**BRIDGING THE AMERICAN DIVIDES (B8585)**

**COURSE SYLLABUS**

FALL A & B TERM, Sept 11 – Nov 13, 2023

Mondays 2:20-5:35 pm

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**PURPOSE**

**Bridging the American Divides** is a fall semester elective designed for Columbia Business School students to gain a better understanding of the causes and consequences of the American divides — and how to address those divides as business leaders. A primary focus will be on the linkages between business decisions and practices, and these divides. The course also examines how each of us plays a personal role in directly or indirectly enabling and fueling the divides.

A wide variety of business issues and social impacts will be discussed, likely to include globalization, immigration, job loss, and divides including race, income, geography, education, media, and politics. The course will be held in-person and relies heavily on student participation in discussions. Students should only take the course if they can actively engage in all the assignments and class discussions. It is not a course for “observers.”

Class sessions will be followed by a four-day visit to Youngstown, Ohio, where students will engage in a variety of learning activities. During the trip, students will have the opportunity to engage with local individuals working in business, community, government, religious, and nonprofit organizations. You should be comfortable meeting and speaking with individuals in a context that is very different from Columbia Business School, and you will be expected to engage in the course and on the trip in an open and thoughtful manner.

**COURSE TOPICS**

Class #1 (9/11) – Intro to the course; Identification of the American Divides; Challenges and Opportunities for Business School Curriculum; Student Introductions

Class #2 (9/18) – Causes of the Divides; Managing the Culture Wars and Divides in the Workplace; Learning to Have Difficult Conversations

NO Class on 9/25

Class #3 (10/2) – Globalization, Workforce Protections, and Unionization

Class #4 (10/9) – Immigration, Business and Community; Racial Equity and DEI in the Workplace

BREAK – Week of 10/16

Class #5 (10/23) – Media Divides; Automation and AI

Class #6 (10/30) – Book “reports” on Divides with Student Led Discussions; Preparation for Youngstown Trip

Classes #7-11 (11/3-11/7) – Youngstown, Ohio Trip

Class #12 (11/13) – Lessons Learned from Youngstown; Course Wrap Up

**REQUIREMENTS**

Students are expected to be prepared for and participate thoughtfully in all aspects of the course, including the class sessions, project work, on YellowDig, and during the trip to Youngstown, Ohio. **Attendance is required for each class – missed classes are heavily frowned upon and participation points will be deducted accordingly (an additional assignment may also be required)**. If there are extenuating and excusing circumstances, this must be shared in writing prior to class with your Professor and TA.

