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 **course pack**. The instructions on how to purchase the course materials are posted in the first learning module in Canvas.

AI Policy

AI is a powerful tool to enhance human productivity, but emerging research shows that some ways of using AI inhibit learning and prevent individual growth. Accordingly, there are appropriate and inappropriate uses of AI in this class as follows:

AI as Coach and Tutor (acceptable use)
You may use AI to coach you and help you learn. In this case, you are using AI as a tool to enhance your own learning and development, just as students have been using learning aids (hiring tutors, purchasing extra books, etc.) for many years. AI can be an incredibly effective partner in your learning, and I encourage you to use it for this purpose. You may use AI generically to help you with any of the tools of strategy, you may NOT use AI to help you with specific cases or graded assignments for the class.

Examples of AI prompts that likely fit this acceptable use policy include:
- Please remind me what supplier power means in industry analysis, and the key factors that determine supplier power
- I have forgotten the core elements of the VRIO framework, will you please remind me?
- I need some practice applying industry analysis, will you generate an example scenario for me, allow me to perform a brief industry analysis, and give me some feedback on my work?
- My strategy project industry is X and I am not sure where to find resources to research X, will you make some recommendations? AS you do so, please DO NOT summarize the resources you recommend, reading them and interpreting them is my job as a student.

Critically, these examples show how the user (you) are using AI to help YOU learn, rather than using AI to DO YOUR WORK for you.

Another form of AI that is acceptable is using AI to enhance writing quality. Tools like Grammarly and/or embedded software tools that recommend writing enhancements are acceptable. You could also, for example, write your own response and then paste it into a tool like Gemini or ChatGPT and ask the AI to clean up the writing to make it easier to read and understand. You MAY NOT ask it to help you with the logic or the arguments, but you MAY ask it to clean up basic writing errors that might otherwise make your work harder to read.

AI as Substitute for Learning (unacceptable use)
You MAY NOT use AI to replace your own work, shortcut your work, or otherwise do your work for you. This kind of AI use may seem efficient, and may save you time, but mounting evidence shows that it significantly limits your personal learning and, accordingly, is contrary to the purposes and intentions of a learning environment like ours.

Examples of AI prompts that are unacceptable and violate this policy include:
- This week we are doing the Ebony Magazine case (uploaded here) and my professor has asked me to consider the following questions to prepare for class…
- Will you complete an industry analysis on the Cola Wars case?
- Here is the framework my professor has given us, will you apply it to this case he has asked us to read?

My expectation is that YOU will do the work I ask you to do and that you will NOT assign out that work to AI. The learning assignments and experiences are designed to help you develop a more holistic and strategic way of thinking; the AI assistants of the world do not need this growth. You, however, absolutely need these abilities to be successful in your careers.

Here is the key rule for AI: AI can support *your* thinking, but cannot think for you.

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. Exceptions to the airplane mode policy include in-class quizzes that require an internet connection and/or learning experiences where I specifically invite you to explore something online. In these situations, it is understood that the purpose of going online is purely to support the designed learning experience.

GRADING

This class, like the real-world work environment, is based largely on subjective assessments. Most professional evaluations are based on whether you meet, exceed, or fall below professional expectations based on your current job, experience level, and so forth. Rarely will your professional jobs have point-based systems. We still have points-based systems in education, for now, so I try to model the real world in my approach to evaluations. In the real world, there are almost never 100% scores; you will almost never get all your work done, you will never satisfy 100% of your customers, your co-workers, and/or other stakeholders. Your job is to get most of your work done and make strategic choices about what not to get done and who not to satisfy (who you say "no" to is a central strategic issue!). My grading approach is designed to model this real-world approach to employee evaluation.

My grading for most assessments is different than what you experience in most classes. The benchmark score is 85% (8.5 out of 10 or 85 out of 100). If you do everything I ask you to do, you should expect to receive an 85% on the assignment. If you miss one or more things I ask of you, then you should expect to receive below an 85%. If you exceed what I have asked of you by providing an unusually insightful analysis, an uncommonly thorough analysis, work that effectively integrates across concepts and topics, and so forth, you may receive above an 85%.

You will see this on the rubrics for most assignments, where the "graded" points add up to 85% and there is a separate section for "bonus points."

It is common for students earning an 85% average to earn an A in the class. To put this in perspective, my most recent final grade distribution when teaching this class was as follows:

A 100% to 85% (11 students)
B+ < 85% to 80% (10 students)

B < 80% to 76% (2 students)
C+ < 76% to 72% (0 students)
C or below < 72% to 0% (1 student)

I reserve the right to adjust these grade cutoffs as appropriate at the end of the semester, but my intention is for students earning 85% or more to earn As in the class.

ASSIGNMENTS

The primary assessments in the course are as follows:

Graded Category	Percentage	Description
1. Individual Course Contribution	10%	Subjective assessment of your overall contribution to the class learning experience
2. In-Class Preparation Quizzes	20%	Quizzes at the start of class sessions to evaluate your preparation work prior to class.
3. 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
4. Strategy and YOUR LIFE Paper	5%	A paper where you apply the tools and frameworks of strategy to a domain of your personal life.
5. 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 assessments of your in-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 appropriate titles/names/pronouns when addressing others, uses a raised hand before speaking, waits for others to finish speaking, etc.) -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 challenge the direction of the discussion with a different perspective or opinion. Meaningful comments often start with phrases such as: ----"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	In addition to meeting expectations, the student: -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
Below expectations	-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 the conversation -The 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. In-Class Quizzes

The primary purpose of the in-class quiz is to evaluate the quality of your preparation for our in-class discussion that day. The quiz will essentially ask the following questions:

- Have you gained a basic familiarity with the assigned tool for the day (typically in videos assigned before class)?
- Have you read the case and considered the assigned preparation questions?
- Have you tried to apply the assigned tool for the day to the assigned case?
- Can you apply the assigned readings to other ideas/concepts in real time?

Please note that the quiz is not asking whether your opinions and/or preparation work is correct. In strategy, we often have different people in the room with different opinions and perspectives based on the same tools and the same case. Embracing this is part of the learning experience. If you have done the preparation work, then your preparation will be clear in the way you respond to the quizzes. If you have not done the preparation work, then it should be difficult to fake it in the quiz.

3. 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 can pick the most attractive company (within a defined industry) to invest in.

- **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.

- **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. These are not graded, but doing them will keep you on track.

- **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.

4. **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 an 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.

5. **Final Exam:**

At the end of the semester, you will complete an in-person case-based final exam that tests your personal and independent abilities to apply the tools and frameworks of strategy to a business case. This is NOT a test of whether you have the strategy tools and frameworks memorized; this evaluates whether you can independently and appropriately apply these tools to a business situation to generate useful insights.

For the first part of the exam period, I will give you a short, written case with some extra paper for you to take notes and perform whatever analysis you think might be most appropriate – this will be quiet/solo work/preparation time on the case. This is a paper-only exercise, and all technology is off the desk and put away.

In the second part of the exam period, you will take out a device of your choosing (I strongly recommend a laptop with keyboard) and take a Canvas exam that asks you questions about the case and your analysis. Note that the exam may also ask you questions related to the cases we have discussed in class throughout the semester.

NO AI of any kind is permitted on the exam, and any use of AI on any portion of the final exam results in an automatic failing grade on the final. This includes using AI tools *before, during, or after the in-person exam period* to support exam responses.

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's 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