

Course Syllabus: MBA Program | MBA 412 - Contemporary Business Perspectives and Leadership Skills  
Course Duration – January 13, 2026 through April 28, 2026  
Time and Location – Tuesdays, 6:00 pm – 7:30 pm, SFHB 133  
Tuesdays, 7:45 pm – 9:15 pm, SFHB 147

Instructor – Dr. Reid Butler ([jrbut14@ilstu.edu](mailto:jrbut14@ilstu.edu))

Office – SFHB 104, 309.438.7722, Hours: Thursdays, 4:30 pm – 5:30 pm or by appointment / Zoom

Required Materials –

Collins, Jim (2001). *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap...and Others Don't* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.). New York, NY: HarperCollins. (ISBN: 9780062119209)

Recommended Reading –

Bowell, Tracy, Cowan, Robert, & Kemp, Gary (2019). *Critical Thinking: A Concise Guide* (5<sup>th</sup> Ed.). London, England: Routledge. (ISBN: 0815371438)

Kofman, Fred (2006). *Conscious Business: How to Build Value Through Values* (1<sup>st</sup> Ed.). Boulder, CO: Sounds Tree. (ISBN: 9781591798712)

Patterson, Kerry, Grenny, Joseph, McMillan, Ron, and Switzler, Al (2002). *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High* (3<sup>rd</sup> Ed.). New York, NY: McGraw-Hill. (ISBN: 1260474186)

### Description

This course addresses contemporary business issues in ways that attempt to prepare students for a future of rapid change and increasing complexity. Throughout the semester we will engage in critical thinking – that is, the process of evaluating and improving our own and others' thinking – in areas relating to leadership, ethics, organizational change, teamwork, and other prominent issues in organizations. Involvement in this process is the foundation for continuous individual and organizational learning.

This course is designed differently from most others you have been exposed to, in that you will be asked to think critically about leadership throughout the semester. While some courses at the undergraduate, and many at the graduate, level involve some measure of critical thinking, this course is concerned with more fully developing potential capacities that all students must think critically.

Becoming a critical thinker involves practicing leadership skills that enable you to accurately assess strengths and weaknesses in thinking. To think critically is to think consciously, deliberately, and skillfully. It is to develop a mind that is analogous to the body of a person that is physically fit. The “mortal sins” of the class are: thinking in a vague, obscure, nebulous, blurred, confused, intangible, indefinite, imprecise, fuzzy, foggy, or indeterminate manner; submitting sloppy work for me to evaluate; and failing to turn in assignments.

The class will focus on practice as well as lectures / discussion. It will emphasize disciplined intellectual skills, not memorizing what is in a textbook. On a typical class day, you may encounter lecture as well as discussion, group, and/or individual work calling for “disciplined” thinking. For some classes, you will have in-class written assignments that involve “disciplined” thinking. You will have out-of-class assignments, as well.

You will have multiple opportunities to demonstrate what you learn in this course. Your final grade will be determined by your performance on work encompassing:

- assignments written individually; and
- assignments written in group settings.

In addition, classroom participation and/or peer evaluations will be used to determine your final grade if your grade is on the borderline. Your participation in this class comes with our expectation that your work will be in full observance of the codes of student conduct governing Illinois State University. Academic dishonesty in any form is unacceptable because any breach in academic integrity, however small, strikes destructively at the University's life and work. (See Governance below)

## Learning Objectives

Student Learning Outcomes describe what you will learn and be able to take away from this course to your future classes and career. Each lecture and each assignment will align to these Objectives:

- Recognize what critical thinking can do for you
- Apply critical thinking to being an effective leader
- Use critical thinking to lead organizational change
- Understand the difference between being a manager and being a leader
- Effectively have difficult discussions with others or yourself
- How to properly incentivize employees appropriately
- Build a great organization through effective leadership
- Realizing leadership is not about control of the team
- Recognize when to say “No” as an effective leader

## Grading Explained

Students will complete six assignments: three individual and three group assignments (to be distributed on the first day of class). The assignments are worth 100 points each and the group presentation is worth 50 points. However, the final grade is not based solely on a simple point total; the instructor reserves the right to adjust final course grades according to his understanding of how well students have performed over the course of the class. Further, the class will not be graded on a curve reflecting a pre-determined number or proportion of A, B, etc. grades. In this sense, you will not be competing against each other. In fact, given the structure of the class, there will be incentive to help each other improve. In general, your grade on group work will be identical to that for other members of your group.

In assigning grades to your work, I will examine the strengths and weaknesses of your work and match your work against the criteria described below. You should read and re-read these criteria throughout the semester to ensure that you are clear about what you are striving to achieve. Overall, your focus should be on improving your performance by increasing your strengths and diminishing your weaknesses. Outlined below are standards for A, B, C, D, and F level performance.

