



Broad College of Business MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of Management

MBA 850: Strategic Management 2026 Syllabus

Course Number: MBA-850

Credit Hours: 1.5

Course Modality: Face-to-face

Course meeting: Mondays & Wednesdays from 2:20 PM – 3:40 PM in M242

Course website: <https://d2l.msu.edu/>

Instructor

Instructor Information

Name: Professor Derek Harmon
Office: N424
Office hours: Wednesdays from 1:00 PM – 2:00 PM in N424 (or upon request)
E-mail: djh@msu.edu

Course Information

Course Description

Why do some companies achieve sustained success while others fail? This course addresses the challenges facing the General Manager, requiring an integrated perspective beyond functional silos (e.g., marketing, finance, operations). Through foundational frameworks and case discussions, students will learn a disciplined approach to diagnosing business performance. We will examine the building blocks of strategy—industry structure and competitive advantage—and apply them to modern challenges like platform dynamics, corporate diversification, and the firm’s broader role in society. This course is designed for aspiring leaders who prefer rigorous analysis over simplified prescriptions.

Course Objectives

By the completion of this course, successful students will be able to:

1. Analyze how firms create, capture, and sustain value in dynamic markets.
2. Integrate functional perspectives to evaluate overall firm performance and success.
3. Utilize analytical tools to diagnose business problems at the industry, firm, and corporate levels.
4. Develop strategic recommendations that account for trade-offs and competitive dynamics.

To accomplish our objectives, we will use a variety of learning techniques: readings, lectures, in-class discussions, case analysis, quizzes, and group projects.

Course Requirements

To complete this course you must attend class, read the assigned materials, prepare the cases, and participate in class exercises. Late assignments will not be accepted.

Required Course Materials

Lecture Notes (posted on D2L)

Harvard Business Publishing Course Pack (purchase here: <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/import/1386128>)

Course Schedule

All dates are tentative and any changes will be notified through D2L.

CLASS	DATE	DAY	TYPE	TOPIC	REQUIRED PREPARATION
INTRODUCTION					
1	Mar 9	M	Lecture	Introduction	Read Lecture Note 1
EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT					
2	Mar 11	W	Case	Industry Structure 1	Read Lecture Note 2 Prepare “Cola Wars” Case
3	Mar 16	M	Case	Industry Structure 2	Continue “Cola Wars” Case
BUSINESS STRATEGY					
4	Mar 18	W	Case	Competitive Advantage 1	Read Lecture Note 3 Prepare “eHarmony” Case
5	Mar 23	M	Case	Competitive Advantage 2	Prepare “Aldi” Case
6	Mar 25	W	Exam	Quiz #1	Review for Quiz
7	Mar 30	M	Case	Industry Value Chain	Read Lecture Note 4 Prepare “HSC vs. Nutrasweet” Case
8	Apr 1	W	Case	Network Effects	Read Lecture Note 5 Prepare “Wii” Case
CORPORATE STRATEGY					
9	Apr 6	M	Case	Corporate Scope 1	Read Lecture Note 6 Prepare “Disney” Case
10	Apr 8	W	Case	Corporate Scope 2	Continue “Disney” Case
11	Apr 13	M	Case	Corporate Scope 3	Read Lecture Note 7 Prepare “CEMEX” Case
12	April 15	W	Exam	Quiz #2	Review for Quiz
STRATEGY & SOCIETY					
13	Apr 20	M	Case	Strategy & Society 1	Read Lecture Note 8 Prepare “Patagonia” Case
14	Apr 22	W	Lecture	Strategy & Society 2	Begin working on Group Final

Grading Policy

Course Contribution (250 points, 25%):

In the real world, your ability to diagnose problems is only as valuable as your ability to persuade others of your solution. Strategy is rarely a solitary endeavor; it is a debate. Therefore, this course relies heavily on active engagement. Your grade will reflect not just your presence, but your contribution to the collective learning environment during lectures, in-class activities, and especially case discussions.