**COURSE SCHEDULE:**

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| **Class 1** | **Sept 11, 2022** | | **Introduction to the Course;**  **Identification of the American Divides; Curriculum Biases; Student Intros** |
| **Topics:** Objectives, Norms and Expectations for the course; Syllabus Structure and Course Plan; General introduction to the nature of the American Divides; The American Dream ideology and reality; Role and responsibility of the “New” Business Leader  **We Need To Talk….From Different Standpoints Readings:**   1. “Leaders Can’t Shy Away from Sensitive Topics,” Bill Boulding, HBR, March 13, 2018 2. “Business Class: Inside the Strange Uniform Politics of MBA Programs and What it Says about America’s Elite,” John Benjamin, New Republic, May 14, 2018 3. “Clarence Thomas and Campus Cancel Culture,” Jonathan Turley, NY Post, July 6, 2022.   **The Divides and Our Responsibility Readings:**   1. “The Birth of a New Aristocracy,” Matthew Stewart, Atlantic Magazine, June 2018 *(long article, but rich in material)* 2. “Are You Willing to Give Up Your Privilege?” Darren Walker, NY Times, June 25, 2020 3. “What If We Are the Bad Guys Here?,” David Brooks, NY Times, Aug. 4, 2023 (And see Smerconish show, Aug 5, 2023, on same topic, https://www.cnn.com/videos/us/2023/08/12/smr-meritocracy-trap.cnn)   **Study Questions**:  1. What are the key messages of these articles for you? Most agree? Disagree?  2. What, for you, are the most significant American Divides?  3. How well do the observations in the John Benjamin article connect with your CBS experience? What are the implications for us in the BTAD course?  4. How are you, as a CBS MBA student, connected to the Divides? Come prepared to introduce yourself to other students – why are you taking the course, and what is your personal connection to the Divides? | | | |
| **Class 2** | **Sept 18, 2022** | | **Causes of the Divides; Managing the Culture Wars and Divides in the Workplace;**  **Learning to Have Difficult Conversations** |
| **Topics:** Understanding why we are so divided.Pros and cons of corporations taking political stands. What to do if employees want companies to address divisive issues? How to manage divides and difficult conversations in the workplace?  **Corporate and Employee Activism Readings:**   1. “Deciding When to Engage on Societal Issues,” Joly and Migal, HBS Note, September, 2022. 2. “Companies Rethink Embrace of Social Issues,” Cutter and Weber, WSJ, June 7, 2023. 3. “BlackRock CEO Larry Fink, who faced intense backlash for championing ESG, says he’s ‘ashamed’ the topic has become politicized”, Prarthana Prakash, Fortune, June 26, 2023. 4. “Shopify CEO Email to Managers: We are Not a Family” Madeline Stone, Business Insider, May 11, 2021 5. “Don’t Ban Politics at Work” Megan Reitz and John Higgins, HBR, July 7, 2021.   **Managing and Reducing Polarization Readings:**   1. “How Business Leaders Can Reduce Polarization,” Quinlan, Lefevre and Kail, HBR, Oct 8, 2021. 2. “How To Respectfully Discuss Contentious Issues at Work,” Joseph Grenny, HBR, Feb 22, 2022. 3. (skim) “This is the Music America Needs,” Farah Stockman, NY Times, Aug 5, 2023 and (skim) Braverangels.org website   **Study Questions**:   1. How do the readings shed light on better understanding polarization? 2. Do you support Shopify’s philosophy about keeping politics out of the workplace? Why or why not? 3. What are the forces increasing or decreasing employee and corporate activism today and what are the cautions in your mind? On what social and political issues do you believe companies should and should not opine? How should companies address customer preferences on key social and political issues? 4. What should we heed from the articles about managing discussions in the workplace on American divides such as politics?   **Guest:**  Caroline Mehl, Co-Founder & Executive Director, Constructive Dialogue Institute | | | |
| **Class 3** | **Oct 2, 2022** | | **Globalization, Workforce Protections, Unionization** |
| **Topics:** Effects of competition from abroad, the outsourcing of employment, and the impacts on American workers. “Solutions” will be evaluated to mitigate some of the impacts including unionization and workforce protections.  **Globalization Readings:**   1. “The Globalization of Our Discontent,” Joe Stiglitz, CBS Ideas, Dec 5 2017 2. “Globalisation is not dying, it’s changing,” Martin Wolf, Financial Times, Sept 14, 2022 3. “Why It Seems Everything We Knew About the Global Economy Is No Longer True,” Patricia Cohen, NYTimes, June 18, 2023   **Globalization Study Questions**:   1. Why do most businesses support globalization? 2. Why did growth in international trade increase discontent in America? 3. Will growth in international trade in services lead to further discontent in America?   **Workforce and Unionization** **Readings:**   1. NY Times Video Documentary, “Inside a Steel Plant Facing Layoffs,” 2018 *(in library course reserves and online) (14 minutes)* 2. [“I was Skeptical of Unions. Then I joined One.”  German Lopez. Vox. Aug. 19, 2019.](https://www.vox.com/policy-and-politics/2019/8/19/20727283/unions-good-income-inequality-wealth) 3. “Are Unions Making a Comeback?” NY Times Daily Podcast, May 2, 2022.   **Workforce and Unionization Study Questions:**  1. In the NYT video doc, steelworkers were incented to “train their replacements” from the Mexican factory:  a) Why did Mark and John each react the way they did?,  b) How would you have reacted if you were in their shoes?,  c) How would you view “globalization” from their standpoint?  2. What are your views about the role of Unions to help protect workers? If you are supportive, be prepared to explain. If you are negative, what are alternatives to protect worker rights, job security, benefits, etc.? | | | |
| **Class 4** | **Oct 9, 2022** | | **Immigration, Business and Community;**  **Racial Equity and DEI in the Workplace** |
