



Broad College of Business MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY

Department of Management

MGT 409: Business Policy & Strategic Management Fall 2025 Syllabus

Course Number: MGT-409-007

Credit Hours: 3

Course Modality: Face-to-face

Course meeting: Tuesday & Thursdays from 12:40 PM – 2:00 PM in 139 AKR

Course location: D2L

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

Instructor

Instructor Information

Name: Professor Derek Harmon
Office: N424
Office hours: Tuesdays (in person) from 2:00 PM – 3:00 PM (scheduling link)
E-mail: djh@msu.edu

Course Information

Course Description

Many decisions that managers face are *strategic* in that they have big financial and organizational implications and cannot be easily reversed. These decisions are almost always complex and involve conflicting objectives, scarce resources, uncertain technologies, ambiguous information, conflicts among different functional areas (e.g., accounting, finance, marketing, etc.), and environmental uncertainties. To deal with these issues, managers must be able to understand and structure complex business situations in systematic, useful ways. They should also be able to extrapolate the likely outcomes of various choices and courses of action that they could take.

So far, most of your education at Broad has emphasized a specialized, functional perspective of business situations. For example, in Accountancy, you have concentrated on how to both identify and produce the information necessary to manage and guide organizations effectively. In Finance, you have been concerned with how capital markets work and how they affect the financing of a company's ongoing

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operations. In Marketing, the focus has been on how to analyze, shape, and respond to the needs of consumers as well as how to manage a company's marketing efforts. Supply chain emphasizes efficiently managing the logistics of key inputs and outputs to streamline production to enable attractive prices to the market. Courses on Human Resource Management have been concerned with the effective development and management of a company's human assets. All these functional disciplines play a critical role in the success of a company, but how do they fit together?

In this capstone business course, we integrate these views together by taking the unique perspective of the situational problems of the general manager. The general manager's primary responsibility is to formulate the problems at hand, to diagnose the critical factors that require attention in complex business situations, and to find workable solutions to strategic and organizational problems. To address such business problems, the general manager must be capable of understanding and using knowledge from each functional area to provide a total business (systems) perspective on issues pertaining to strategic management. The general manager must analyze competitive situations within industries to understand the sources of the firm's competitive advantage. Strategy is both enabled and constrained by the economic and political conditions that prevail in an industry or country, as well as by the resources and capabilities available to management. In today's increasingly global business environment, whether you are a newly hired employee or the CEO of the company, you must be capable of thinking like a general manager.

This course utilizes various tools, concepts, and frameworks that enhance our ability to define and analyze strategic problems, and to identify sources of competitive advantage from industry- and firm-level perspectives. Focusing on a firm's strengths and weaknesses, we analyze the impact of change and environmental forces on unfolding opportunities for establishing and sustaining competitive advantage. Unlike other core courses you have previously taken that tend to focus on a single functional area of business, we will take a high-level view of the firm as a whole and its position within the competitive environment. Emphasis is given to developing pragmatic and action-oriented general management skills. Importantly, extant theory within the disciplines of accounting, economics, finance, international business, marketing, political science, and organization theory have major implications for general management.

In addition to being useful to general managers and consultants, this course offers many other applications. For example, small businesses and nonprofit organizations can benefit from understanding how to analyze, formulate, and implement effective strategies. Functional specialists can benefit from the general management perspective, as every function's actions should be coordinated with the overarching needs of the business to contribute to its performance. In addition, your own career will benefit if you can translate what you do in terms of value creation according to the needs and perspectives of your employer's management team.

Course Overview

A central theme of this course is analyzing the source(s) of competitive advantages for an organization and the environmental conditions that provide for it. We focus on identifying and analyzing a firm's internal and external environments and formulating strategy geared towards gaining a competitive advantage. We will also look at the decisions made in implementing a well-formulated strategy that can lead to its ultimate success or failure.

In our case discussions covering specific companies and related team exercises, you will take on the roles of a senior executive or strategy consultant. You will be required to apply the theory and

frameworks covered to make well-articulated decisions concerning key strategic issues, provide logical and factual support for your decisions, and indicate how your decisions will be implemented.

Course Objectives

The overarching objective of this course is to develop and hone—through practice—the analytical and critical thinking skills necessary to evaluate strategic issues and formulate strategies that can be successfully implemented in various types of firm contexts. This course should help you participate effectively in evaluating, formulating, and implementing strategy at the business and corporate levels. During this course, you will learn to:

1. Understand how firms create, capture, and sustain competitive advantage
2. Think holistically about organizational factors related to overall performance
3. Apply a variety of frameworks to analyze business problems at multiple levels
4. Generate and evaluate potential strategies with a consideration of how your recommended decisions may impact dynamically the firm and its competitive environment

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

Prerequisites

MKT 300 and SCM 303 and FI 311

Open to seniors in the Accounting or Finance Major, the Marketing Major, the Supply Chain Management Major, the Human Resource Management Major, or the Management Major.

