersection of technology, business, and management are often well-suited for product management, a role that is often referred to as “CEO of the product” but is without direct control of most of the resources required to build and launch a successful product. Product managers must be proficient in a broad range of capabilities, and must lead through influence, not authority.

This course is aimed at those without a strong technical background who want to develop the knowledge and skills to get a leg up when joining a technology company or build a product of their own. Students will get a strong understanding of what it means to be a product manager and its role within an organization. For students who decide to put the skills learned from this class into practice, CBS offers a Digital Product Management Lab, a team-based experiential class that partners with member companies to address “problems to be solved” that require fresh product development thinking. For those students that pursue other careers, many of the concepts and approaches covered in this class will help students in whatever path they choose, as every business in every industry is now at least in part a software business.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1. **Understanding and Owning “Product”:** Product is something that transcends any given iteration and is more akin to a brand: it is a living, changing thing that evolves over time. We will explore how products are different from brands and also different from features, learn how they are created and maintained, and about how the product manager is the keeper of a product’s identity.
2. **Digital Product Lifecycle:** The product manager manages the process of creating a digital product from front to end, and as any product manager will tell you: there is no end. You will learn how digital products get built from conception to launch (and beyond) and the role of the product manager at each stage of the digital product lifecycle. You will learn frameworks and strategies to understand proven approaches to spotting product opportunities, building and launching successful products, managing a product portfolio and managing the product life cycle.
3. **Product Management Fundamentals:** You will learn the essentials of product management and actionable ways to drive not only a product, but a product team. We will also explore how the PM role functions within a larger organization, how the role differs from company to company, and what sorts of pertinent experience one needs in order to be hired as a product manager. You will learn strategies, frameworks, and tactics for managing cross-functional teams and leading through influence, not authority.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS & GRADING

Your grade for this course will be based on the following:

- 50% Final Group Project (written and presentation)
- 25% Individual Assignments
- 25% Individual class participation (*Coming to class, being attentive, and actively participating are expected. Asking questions, challenging assumptions, and inspiring others are all part of the process. An active classroom will simulate what it is like to work on a product team.*)

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS

Throughout the sessions, various case studies, articles, videos, podcasts, and other materials will be assigned as required content to discuss in class.

INCLUSION, ACCOMMODATIONS, AND SUPPORT FOR STUDENTS

At Columbia Business School, we believe that diversity strengthens any community or business model and brings it greater success. Columbia Business School is committed to providing all students with the 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 seeking accommodation in the classroom may obtain information on the services offered by Columbia University's Office of Disability Services online at www.health.columbia.edu/docs/services/ods/index.html or by contacting (212) 854-2388.

COURSE CONTENT SUMMARY

- **Introduction & Defining Product Management:** *Setting the stage for the course.*
 - Course Administration
 - What is a Product?
 - What is a Product Manager?
- **Managing the Product:** *It's critical for PMs not to lose sight of their north star: building products that solve a clear user problem and their willingness to pay.*
 - Digital Product Lifecycle & the product manager's role throughout
 - Product Strategy
 - Product Discovery
 - Designing & Building Products (UX, Engineering, and more)
 - Designing "Ethical" Products
 - Product Go-To-Market
- **Managing the Process:** *How does a PM actually get the job done? What tools does she need to understand and work with every day? In this segment we will explore some common processes for managing the product development throughout the cycle and some of tools of the trade to make it easier.*
 - Process management. What is "agile" and why is that better than (or similar to) the "waterfall" process
 - Documentation: Requirement documents; MRDs, PRDs, Roadmaps, Prototyping (and tools to help)
 - Measuring success: How to define key metrics or OKRs to track along each stage of the user journey
- **Managing Stakeholders:** *More than just about any other role, the PM works across the entire organization, fielding multiple inputs and driving the firm forward. An examination of some of the critical connections and how to navigate them effectively.*

- Characteristics of a great PM as an individual contributor - Managing a 'product'
 - Characteristics of a great PM Leader - Managing a 'product team'
 - Leading through Influence, not authority
 - Communicating with stakeholders
 - Working with leadership
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- **Getting a Product Management Job:** *How to approach the application process and how to present yourself as an attractive candidate as well as key questions to ask.*

 - **Team Projects:** *Core to the class will be a team project that will allow students to evaluate and analyze an existing product through the lens of a product manager.*