### The “A” Performance Level

**A-level work demonstrates real achievement in grasping what critical thinking is, along with the clear development of a range of thinking skills and abilities.** The work is, overall, not only clear, precise, and well-reasoned, but insightful as well. Basic terms and distinctions are learned at a level that implies insight into concepts and principles. The A-level student has internalized the basic intellectual standards appropriate to the assessment of his/her own work related to contemporary business issues and demonstrates insight in self-evaluation. A-level work displays excellent reasoning and problem-solving related to contemporary issues, and is consistently at an elevated level of intellectual excellence.

### The “B” Performance Level

**B-level work represents demonstrable achievement in grasping what critical thinking is, along with a clear demonstration of a range of thinking skills and abilities.** The work is, overall, clear, precise, and well-reasoned, but does not always have depth of insight. Basic terms and distinctions are learned at a level that implies comprehension of concepts and principles. The B-level student has internalized several of the basic intellectual standards appropriate to the assessment of his/her own work related to contemporary business issues and demonstrates competence in self-evaluation. B-level work displays sound reasoning and problem-solving related to contemporary issues and is consistently at a competent level of intellectual performance.

### The “C” Performance Level

**C-level work illustrates some, but inconsistent, achievement in grasping what critical thinking is, along with the development of modest thinking skills or abilities.** The work is inconsistently clear, precise, and well-reasoned; moreover, it does not display depth of insight or even consistent competence. Basic terms and distinctions are learned at a level that implies inconsistent comprehension of concepts and principles. The C-level student has internalized a few of the basic intellectual standards appropriate to the assessment of his/her

own work related to contemporary business issues, but demonstrates inconsistency in self-evaluation. C-level work displays inconsistent reasoning and problem solving related to contemporary business issues and is, at best, at a competent level of intellectual performance.

#### The “D” Performance Level

**D-level work shows only a minimal level of understanding of what critical thinking is, along with development of some, but extraordinarily little, thinking skills or abilities.** The work represents thinking that is typically unclear, imprecise, and poorly reasoned. The student is achieving competence only on the lowest order of performance. Basic terms and distinctions are often incorrectly used and reflect a superficial or mistaken comprehension of concepts and principles. The D-level student has not internalized the basic intellectual standards appropriate to the assessment of his/her own work related to contemporary business issues and does poorly in self-evaluation. The D-level student is insensitive to important implications and consequences. D-level work displays poor reasoning and problem-solving related to contemporary issues, and is, at best, at a low level of intellectual performance.

#### The “F” Performance Level

**F-level work fails to display critical thinking skills and abilities that are at the heart of this course.** The work represents thinking that is regularly unclear, imprecise, and poorly reasoned. The student is not achieving competence in his/her academic work. Basic terms and distinctions are frequently used incorrectly, and reflect a mistaken comprehension of concepts and principles. The F-level student has not internalized the basic intellectual standards appropriate to the assessment of his/her own work related to contemporary business issues, and does not critically evaluate his/her own work. The F-level student is oblivious to important implications and consequences. F-level work displays incompetent reasoning and problem-solving related to contemporary issues and consistently poor intellectual performance.

### Governance

**Professional Standards:** All students in this course are expected to be familiar with the “College of Business Standards of Professional Behavior and Ethical Conduct” (<https://business.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/about/Standards%20of%20Professional%20Behavior.pdf>). Please note that only bottled water may be consumed in the classroom wing of the College of Business Building and that all cell phones and other electronic devices should be turned off and stored away during classes, unless permission is otherwise granted by the instructor. I expect all students to show respect and consideration for the instructor and other students. The ability to show respect and consideration is essential to creating an effective learning environment. If you do not behave professionally in the classroom, your grade will be negatively impacted.

There will not be enough time to cover all the course materials in class, so our meetings will focus on understanding the big picture and applying the concepts to genuine business situations. You should prepare the assignments prior to class so that you are ready to discuss and apply management concepts. Plan to spend 1 to 2 hours working on your own for each classroom hour. If you have trouble understanding the readings, ask questions. I expect class members to participate as equal partners in the class learning experience. As a partner, I welcome your feedback and suggestions about how to improve the learning environment.

All class members are expected to:

- Show respect and consideration for other students, the instructor, and any class visitors,
- Attend Zoom meetings and sign in before class begins,
- Prepare for class by reading all assigned material and preparing assigned homework,
- Participate in class discussions and exercises,
- Treat others as you would wish to be treated,
- Contribute to the learning of other class members,
- Ask questions when you do not understand material, assignments, or anything else.