| **Topics**: a) Effects of immigration; winners and losers from changes in the American labor pool, and reaction from communities; b) What, as business leaders, can we do to address racial inequities in the workplace, and beyond? How much progress have DEI initiatives made? When do they flourish vs. flounder?  **Immigration Readings:**   1. “The Elites Feed Anti-Immigration Bias” WSJ, July 11, 2018 2. “Schools Scramble to Handle Thousands of New Migrant Families,” NY Times, July 9, 2019 3. “In My Town, We Need Immigrants,” NY Times, July 9, 2019 4. “Illegal immigration hurts the poor — even if Dems deny it”, NY Post, May 9, 2023   **Immigration Study Questions**:   1. In what ways does business benefit from immigration? 2. Which Americans are most likely to benefit from immigration? Which are most likely to be hurt by immigration?   **Racial Equity Readings:**   1. “Is Being ‘Woke’ Good or Bad for Business?” SHRM, April 24, 2023 2. “Woke Washing Your Company Won’t Cut It,” Erin Dowell and Marlette Jackson, HBR, July 27, 2020 3. “The Failure of the DEI Industrial Complex,” Zheng, HBR, December 2022. 4. “How Racist is America?,” David Brooks, NY Times, July 23, 2021. 5. “What SCOTUS’ Affirmative Action Decision Means for Corporate DEI,” Kenji Yoshino and David Glasgow, HBR, July 12, 2023   **Racial Equity Study Questions**:   1. What takeaways do you have from the readings? 2. What are your biggest concerns about making forward progress on the racial divide and its impact on and in the workplace? 3. What’s needed to move things forward on effective corporate responses to racial divides and inequities?   **Guest:**  Jeanetta Darno, VP & Chief Diversity, Equity and Inclusion Officer, UC Health | | | |
| **Class 5** | **Oct 23, 2022** | | **Media Divides;**  **Automation and AI** |
| **Topics:** How has social media enabled or mitigated the divides?; In what ways might automation or AI improve or worsen divides in the future?  **Media Divides**   1. “Is America’s Media Divide Destroying Democracy?” Richard Drew, CS Monitor, April 16, 2019 2. “Study: CNN, MSNBC Took Sharp Left Turns During Trump Presidency,” Erik Wemple, Washington Post, Aug 3, 2022 3. “In News Industry, A Stark Divide Between Haves and Have Nots,” Keach Hagey, Lukas Alpert, and Yaryna Serkez, WSJ, May 4-5, 2019 4. “How Harmful is Social Media?” Gideon Lewi-Kraus, New Yorker, June 3, 2022 5. Review one or more of the following websites: All Sides, GroundNews, Flipside, etc   **Guest:** TBD  **Automation and AI**   1. “Generative AI could raise global GDP by 7%”, Goldman Sachs, April 5, 2023. 2. “Goldman Sachs Predicts 300 Million Jobs Will Be Lost Or Degraded By Artificial Intelligence,” Jack Kelly, Forbes, March 31, 2023.   **Study Questions:**   1. What is the role of social media in causing and furthering the American divides? What should be done to mitigate such effects? 2. Will automation and AI widen the American divides? | | | |
|  | **Oct 30, 2022** | | **Going deeper on the Divides;**  **Preparing for Our Youngstown Trip** |
| **Topics:** Book Reports – students will both teach and learn from each other based on the book they have chosen to read to learn more about “bridging” the divides; We will prepare for the Youngstown trip with an orientation to the city and region.  **Book “Reports”**:  Students will select one of the following books to read and share takeaways with classmates:   * I Never Thought of It That Way; How to Have Fearlessly Curious Conversations in Dangerously Divided Times, Monica Guzman, 2022 * American Made: What Happens to People When Work Disappears, Farah Stockman, 2021 * Woke Racism: How a New Religion Has Betrayed Black America, John McWhorter, 2021 * After the Ivory Tower Falls: How College Broke the American Dream and Blew Up Our Politics – and How to Fix It, Will Bunch, 2022 * The Tyranny of Merit, Michael Sandel, 2021 * Breaking the Social Media Prism: How to Make Our Platforms Less Polarizing, Chris Ball, 2021   Choose one of the above books to read and prepare a summary as follows in one powerpoint slide to share with the class:   1. What are the three major takeaways from the book? 2. How did the book personally change your understanding of the Divides and how to bridge them? 3. What questions does the book raise for us in the BTAD course?   **Youngstown Readings:**   1. “The Decline of Ohio and the Rise of JD Vance,”C. Caldwell, NY Times, April 29, 2022. 2. [skim] “When My Newspaper Died,” Graig Grasiosi, Columbia Journalism Review, Nov 25, 2019. 3. Film Doc: “The Place That Makes Us” (Y-town) (link info to follow) | | | |
| **Classes 7-11** | **Nov 3-7, 2022** | | **Trip to Youngstown, Ohio** |
| Schedule TBD. | | | |
| **Class 12** | **Nov 13, 2022** | **Debrief of Youngstown Trip; Next Generation Leadership: Our Role and Responsibility Going Forward; Wrap Up of the Course** | |
| **Topics:** What do you see as your own role and your own responsibility as a future business leader regarding the Divides and the path forward? What are the potential avenues for individuals, communities, and American society/politics to help “bridge the divides”?  **Readings:**   1. “How Business Can Build and Maintain Trust” Tim Ryan, HBR, Feb 7, 2022 2. “Five Ways to Exemplify Responsible Leadership,” Rana Kaliouby, Inc., Aug 21, 2020 3. “Build Your Reputation as a Trustworthy Leader,” Ron Carucci, HBR, June 11, 2021. 4. “How to Create a Stakeholder Strategy”, Rigby et al, HBR, May-June, 2023   **Study Questions:**   1. What is our role and responsibility as next generation business leaders in “bridging the American divides”? 2. What are some specific organizations and approaches which appeal to you as ways to bridge the divides? 3. In what ways are you hopeful for the future? Less hopeful? 4. What insights overall have you gained about the “Divides” in America? | | | |
| **Final Paper (50%)** | **Due Nov 13, 2022** | |  |
| Based on the course, the trip, and any additional readings if appropriate, your Final Paper will address key lessons and implications for Bridging divides.  Come to the final class on November 13th prepared to showcase the divide you selected for your Final Paper, and proposed solution. Summarize your main points on a one-page slide. | | | |

