

2015

MACC 625-01 Current Topics in Accounting Practice

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PROFESSOR	Christian Mastilak, PhD, CPA (Ohio, inactive)		
	My last name is pronounced "MASS-tuh-lack." Feel free to call me "Dr. M."		
CLASS MEETINGS:	Thursday, 6:00 – 8:30 PM, room 141 SMH		
OFFICE LOCATION	212 Smith Hall	MAIL LOCATION	ML#1211
OFFICE PHONE	513-745-3290	OFFICE FAX	513-745-4383
EMAIL ADDRESS	mastilakc@xavier.edu (note the "c" at the end of my username , but not my actual last name)		
OFFICE HOURS	MW, 10:00 AM – 3:00 PM; Thursday 1:30 – 5:00PM		
EMAIL HOURS	I try to check email daily during the week; however, I rarely do so on Saturdays and almost never on Sundays.		

Mission of the Williams College of Business: *We educate students of business, enabling them to improve organizations and society, consistent with the Jesuit tradition.*

Course objectives: MACC 625 contributes to this mission through the examination of current developments in accounting practice. Students will learn to identify current trends, changes, problems and other events or issues, to understand them in their theoretical and historical context, to understand the development of accounting standards and practices.

The above course objective primarily supports the following Master's of Accountancy Program Learning Outcomes: Students will be able to:

- PLO 1) Prepare and analyze financial statements and financial reports across industries.
 - PLO 2) Develop and analyze information for decision making support, planning, control and assurance.
 - PLO 5) Use relevant professional technology.
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Required course materials

1. *Current Topics in Accounting Practice* (custom textbook, available at the XU bookstore or e-book)
2. Subscription to WSJ.com.
3. Other readings as assigned.

Notes on the textbook and course content: The course content (and the textbook) vary from high-level conceptual topics to relatively detailed calculations. I strongly believe that both levels of understanding are important. I will not lead you through detailed calculations for no good reason. Rather, I believe that "computational rigor" enhances "analytical and conceptual rigor" – going through the detailed computations helps bring to light the conceptual issues involved.

The nature of accounting information is that it is generated and used for a variety of purposes. Much of the course content revolves around the trade-off of costs and benefits that are specific to organizations and contingent upon specific situations. The value of accounting information will depend on the specific users and their circumstances. We must therefore answer many questions with “it depends.” What is done, and what should be done? It often depends. But we must not stop there. We must pursue the thought further: *upon what does it depend?* Some of this course will be devoted to helping you think through how to apply general principles to specific situations, by considering the costs and benefits of various accounting choices, and how to determine the best available cost-benefit tradeoff.

Canvas: Course-related material and information will be distributed through Canvas. I will generally use “Announcements” on Canvas and email to communicate with the class.

If you need help in the course: Please try these things, roughly in this order:

1. *Have you done the recommended reading and practice problems?* They are intended to help you. The practice problems particularly will help you understand where you need help.
2. *Have you talked to me?* It is my job to help you learn – it is what I get paid to do, and I enjoy it. To help me be most effective and to use our time wisely, please have answers to the following questions when you ask me for help:
 - a. With what specific topic are you struggling?
 - b. Which practice problems have you already attempted?
 - c. How far were you able to get on the practice problems?
 - d. How do your solutions compare to the suggested solutions on Canvas? For which parts of which questions do your answers differ?
 - e. Why were you unable to proceed further?
 - f. Which portion of the lecture or book was unclear?
3. *Have you talked to classmates?* Often other students in the class can help you understand the material, and may be either more conveniently available or better able to explain the solution to your struggles.

It is inefficient and often impossible for me to help students who have not attempted to work problems on their own. Saying, “I’m totally lost” doesn’t help me help you, and usually untrue (most students who say that are not totally lost; rather they need specific help in a few areas, most of which can be solved by working practice problems).

Professionalism: Please maintain a professional demeanor in class as you would at work. Please, prepare all written communications, such as emails or answers to assignments, professionally. I reserve the right to reduce grades on any outside-of-class assignment due to poor grammar, punctuation, spelling, or other presentation problems.