Airtime in this class is a scarce resource. You will be evaluated based on the *quality* of your insights, not the *quantity* of your comments. A single, piercing observation that shifts the class's perspective is worth far more than frequent, superficial comments. When preparing and participating, aim for comments that:

- *Analyze, don't summarize:* Move beyond reciting case facts to diagnosing the underlying causes.
- *Connect the dots:* Link the current discussion to theoretical frameworks from previous cases.
- *Are evidence-based:* Support your arguments with specific data from the case or reading.
- *Constructively challenge:* It is okay to disagree with the instructor or your peers, provided it is done respectfully and supported by logic.

For case discussions, you are expected to arrive fully prepared, having read the materials and formulated a preliminary stance on the core issues. To ensure a lively and representative debate, I may use “cold calling” or “warm calling” to solicit initial thoughts or push for deeper analysis. Please view this not as a test, but as an opportunity to practice thinking on your feet—a critical skill for any general manager.

Quizzes (300 points, 30%):

We have two in-class quizzes. Each quiz will consist of both multiple-choice questions and short answers. Quizzes are not cumulative.

Strategic Dilemma (150 points, 15%):

The Strategic Dilemma is an individual assignment that is a self-contained “mini case,” where you will describe and analyze a strategic decision that a company is facing (or did face) within the last two years. The dilemma has three parts: (i) you'll find a news article explaining a situation faced by a firm (no longer than 500 words), (ii) you'll develop two questions regarding what the firm should do in that situation, and (iii) you'll provide answers to these questions (no longer than 2 pages single spaced). The deliverable is due on D2L. Detailed instructions and official deadline to follow.

Group Final (300 points, 30%):

The final for the course will be a group-based case analysis. Your group must identify the primary problem facing the protagonist in a case and provide a recommendation for its solution, using concepts from the course as support. Your deliverable will be a 10-minute voiced-over PowerPoint. Detailed instructions and official deadline to follow.

Graded Course Activities:

The table below summarizes the graded course activities and their points and weights in the final grade.

Description	Points	Percentage
Course Contribution	250	25%
Quizzes	300	30%
Strategic Dilemma	150	15%
Group Final	300	30%
Total Possible	1000	100%

Technology and Media

Email

You can email me at djh@msu.edu with any questions or concerns, and I will reply as soon as possible.

Cellphone/Smartphone Usage

You should keep your phone silent and not answer any calls in the class. In urgent situations, you should go out of the class, take your call, and return to your desk with minimal disturbance to other students.

Laptop Usage

You can use your laptop to take notes in the class. However, browsing and not paying attention in class will be assessed against your participation.

Course Recordings, Intellectual Property and Social Media Use

- Meetings of this course may be recorded by the instructor at their discretion. The recordings may be available to students registered for this class. This is intended to supplement the classroom experience.
- Commercialization of lecture notes and university-provided course materials is prohibited for this course.
- [Institutional Data Policy](#)
- [Student Privacy Guidelines and Notification of Rights under FERPA](#)

As members of a learning community, students are expected to respect the intellectual property of course instructors. All course materials presented to students are the copyrighted property of the course instructor and are subject to the following conditions of use:

1. Students *may* record lectures or other classroom activities and use the recordings only for their course-related purposes.
2. Students *may not* share the recordings with other students enrolled in the class. Sharing is limited to using the recordings only for course-related purposes.
3. Video and audio recordings made of online lectures may contain [inaudible or invisible watermarks to identify shared media](#).
4. Students *may not* post the recordings or other course materials online or distribute them to anyone not enrolled in the class without the advance written permission of the instructor and, if applicable, any students whose voice or image is included in the recordings.
5. Any student violating the conditions described above may face academic disciplinary sanctions.

Academic Honesty

Academic Conduct Policy

Cheating and plagiarism are not allowed in the class.

Generative A.I. Statement

You may use generative AI tools (e.g. ChatGPT, Dall-e, etc.) in this class to supplement your writing and analysis, though I would encourage you to rely instead on the collective analysis and writing of your team members. You are responsible for the information you submit based on an AI query (for instance, that it does not violate intellectual property laws, or contain misinformation or unethical content). Your use of AI tools must be properly documented and cited in order to stay within university policies on [academic integrity](#) and the [Spartan Code of Honor Academic Pledge](#). Remember, AI is not likely to generate a

response that would be seen as quality work and must be revised and improved with original work prior to submission.