**GRADING:**

Contribution to the learning process and the Final Paper will be weighted equally in determining the final grade.

1. **Class and Participation** (50%): Includes engagement and contributions made in class discussions, with course guests, and during the trip to Youngstown. We will also use “YellowDig” (described below), an interactive online platform allowing us to continue to discuss and deepen our knowledge between classes.
2. **Final Paper** (50%):

Based on the course and any additional readings and research as appropriate:

* Identify a divide covered in the course, or one not covered subject to approval from the Professors;
* Briefly summarize the main causes and consequences;
* Explore solutions to the selected divide with specific reference to organizations, policies, business decisions, etc. which serve to “bridge” that divide;
* Evaluate the bridging approach which seems most effective and what it takes to successfully implement it;
* Explain the role that business can play in your selected bridging approach;
* If relevant, what insight from the Youngstown trip enhanced your understanding of the Divide and/or how to bridge the Divide. Alternatively, select a specific example of a US city, or region, or population in which the divide you selected, and your bridging approach, is relevant.

Your paper should be no more than 1500 words, plus references/appendices. Due by November 13th at noon. Submit to Prof Jick or Prof Usher, based on your “assigned” section no later than Monday, November 13th at noon.

Come to the final class on November 13th prepared to showcase your selected divide and proposed solution. Summarize your main points on a one-page slide.

**Generative AI Policy**

Students in this course may use Generative AI tools, such as ChatGPT, but must include a citation describing any usage. Using these tools to generate responses to assignments violates CBS’s Honor Code, and the professors will report suspected instances of plagiarism. Please contact the professors if you have any questions about this policy.

**YellowDig Engage Guide**

**WHAT IS YELLOWDIG?**

YellowDig is a blog-like platform that allows you to create discussion threads through posts and give/receive comments on posts.

**WHAT IS THE PURPOSE OF YELLOWDIG?**

YellowDig offers an additional way for you to engage with the substantial amount of course material we will cover. YellowDig gives you space to apply frameworks from this class to identify when change is done well and when it can be improved.

Moreover, giving/receiving comments on YellowDig is another way to get to know your classmates.

**WHAT IS AN EXAMPLE OF A “GOOD” YELLOWDIG CONTRIBUTION?**

A good YellowDig **post** amplifies, enhances, and/or synthesizes the material from the course, readings, and discussion such as:

* Continuing class discussion asynchronously with further opinions, information or perspectives
* Sharing a personal experiences
* Sharing a conceptual model or framework from an article which you think would be useful to your classmates
* Media recommendations relevant to the material (includes book, article, podcast, video)
* Questions or issues you would like to hear opinions from classmates (or do a Poll)
* Updates of relevant topical examples

A good YellowDig **comment** is:

* Additive to the post (via experiences or observations)
* Reactions (agreement/disagreement)
* Brings another layer of depth and perspective to the conversation

**YELLOWDIG BEST PRACTICES**

Please also tag/label each post according to the topic you are discussing so all of us can “search” and code the materials.

Also, be careful when linking to sites or articles that require logins! Make sure to make use of the “Preview” feature to ensure YellowDig can display your post effectively. Articles from websites like the New York Times, Wall Street Journal, the Financial Times, etc., will require logins – submitting these traditionally may create a barrier for your classmates. **Instead, you should make a PDF of the article you wish to share, which you can attach to your post.**

**HOW IS PARTICIPATION TRACKED?**

Activity on YellowDig bolsters your participation grade, but does NOT replace in-class participation. **We expect that you will post/comment enough to reach 600 YellowDig points by the end of the course.** This is the minimum goal, but the sky is the limit for value adding posts and comments.

**Points are tracked in YellowDig and are achieved in the following ways:**

**Each post (“pin”) is worth 50 points (40 word minimum)**

**Each comment on another’s post is worth 30 points (20 word minimum)**

**Each comment received on your post earns you 20 points**

**Each “reaction” to your post from fellow students earns 10 points**

You should **regularly be contributing** to the class “inventory” of ideas, comments, updates, analysis, news items, etc. which will give us an asynchronous deepening of class materials. We suggest roughly targetting100 points per week to keep you on a consistent cadence. DO NOT WAIT UNTIL THE END OF THE COURSE TO CONTRIBUTE AS THE PURPOSE IS TO STIMULATE CONVERSATIONS AND ENHANCING THE COURSE MATERIAL AS WE GO ALONG!