Class attendance and preparation: Actively participating in class and completing suggested homework problems on a timely basis are critical to your success. Homework problems for each chapter are noted on the tentative course schedule available on Canvas. Students should attempt all the homework problems assigned for each day prior to class. Completing the problems before class allows you to highlight the topics that need additional attention and to ask clarifying questions during class. You should bring the textbook to class each day.

I hope you will attend class every week. However, I understand that work, family and other parts of your life may cause you to miss class. I try to be reasonable to accommodate these things, while also trying to ensure all students must meet the same requirements for the course. If you anticipate missing more than three class periods during the semester, I recommend that you consider taking this course at another time. In the event that you find it unavoidable and must miss a class, you should make arrangements to

obtain lecture notes and assignment solutions from another member of the class. I will answer specific questions, but I will not repeat entire lectures privately.

If you wish to use a laptop for notes, please sit in the back of the classroom to avoid distracting other students. Please note that if you are constantly checking email or other things other than class, I can usually tell, and it is pretty distracting.

Grades: The course grade will be determined based on a student's performance on the activities listed below. Final course letter grades will be based on the grading scale below. I reserve the right to assign + or - grades at my discretion. These adjustments will generally be made based on students' contributions to the course, via class participation, thorough preparation, etc.

<u>Grade Components</u>		<u>Grade Scale</u>	
Final exam	50%	A (exceptional) =	90%-100%
Weekly updates	25%	B (good) =	80%-below 90%
Other assignments	<u>25%</u>	C (minimal passing) =	75%-below 80%
Total	<u>100%</u>	F (failure) =	Below 75%

Note that the university considers an "A" to represent "exceptional" work. Thus, earning an "A" in this course will require understanding the material deeply, and being able to apply it to situations beyond the basic examples provided in class or in the textbook. All students who demonstrate exceptional work (measured by earning at least 90% of the available points) will receive an "A". However, students should not assume an "A" is the default grade. I intend to use the full grading scale provided by the University, as needed. A grade of Incomplete is not assigned except under extreme circumstances (at my discretion).

Late work: Any work turned in after the deadline without my prior permission will receive *at least* a one-letter-grade deduction.

Exams: The exams will cover the assigned chapters, problems, lectures, cases, as well as assigned extra reading material and class discussion. If material is sufficiently covered in the readings, it may not be covered in class. This material may be on the exams. Generally, though, the material I believe is most important will receive time in class. Students should not expect to do well on exams if they have not read the textbook, worked homework problems on their own and participated in class.

As you prepare for each exam, you should work all suggested practice problems and study the learning objectives, examples, and exercises within the chapters, and self-study problems found at the end of each chapter. **Do not deceive yourself by assuming that memorizing the rules and definitions discussed in class and scanning over the solutions to the homework problems will be sufficient for you to answer questions successfully on an exam. I intentionally write exams so that rote memorization will not be a successful approach, because rote memorization will not help you manage organizations.** You should also try to develop extensions, alterations, or novel combinations of material. What more could be done with a particular setting? What could be changed about the assumptions? How would those changes affect your response to the question? How do topics covered previously affect decisions managers would make? Try to think about how changes would affect computations, behavioral effects on managers involved, and the overall success of the organization.

As the course material is applied and quantitative, the exams will measure students' ability to apply quantitative material. Application, as I use it here, is not merely recitation. Exams will likely require you to apply material in settings or contexts that differ somewhat from those covered in class. This is because in managerial practice, you will be required to do the same. My goal is not to teach you to answer particular homework or exam questions correctly, but to help you develop a framework for thinking

through the issues of measurement and control, and to take that framework with you into managerial practice.

All students are expected to sit for exams at the scheduled time. Students who are absent will receive a score of zero. **Consideration for a makeup exam will be given only to students who notify the professor in advance.** Documentation may be required for any exams rescheduled at the instructor's discretion.

Department of Accountancy policy: No programmable calculators may be used for exams. Students will be provided with a basic four function calculator for taking exams if needed.

