

38:533:590 HR Strategy II: Business Strategy

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Office Hours: I love to meet one-on-one with my students! Please reach out to me to schedule a time in person or by zoom. I am generally willing to meet between the hours of 7:00am and 11:59pm most days. When you email me please provide a few time chunks that work in your schedule and whether you prefer zoom or in-person. We can coordinate a time that matches both of our schedules. I look forward to visiting with you!

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Strategic management is all about *helping organizations achieve superior performance*. In this course, you will acquire tools, insights, frameworks, and experiences that will aid you in helping organizations achieve this goal.

Strategic management is a highly integrative course that puts many other pieces of the business into a larger context. We will ultimately address three very high-level questions:

1. What determines the overall profitability of a business?
2. Why do some companies fail, while others succeed?
3. What, if anything, can managers do about it?

I care deeply about your learning, so please reach out to me if you have concerns and/or recommendations regarding your learning experience.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

This course addresses many of the core [SMLR learning objectives](#). In particular, each of the main learning activities map to the core learning objectives as indicated below. The table shows how strongly each learning activity maps to each key learning objective (++ means very strong mapping, + means strong mapping)

Learning Objectives		Learning Activities			
		Case Discussions	Strategy and YOUR LIFE paper	Team Final Project	Individual Final Exam
Cognitive Skills and Processes	Written Communication		VERY STRONG	STRONG	VERY STRONG
	Oral Communication	VERY STRONG		VERY STRONG	

	Quantitative Skills	STRONG		VERY STRONG	STRONG
	Research Skills	VERY STRONG		VERY STRONG	STRONG
Knowledge of Theory, Practice and Application	Theoretical Perspective	VERY STRONG		VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG
	Understanding Context	VERY STRONG		VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG
	Application	VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG	VERY STRONG
Professional Development	Professional Interactions	VERY STRONG		VERY STRONG	

By the end of the course, you will be able to:

1. Understand the core theories, tools and frameworks of business strategy
2. Apply the appropriate tools to the appropriate business situations to generate useful strategic insights for a company
3. Perform a strategy audit for a company and identify key opportunities for improvement based on the audit
4. Articulate the importance of strategy tools for HR professionals and be prepared to integrate strategy logic into your work in HR.

COURSE FORMAT

I teach this course primarily through the case method. I give you theories and tools outside of class through readings and videos and then invite you to apply these theories and tools to cases as you prepare for class discussions.

A substantial portion of the learning comes through engaged classroom discussion as we explore the cases from our varied backgrounds and perspectives. The case discussions are designed to stretch and solidify the learning you do on your own before class. The value you get from the class is a direct function of the amount and quality of preparation for these case discussions.

COURSE MATERIALS

You are required to buy a **coursepack**. The instructions on how to purchase the course materials are posted in the first learning module in Canvas.

AIRPLANE MODE TECHNOLOGY POLICY

Electronic devices (e.g., laptops, tablets, cell phones, etc.) are permitted only for activities directly related to the designed learning experiences in the classroom. The use of electronic devices for any other purpose will negatively impact your individual course contribution evaluation (see below). If you choose to use electronics in class, then it is your responsibility to

put your device in **airplane mode** before the start of class and only use technology to focus on the in-class learning experience.

GRADING

This class, like the real-world work environment, is based largely on subjective assessments. Assigning (or taking away) “points” is very appropriate when there are clear objective criteria, but when much of our performance is subjective, I find it useful to apply general guidelines and subjective assessments of student performance relative to those guidelines. This is a relief to some, and a point of stress for others (especially those who want to regularly track their point accumulations in a course). However, in the work environment we rarely get daily “points” that allow us to track our scores as the year goes on. Instead, we have irregular and lumpy opportunities for feedback as we navigate our way through the complexities of organizational life.