**Student Code of Conduct:** You are expected to be honest in all academic work, consistent with the academic integrity policy as outlined in the Code of Student Conduct. All work is to be appropriately cited

when it is borrowed, directly or indirectly, from another source. Unauthorized and unacknowledged collaboration on any work, or the presentation of someone else's work, is plagiarism. Students are responsible for adhering to the code of conduct, and ignorance about the Code is not an acceptable excuse for violating it. All violations will be reported to the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution for sanctions and will receive any grade modifications that the instructor sees fit.

(<https://deanofstudents.illinoisstate.edu/downloads/Code%20of%20Student%20Conduct%20Effective%208.27.2025.pdf>)

**Plagiarizing:** This includes all ideas and intellectual property used, for which proper credit is not given, as determined by the instructor. Reproducing verbatim, regardless of credit given, is always prohibited. Submitting a paper of your own which has already been submitted for another university class, without instructor approval. Students shall attach only their names to academic exercises that are the results of their own thought, effort, and study. To that end, all the following are in violation of the code. Using (or even possessing) any means of assistance to complete course activities without instructor authorization. This includes the reproduction or dissemination of course, assignment, and test materials. Examples include but are not limited to posting faculty Power Point slides, using Quizlet, and any other form of cheating in quizzes and examinations. For any case of willfully giving or receiving such information, both parties will be held responsible.

**Writing Assistance:** Written communication is a critical skill for your future career success. Proficient writing skills allow you to communicate with clarity and ease, which is becoming increasingly important in today's frequently virtual work environment. Quality of writing is graded as a part of all written assignments. If you find yourself needing improvement in writing, the Julia N. Visor Academic Center on campus offers such assistance. The center offers one-on-one writing assistance for any course by appointment in the Visor Center. Students can call 438-7100 or visit **their website** to make an appointment.

(<https://universitycollege.illinoisstate.edu/help/tutoring/>)

**Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:** Any student needing to arrange reasonable accommodation for a documented disability and/or medical/mental health condition should contact Student Access and Accommodation Services at 350 Fell Hall, 309.438.5853, or visit the website.

(<https://StudentAccess.IllinoisState.edu/>) The primary responsibility for disclosing disabilities and for requesting adjustments to the learning environment rests with the student. If you require or think you might require disability accommodations for this course, please contact me as soon as possible. I will work with you and Student Access and Accommodation Services on appropriate accommodation, but I cannot do so until you have formally requested an accommodation through Student Access and Accommodation Services. All communication with me regarding disability accommodation will be kept strictly confidential.

**Mental Health Resources:** Life at college can get very complicated. Students sometimes feel overwhelmed, lost, experience anxiety or depression, struggle with relationship difficulties or diminished self-esteem. However, many of these issues can be effectively addressed with a little help. Student Counseling Services (SCS) helps students cope with difficult emotions and life stressors. Student Counseling Services is staffed by experienced, professional psychologists and counselors, who are attuned to the needs of college students. The services are FREE and completely confidential. Find out more at [Counseling.IllinoisState.edu](https://Counseling.IllinoisState.edu) or by calling (309) 438-3655.

**Retention of Student Work:** The instructor reserves the right to retain for pedagogical reasons either the original, or a copy, of any student's test, written assignment, paper, or other submissions by the student/student groups for this class. The students' names will be deleted from any retained items unless arranged otherwise.

Course Schedule:

Date	Description	Discussion items and assignments
01/13/2026	First Day of Class	Introductions and discussions in class subject / direction – Reading materials to be explained and distributed
01/20/2026	Critical Thinking	Individual assignment due (How do you recognize fact from fiction using critical thinking) 100 points
01/27/2026	Critical Thinking	
02/03/2026	Critical Thinking	Group assignment due (TBD) 100 points
02/10/2026	Leadership v. Mgmt.	Reading materials to be explained and distributed
02/17/2026	Leadership v. Mgmt.	
02/24/2026	Leadership v. Mgmt.	Individual assignment due (TBD) 100 points
03/03/2026	Org. Change/Readiness	Reading materials to be explained and distributed
03/10/2026	No Class	Spring Break/Vacation
03/17/2026	Org. Change/Readiness	Group assignment due (TBD) 100 points
03/24/2026	Org. Change/Readiness	Reading materials to be explained and distributed
03/31/2026	Emotional Intelligence	Individual assignment due (TBD) 100 points
04/07/2026	Emotional Intelligence	No reading materials
04/14/2026	Culture / Ethics	No reading materials
04/21/2026	n/a	Final Group assignment due (TBD) 100 points No materials or lecture...just combine the classes and see if they need / want help – in class office hours
04/28/2026	Last Day of Class	Final Group presentations (Keep to 20 minutes) 50 points