Quizzes, if assigned will be completed inside or outside of class. If done outside of class, they are due by the beginning of class on their due date. **These are to be done individually, unless otherwise noted.** They are intended to ensure practice working problems, and feedback, prior to exams. **Students may ask the instructor for help;** however, the instructor may give limited help to ensure the student benefits from doing the work.

Case summaries, if assigned: The case summaries are intended to demonstrate that all students have prepared and thought about a solution to cases. They are primarily for applying the material in class. **Typed case summaries must be turned via Canvas prior to class.** *Case summaries may be done individually or in groups of no more than three (3) students.* All group summaries must clearly indicate the names of all students in the group, both on the summary itself and in the email to me (if applicable). **Case summaries that demonstrate a good-faith effort will receive a score of 90% regardless of whether any particular responses are correct.** Summaries that do not demonstrate a good-faith effort may receive a lower score.

Good faith effort assignments, if assigned: Good faith effort assignments are similar to cases, only smaller. *These may be done individually or in pairs.* Good faith effort assignments will receive full credit as long as they demonstrate the following characteristics: (1) on time, (2) all parts of the assignment are attempted with a good faith effort at correctness, (3) a note of explanation for any parts of the assignment that aren't completed and (4) professional presentation. Note that no particular answers must be correct to receive full credit.

Practice problems: Practice problems listed on the Course Schedule may be the basis for class discussions and exam preparation, but will not be collected for grading. These problems are intended to help in learning to apply the material. They are not necessarily useful for assessing learning, nor are they necessarily sufficient for learning to apply the material in practice beyond your time in the course. Thus, homework problems and exam problems will differ.

Academic honesty: Academic life requires a trust based upon integrity of the written and spoken word. I will not tolerate violations of certain standards of ethical behavior. These violations include all forms of cheating, plagiarism, and unauthorized assistance on any assignments and exams. **All assignments in this class are to be done individually, unless otherwise noted. Anyone who receives or gives unauthorized assistance on any assignment will be guilty of violating this policy.** If you are unsure of how to apply this policy to a particular situation, you should discuss it with me before turning in any assignments or discussing an assignment with anyone else. **The penalty for violations of the academic honesty policy will generally include your receiving an "F" in the course. I may also pursue your expulsion from the Master's of Accountancy Program or the University if I deem it appropriate.** Further, in accord with the University's policy, **I will report all instances of academic honesty violations to the Dean of the Williams College of Business.**

Keep in mind that when I find instances of academic dishonesty, I am forced to respond. The responses are never pleasant, and may linger throughout the semester or beyond. It is a waste of my time to have to prosecute these incidents, and I am unlikely to be in a good mood when I do so. Given the penalty for cheating, and the fact that I take this seriously, you are generally better off not turning in an assignment than cheating on it. Not turning in an assignment results in a zero. Cheating is substantially worse than not turning in an assignment. **Your best course of action if you're having difficulty with an assignment – even if it's at the last minute – is to contact me and ask for help. I would much rather grant an extension, or help you with the requirements of an assignment, than have you turn in someone else's work as your own.** So, even if it's shortly before an assignment is due, or it's the middle of the night, send me an email and we can talk about it. Of course, you'd be better off contacting me sooner – but **cheating is always the worst possible action to take.**

Learning disabilities: If you have a documented learning disability, please disclose this information to your professor during the first week of class. If you think you may have a disability, but are not sure, you should contact the Learning Assistance Center during the first week of classes to schedule testing. After obtaining documentation of a learning disability, please disclose this information to your professor as soon as you can.

Miscellaneous items: All dates and assignments in the Course Schedule are subject to change at the sole discretion of the professor. Verbal notification during any regularly scheduled class period will be considered sufficient notification to effect such change under this syllabus. Alternatively, an email sent to the class or an “announcement” posted to Canvas will be considered sufficient notification to effect a change.

Each student should become familiar with the appropriate dates and academic regulations as published by Xavier University in its Catalogs, Programs, and Semester Schedule of Classes.

Class schedule and specific topics: the accompanying class schedule, available on Canvas, is to be considered part of this syllabus.