Grading on **individual assessments** is based on my comparison of your work to the typical level of work from graduate students in a strategy classroom. The general grading scale I will use for each assessment is as follows:

- Excellent, 95 (very rare) - reserved for situations where students vastly outperform the typical level for master’s level students.
- Exceeds expectations, 90 (uncommon) - assigned in situations where student performance is above typical levels for master’s students.
- Meets expectations, 85 (common) - assigned in situations where student performance meets the core expectations for master’s level students.
- Below expectations, 80 or lower (uncommon) - assigned in situations where student performance is below core expectations of a master’s student in one or more clear ways.

This is sometimes hard for students to understand because you are used to interpreting numbers as “points.” In this case, the numbers are required by Canvas to keep track of things, but to me they represent a category (e.g. 85 is not 85 points, 85 means “meets expectations” for that assignment).

“Meets Expectations” is a very good score, and it is possible to “meet expectations” on every assignment of the semester and earn an A in this class! So, DO NOT be worried about or concerned about seeing “85” in the gradebook. This means that you have done everything I have expected you to do on that assignment as an engaged master’s student!

For each specific assignment/assessment I will provide guidance on what it means to “meet expectations” so that you can benchmark your own performance.

While grading on individual assignments is based on your performance relative to expectations, **final grading** is relative to other students in the class, with some protections. If you at least “meet expectations” on all assessments for the semester then your final grade will be no lower than a B+, but could be an A- or A, depending on how other students in the class perform. I will

look at the overall distribution at the end of the semester and look for natural break points and assign grades accordingly.

ASSIGNMENTS

The primary assessments in the course are as follows:

Graded Category	Percentage	Description
1. Individual Course Contribution	30%	Assessment of your overall contribution to the class learning experience
2. Team Final Project	30%	A group strategy project where you work as a team to analyze an industry and company of your choice using strategy tools
3. Strategy and YOUR LIFE Paper	5%	A paper where you apply the tools and frameworks of strategy to a domain of your personal life.
4. Individual Final Exam	35%	An exam where you prepare a case in advance, apply strategy tools, and then answer questions about the case to demonstrate your individual mastery of the tools and frameworks.
TOTAL	100%	

1. Individual Course Contribution:

Course contribution is about meaningfully contributing to the overall learning experience of the class. There are many ways to contribute to our shared learning experience including, but not limited to:

- Making comments in class
- Asking questions
- Respectfully challenging a classmate or the professor
- Participating in class learning activities/experiences
- Being an engaged learner and an attentive and supportive classmate

There is no one “best” way to meet or exceed expectations for course contributions, and I try to make room for students to meaningfully contribute in many ways.

Some general guidelines I use in determining my daily assessments of your class contributions:

Assessment	Notes/comments (these are examples only, not a complete list)
Meets Expectations	-Student is on time and engaged, student appears to be tracking the discussion and processing information -Student is respectful and professional in interactions and comments (i.e. uses

	<p>appropriate titles/names/pronouns when addressing others, uses raises hand before speaking, waits for others to finish speaking, etc.)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Student comments clearly reflect that the student has completed the assigned pre-work and is prepared to engage in case discussion -Student offers at least one meaningful comment per week that helps to move the class discussion forward. Meaningful comments are those that are on topic and add new information to the discussion, shift the discussion by integrating information that is already available and/or challenges the direction of the discussion with a different perspective or opinion. Meaningful comments often start with phrases such as: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ----“I haven’t heard anyone discuss this point in the case yet, but this point seems important for us to understand...” ----“Most of us seem to be leaning towards X given the information available, but my own interpretation causes me to lean in a different direction because...” ----“Professor, you seem to be emphasizing A, but I don’t understand why you left B behind so quickly, will you please back up and explain why you don’t think B is important for our case analysis?” ----“I’d like to start out our case discussion by giving an overview of the case and the core issues at hand for us to discuss...”
Exceeds Expectations	<p>In addition to meeting expectations, student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Demonstrates an unusually insightful perspective in class discussion – i.e. discusses topics in a way that goes beyond the learning objectives for the day and helps us to dig deeper into the strategy frameworks -Creates clear connections across weeks, cases, theories, frameworks, etc. to help integrate lessons we are learning -Builds and helps other students in productive ways
Excellent	<p>In addition to exceeding expectations, student:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Blows professor away with insights beyond those of most masters students -Provides unusually sophisticated and supported arguments -Leverages uncommon empirical analysis when making reasoned arguments
Below expectations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Student is late and/or visually disengaged from the learning experience -Student violates one or more norms of professional conduct and respectful treatment of others (e.g. student speaks to another individual in a derogatory way, student persistently interrupts others during discussions, etc.) -Student comments reflect a lack of preparation, a lack of investment in the pre-work -Student dominates airtime when others are trying to contribute, student talks over others or monopolizes conversation -Student never speaks

