Product Management
Andrei Guschin, PhD

Course Description
Based upon a highly successful course offered at Harvard Business School, Product Management is a project-based course that uses a "learning-by-doing" approach to build product management skills. Students will evaluate user needs and specify functional requirements for a new web or smartphone application. The course includes a series of workshops featuring lectures by experts from leading tech companies and peer-to-peer feedback. It is designed for students who lack prior product management experience but who wish to work in that role after graduation, either in a big tech company or in a startup. Aspiring entrepreneurs should also benefit from the course. Readings are sourced largely from blog posts by practitioners. There will be no case discussions.

Course Objectives
Product managers can have a tremendous impact on a technology company's performance. PMs define a product's functional requirements and then lead a team responsible for its development, launch, and ongoing improvement. Upon successful completion of this course, Foster MBAs should build an understanding of the PM role and develop skills required to perform the role by addressing the following issues:

- What does a PM do and with whom do they work at different stages of the product life cycle? What are the attributes of successful and unsuccessful PMs?
- What techniques do PMs use to understand customer needs and validate demand for a product?
- What does a PM need to know about user experience design?
- What is a MRD? What techniques do PMs use to understand customer needs and validate demand for a product? How to build the effective MRDs and Use Cases?
- What is a PRD? Why do some tech companies use them while others do not?
- What is the difference between waterfall and agile software development methods, and when/why would firms chose one over the other?
- What approaches (e.g., project planning software, face-to-face meetings, etc.) do PMs use to track progress and coordinate their team's efforts?
- How should a PM approach wireframing? What do they need to know about UX design?
- What does a PM need to know about technology, e.g., model-view-controller architecture, APIs, databases, cloud?

Another objective is to introduce students to the realities of the PM job at the big tech companies and startups, and decide if this is a good career choice for them after graduating:

- This course has given you insights into PM’s job at Microsoft, Amazon, Google and other companies. Where would you want to work and why? How do the key obstacles you would face as a PM change based on the type of company?

Team Project
Students will either bring their own project to the course or work on one sourced by the instructor. Suitable project candidates might include a student's own startup idea, applications for a company, non-profit organization, or the Foster community, and applications under development by the UW's IT staff. Working mostly in pairs, students will have five deliverables: 1) a plan for researching user needs for their proposed application; 2) a MRD; 3) wireframes for their proposed application; 4) a PRD with detailed specifications; 5) weekly progress updates. The course will culminate with the presentation of a PRD specifying use cases and product functionality to the panel of judges from leading tech companies.