The All-University Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades

All participants in this class are held to the standard set by MSU's Policy on Integrity of Scholarship and Grades. The policy can be read in full at the [MSU Ombudsperson's website](#)

Eli Broad College of Business Honor Code

In addition to MSU policies, all students are expected to comply with the [Broad College Undergraduate Honor Code](#) or the FTMBA Honor Code.

Students who violate the Broad Honor Code may receive a grade penalty determined by the instructor and guided by the Dean of Students Academic Dishonesty Report (ADR) process.

If a student receives a second ADR, in addition to any associated penalty grade, a Broad student (defined as Business Preference, Broad Admit, or any student admitted to a Broad College of Business major) could face an additional sanction (in accordance with Article 7.6 of MSU's Student Rights and Responsibilities document) including but not limited to:

- University Probationary status.
- Denial of admission to the Broad College of Business if currently a Business Preference student.
- Dismissal from the Broad College of Business if currently a Broad Admit or are coded in any of the Broad majors.

Spartan Code of Honor

On March 22, 2016, The Associated Students of Michigan State University (ASMSU) adopted the following Spartan Code of Honor:

“As a Spartan, I will strive to uphold values of the highest ethical standard. I will practice honesty in my work, foster honesty in my peers, and take pride in knowing that honor is worth more than grades. I will carry these values beyond my time as a student at Michigan State University, continuing the endeavor to build personal integrity in all that I do.”

Student Rights and Responsibilities

Students have a range of support and information options available to them to discuss actions or activities related to their academic, personal or professional lives at MSU. These rights and resources are detailed on the [ombudsperson's website](#).

Disability Access

Students must inform the instructor of any accommodations needed. Information related to disability access is available on the [Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities \(RCPD\) website](#). Students: to make an appointment with a specialist, call: (517) 353-9642 Or TTY: (517) 355-1293 or visit the [RCPD website](#).

Americans with Disabilities Act Accommodations. Michigan State University is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services, and activities. Requests for accommodations by persons with disabilities may be made by contacting the Resource Center for Persons with Disabilities at 517-884-RCPD or on the web at rcpd.msu.edu. Once your eligibility for accommodation has been determined, you will be issued a verified individual services accommodation (“VISA”) form. Please

present this form to me at the start of the term and/or two weeks before the accommodation date (test, project, etc). Requests received after this date will be honored whenever possible.

Religious Observances

Students are expected to notify their instructor in advance if they intend to miss class to observe a holy day of their religious faith. Refer to the registrar's page on [religious observance policy](#). For a current schedule of major religious holidays, see the [office of inclusion and intercultural initiatives](#).

Policies for Student Athletes

- [Student Athletes](#)

SPLS (Student Perceptions of Learning Survey)

Visit the [MSU's SPLS Online website](#) to complete your end-of-term course and instructor evaluations.

Limits to Faculty/Student Confidentiality; Mandatory Reporting

Essays, journals, and other materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of MSU community members and others. As the instructor & per the [RVSM Limits to Confidentiality](#), I must report the following information to other University offices (including the [MSU Police Department](#)) if you share it with me:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child,
- Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the [MSU Counseling Center](#).

Emergency Procedures

In the event of an emergency arising within the classroom, the instructor will notify you of what actions that may be required to ensure your safety. It is the responsibility of each student to understand the evacuation, "shelter-in-place," and "secure-in-place" guidelines posted in each facility and to act in a safe manner. You are allowed to maintain cellular devices in a silent mode during this course, in order to receive emergency SMS text, phone or email messages distributed by the university. When anyone receives such a notification or observes an emergency situation, they should immediately bring it to the attention of the instructor in a way that causes the least disruption. If an evacuation is ordered, please ensure that you do it in a safe manner and facilitate those around you that may not otherwise be able to safely leave. When these orders are given, you do have the right as a member of this community to follow that order. Also, if a shelter-in-place or secure-in-place is ordered, please seek areas of refuge that are safe depending on the emergency encountered and provide assistance if it is advisable to do so." Prepared by: Captain Penny Fischer Michigan State University Police.