This course is specifically designed to develop and hone your ability to respond quickly in real time and verbally communicate your analyses clearly and logically. It is vitally important that you develop this skill as most of the manager’s job involves verbal communication with

colleagues, customers, suppliers, investors, regulators, etc. Most importantly, and potentially of greatest value, this ability will greatly enhance your performance with recruiters. Learning to communicate effectively in a classroom is a far kinder and gentler venue than attempting to do so in business when the stakes, both personally and financially, are far higher.

I also note that **speaking up in class may be unusually anxiety creating for some of you**. If you are in this category, then each week you may submit an analysis of a current event or news article that illustrates and/or applies one of the strategy tools or frameworks we are learning in class. You will see this as an optional assignment associated with each week of the semester. If you are often quiet in class, then submitting these optional assignments may help to boost your individual contribution score. If you often speak up and engage in the discussion, then these additional assignments are unlikely to boost or affect your individual contribution score. These optional assignments will not boost your contribution score above “meets expectations” for any given class session. So, it is only wise to complete these optional assignments in weeks when you believe that your contributions are below expectations.

These out of class contribution opportunities may also be particularly helpful if you need to miss class sessions due to religious observance, illness or other unplanned reasons. These can demonstrate your efforts to invest in your learning even when you are not able to be physically present for class.

2. Team Final Project:

In your self-selected teams, you are to take the role of a team that is seeking investors for a long-term return on their funds. The long-term is specifically defined as 10 years. Your goal is to convince potential investors (in this case, your classmates and professor) that you are able to pick the most attractive company (within a defined industry) to invest in.

- a. **Project Overview.** Early in the course, your team will be asked for its preferences for industries to examine. Through discussion (optional) with your professor, you will select and define the industry and its boundaries.
 - i. **Detailed Analysis.** Once your industry is defined, your responsibility is to conduct an exhaustive and intensive strategic examination of the industry, the future trends likely to affect the industry, and evaluate current incumbents in the industry as to their prospects for return to investors in a 10-year horizon.
 - ii. **Recommendation.** Based on your research, you are to recommend *one, and only one*, current incumbent in the industry that you believe, based on your research, will yield the greatest return in that industry for investors 10 years from now. The rule is, once the funds are invested, you cannot remove capital for 10 years, nor can you pay out any form of capital, dividends or income in any form to investors. Alternatively stated, once the investment goes in, your investor team is passive for 10 years with the investment.
- b. **Project Work Product Responsibilities/Checkpoints.** Canvas has some key project checkpoints and additional information to help you move forward on the project through the semester.

- c. **Project Presentation.** Your grade is ultimately determined by a final presentation at the end of the semester. This will reflect your cumulative work as a team.

3. Strategy and YOUR LIFE Paper:

At the end of the semester, you will complete a Strategy and YOUR LIFE paper that will give you an opportunity to apply the tools and principles of strategy to a domain of life that is important to you (a job, a company, your family, a volunteer organization where you participate, etc.). The purpose of this assignment is to give you incentive to look beyond the class materials and apply these important tools to the many domains of life where they can help and support you.

4. Final Exam:

At the end of the semester, I will give you a case to read and evaluate using all the strategy tools and frameworks of the semester. You will have at least one week (but maybe more) to read and analyze the case before the final exam. The exam will ask you to respond to a series of questions about the case (that follow naturally from the frameworks we have studied).

