

# So, You Want To Be a PM?

## Course Overview

This class is meant to equip students who are considering careers in Product Management with an understanding of what it's actually like to be a PM and how to best position yourself to get a job as one after leaving CBS. This is meant in some ways to be a "part two" of Professor Paul Canetti's "Introduction to Product Management" class.

Since PM is often referred to as being "the CEO of a product," it's not surprising that students are interested in this as a potential post-CBS career path. The reality of being a PM is in many cases different than the image- not controlling a lot of resources, leading through influence not authority, stakeholder management, etc. Of course, it's also a pretty great job for the right student with the right mindset and expectations going in.

But it's important that students get a strong understanding and experiential exposure to this function and its role in the organization. Even if they decide against moving into PM as a career, many of the concepts and approaches covered in this class will help them in whatever path they choose. Indeed, even companies as large as Walmart are training hundreds of their Bentonville employees from various functions on "product management mindset."

By taking this class, students will come away with a strong understanding of what a career in product management will entail. The course will develop a life-long learning mindset for students interested in careers in PM

## Course Objectives

1. Strengthen students' understanding of the Product Management function in the firm, through examination of core concepts, PM responsibilities, and real-world experiential examples of what it's like to be a PM.
2. Provide students with frameworks and strategies to understand proven approaches to spotting product opportunities, building and launching successful products, managing a product portfolio and managing the product lifecycle
3. Increase students' likelihood of success in getting hired on as PMs with specific guidance on sought-after traits, pathways to hire, typical hierarchies, etc.

## Class Project:

Class will break up into professor-assigned groups of 5 and will come up with a product concept and take it through initial user interviews, competitive analysis, MVP, “moments of delight”, a Product Requirements Document, and a 3- to 6-month roadmap.

## Syllabus

### **Class 1: Product Management: Unpacking common misperceptions**

*What does it actually mean to be a product manager in an organization? In this module we'll cover the critical role that concepts like prioritization, communication, active listening and a specific type of leadership play for PMs.*

- About this class: Forming, Norming, Storming, Performing
- Defining the role of PM
- Product's role in translating strategy → goals → objectives → tactics
- Prioritization
- Defining product success
  - “Outcomes versus Outputs”

### **Class 2: Building Products and Managing the Product Team**

*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 the working mechanics within a product team.*

- Deep dive on Agile: What it is, why it's used, how to use it
  - Exercise: Story Point Poker
- Managing a product team
  - Typical roles, responsibilities
  - Product management vs. project management
  - How to work effectively with engineers
  - How to work effectively with designers
- Working with business stakeholders
  - Leading through Influence, not authority

### **Class 3: Building Products Around User Need**

*It's critical for PMs not to lose sight of their north star: building products that solve a clear user problem and raise willingness to pay.*

- Design Sprints- what they are, how to do them
- Identifying users' needs
- Jobs To Be Done

- Lean Start-up strategies and tactics
- How to use qualitative and quantitative research
- Test and learn: culture and practice

#### **Class 4: Product Management Secret Sauce: Building Delight**

*More and more, across categories and bleeding into B2B and elsewhere, the products that delight users gain a competitive advantage over those that don't prioritize that aspect.*

- Defining delight in different contexts
- The psychology and philosophy of product delight
- How to build delightful products
- The BFogg model and efficacy of triggers
- The dangers of delight

#### **Class 5: Product Management: Getting the Job and Tools of the trade**

*How to approach the hiring process and how to present yourself as an attractive candidate as well as key questions to ask. NOTE: Even though "getting a job" is a discrete part of the syllabus here, we will weave job-related discussions and lessons throughout the course. How does a PM actually get the job done? What tools does she need to understand and work with every day?*

- Requirement documents: what they are and how to write effective ones
- Roadmaps: what they are (and aren't) and how to build and manage them
- Confluence
- JIRA and Github
- Resources to stay current
- Career ladders within PM
  - Typical titles, experience levels
- Building experience through internships, personal projects
- Interview strategies

#### **Class 6: Final Project Presentations**

Each team will have roughly 5-7 minutes to present their product idea and plan

### **Reading List**

#### **Class 1:**

- [Product Success](#), by Marty Cagan, Silicon Valley Product Group, May, 2016

## Class 2:

- [“Embracing Agile”](#) by Darrell Rigby, Jeff Sutherland, Hirotaka Takeuchi, *Harvard Business Review*, May 2016
- [“Negotiation Skills for Product Managers”](#) by Brett Tworetzky, Medium.com, July 2017
- [“How to Work With Engineers.”](#) Julie Zhuo, Medium.com

## Class 3:

- [“Know Your Customers’ Jobs To Be Done”](#) by Clayton Christensen, et al, *Harvard Business Review*, September 2016
- [“The Surprising Power of Online Experiments.”](#) by Ron Kohavi and Stefan Tomke, *Harvard Business Review*, Sept/Oct 2017

## Class 4:

- [“10 Psychological Drivers That Engage Users and Support Product Growth.”](#) by Nate Moch (video)
- [BJ Fogg on Tiny Habits](#) (video)
- [“Good Product Team. Bad Product Team”](#) by Marty Cagan, Silicon Valley Product Group, 2014
- [“Why Delight Matters: The Case for Building Thoughtful and Clever Product Experiences”](#), by Melody Koh, Better Every Day, March, 2018

## Class 5:

- [“How to Write a Painless Product Requirements Document.”](#) Jerry Cao, Medium
- [Product Roadmaps: An Essential Guide.](#) by Richard Holmes, Department of Product
- [“When Agile Goes Awry and How to Fix It.”](#) by Lindsay Gregory and Neel Doshi, *Harvard Business Review*, Oct 2018
- [“Find, Vet, and Close the Best PMs. Here’s How”](#) by Todd Jackson, *First Round Review*
- [“How to Break Into Product Management.”](#) by Melanie Lei, Free Code Camp, February 2018 [[read only if you haven’t had PM experience yet]]
- [Product Management Career Ladders at 8 Top Tech Firms.](#) by Sachin Rekhi
- [The Ultimate List of Product Management Interview Questions.](#) by Gabriela Araujo, Product School, July 2019

## ASSIGNMENTS/METHOD OF EVALUATION

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

**40%** of your grade will be based on the final group presentations.

**60%** of your grade will be based on your class participation (attendance, contributing to classroom conversations in a productive way, completing assignments)

**A note on participation:** Coming to class, being attentive, and actively participating are expected and will account for more than half of your grade. Product Management is a participatory discipline. 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.

## **CLASSROOM NORMS AND EXPECTATIONS**

Because of the small number of sessions, attendance at all sessions is required. As they will take place in the evening, eating in class is allowed. Active participation is encouraged.

## **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](http://www.health.columbia.edu/docs/services/ods/index.html) or by contacting (212) 854-2388.