GRADE APPEALS POLICY

This course will prepare you to succeed in business. After graduation, supervisors will regularly evaluate your performance; you might disagree with their evaluations. Rarely will stopping by the boss' office to lobby for a better rating or complain about the process be rewarded with greater compensation, more promising projects, increasing responsibility or unusually early promotions. This type of behavior will also not help you with your grades in this class.

However, we are human and may make simple grading mistakes or may, at times, misunderstand an answer, submission or response in one of your graded assignments. Such instances are to be addressed as follows:

1. If you would like your grade on a specific assignment to be reconsidered, then you must compose a memo that justifies further consideration of your work:
 - a. The memo must be submitted within 1 week of the original grade being distributed.
 - b. The memo must be no more than 1 page (12 pt font, single-spaced, minimum 1" margins).
 - c. The memo must be emailed directly to the professor
 - d. All of the original work must accompany the memo where applicable.
2. The assignment will then be re-evaluated.

Note that you are more likely to be successful in business if you can persuade others logically, not emotionally, in a concise and specific manner. Consequently, such appeals are most likely to result in more positive evaluations upon review. Bear in mind that the grade appeal process is designed to prepare you to succeed in business; the process should not be abused (i.e. treated as a lottery ticket with a low probability of receiving a higher grade). Abuse of this grade appeals policy may result in grade deductions or penalties.

SMLR AND RUTGERS POLICIES

This course also follows the standard guidelines and policies of the School of Management and Labor Relations and Rutgers University.

ILLNESS AND RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE POLICIES

It is important for all of us to do our part to reduce the spread of illness, so please stay home when you are sick and may be contagious. Additionally, you may have class sessions that you need to miss due to religious observance or unplanned personal emergencies.

All students can miss one class day with no questions asked. Additional absences may have a negative effect on individual contribution assessments for the semester. Please let me know if you need to miss multiple class sessions for illness, personal emergencies and/or religious observances. We can work together for a fair and reasonable solution.

Instructor Illness Plans

There may also be circumstances beyond your instructor's control that require alternative class arrangements. Your instructor will notify you as soon as possible if this is the case and may provide alternative arrangements (e.g. Zoom) for the class session during the assigned class time.

OVERVIEW OF COURSE CONTENT

Week 1: Course Introduction

What is Strategy?

Intro to Core Strategy Concepts

Ebony Magazine Case

Week 2: Where do we compete? Competitor Dynamics

Introduction to competitor dynamics

Holland Sweetener Company Case

Week 3: Where do we compete? Industry Analysis

Introduction to Industry Analysis

Cola Wars Case

Week 4: Where do we compete? PEST Analysis

Introduction to PEST Analysis

Strategy Project Pitch Day

Week 5: Where we compete wrap up and Transition to Internal Analysis

Wrapping up External Analysis

Transition to Internal Analysis

Crown Cork and Seal Case

Week 6: What Resources and Capabilities Help us Compete?

Introduction to the Resource Based View of the Firm

WalMart Stores Case

Week 7: What Unique Value do we Offer?

Cost Advantage

Honda (A) Case

Differentiation Advantage

eHarmony Case

Week 8: How do we Sustain our Unique Value?

Barriers to imitation and protecting competitive advantage

XEROX PARC case

Strategy Project Check In

Week 9: How do we Deliver our Unique Value?

Strategy Implementation

Nordstrom Case

Week 10: Emergent Strategy

Understanding Emergent Strategy

Honda Case

Slack Case

Week 11: Corporate Strategy

Overview of Corporate Strategy

Disney Case

Week 12: Technology Strategy

Industry Life Cycles and Platforms

Netflix Case

Week 13: Semester Summary and Strategy in Real Life

Review the core strategy tools and frameworks

Apply to live case (e.g. Tesla 10K)

Week 14: Final Presentations

Student Final Project Presentations