Required Textbook & Course Materials

Strategic Management: Text and Cases, 11th edition by Dess, McNamara, Eisner, & Lee. (ISBN 9781265999865)

Harvard Business Publishing Course pack: <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/import/1324755>

Course Platforms/Structure

This course will be delivered face to face on Tuesdays and Thursdays and will meet in 139 AKR. All persons on campus at any time will be required to abide by all MSU COVID-19 directives as outlined on the [MSU Together We Will site](#).

Required Technologies

You must download the iClicker app for students from the Apple App Store or Google Play. We will utilize iClicker for attendance purposes and for some in-class exercises.

Technical Assistance

If you need technical assistance at any time during the course or to report a problem, you can:

- Visit the [MSU Help site](#)
- Visit the [Desire2Learn Help Site](#)
- Call the MSU IT Service Desk at (517)432-6200, (844)678-6200, or e-mail at ithelp@msu.edu
- [Request assistance navigating and requesting instructional design help](#)

Course Outline/Schedule

Assessment Dates

All assessment dates are given in the course outline.

Important Dates to Remember

Fall 2025 MSU Holidays and Breaks

- Classes Begin: Monday August 25
- Holiday: Monday September 1
- Quarter Semester: Thursday September 18
- Middle Semester: Monday October 13
- Fall Break: Monday October 20 – Tuesday October 21
- Holiday: Thursday November 27 – Friday November 28
- Classes End: Sunday December 7
- Final Exams: Monday December 8 – Friday December 12
- Commencements: Friday, December 12 – Sunday December 14

Important dates to remember: *All dates are tentative and any changes will be notified through D2L.*

Course Event	Date
Quiz 1	October 9
Quiz 2	November 20
Group Presentations	December 2 & 4
Class Ends	December 7

Expected Hours of Participation/Work Outside Class Per Week

- Individual preparation (i.e., readings, note-taking, etc.): 3 hours
- Groupwork preparation: 2 hours
- Total = 5 hours per week (guideline only)

The Course Outline/Schedule is provided in the following pages. This schedule may be subject to alterations which will be communicated through announcements in D2L.

CLASS	DATE	DAY	TYPE	TOPIC	REQUIRED PREPARATION
INTRODUCTION					
1	Aug 26	T	Lecture	Introduction	Read Syllabus
2	Aug 28	Th	Lecture	Competitive Advantage	Read Chapter 1
INDUSTRY ANALYSIS					
3	Sep 02	T	Lecture	Industry Structure 1	Read Chapter 2
4	Sep 04	Th	Case	Industry Structure 2	Read "Cola Wars" Case Submit Case Questions on DTL before class
5	Sep 09	T	Case	Industry Structure 3	
BUSINESS STRATEGY					
6	Sep 11	Th	Lecture	What is Business Strategy?	Read Chapter 5
7	Sep 16	T	Case	Differentiation 1	Read "eHarmony" Case Submit Case Questions on DTL before class
8	Sep 18	Th	Case	Differentiation 2	
9	Sep 23	T	Case	Cost Advantage 1	Read "Aldi" Case Submit Case Questions on DTL before class
10	Sep 25	Th	Case	Cost Advantage 2	
11	Sep 30	T	Case	Industry Value Chain 1	Read Chapter 3
12	Oct 02	Th	Lecture	Industry Value Chain 2	Read "HSC vs. Nutrasweet" Case Submit Case Questions on DTL before class
13	Oct 07	T	Team	Group Dilemma Groupwork	
14	Oct 09	Th	Quiz	Quiz 1	Review for Quiz 1
15	Oct 14	T	Lecture	Network Effects	
16	Oct 16	Th	Lecture	Emerging Markets	Read Chapter 8
-	Oct 17	F	-	No class	Submit Group Dilemma on DTL before 5 PM
-	Oct 21	T	-	No class – Fall Break	
CORPORATE STRATEGY					
17	Oct 23	Th	Lecture	What is Corporate Strategy?	Read Chapter 6
18	Oct 28	T	Case	Horizontal Integration 1	Read "Disney" Case Submit Case Questions on DTL before class
19	Oct 30	Th	Case	Horizontal Integration 2	
20	Nov 04	T	Case	Vertical Integration 1	Read "Bergerac" Mini-Case
21	Nov 06	Th	Case	Vertical Integration 2	
22	Nov 11	T	Case	Global Integration 1	Read Chapter 7
23	Nov 13	Th	Case	Global Integration 2	Read "CEMEX" Mini-Case
24	Nov 18	T	Team	Group Final Groupwork	
25	Nov 20	Th	Quiz	Quiz 2	Review for Quiz 2
26	Nov 25	T	Lecture	Strategy Failures	
-	Nov 26	W	-	No class	Submit Group Final on DTL before 5 PM
-	Nov 27	Th	-	No class – Thanksgiving	
WRAP-UP					
27	Dec 02	T	Present	Presentations	Prepare Presentations
28	Dec 04	Th	Present	Presentations & Wrap-up	

Grading Policy

Attendance (50 points, 5%):

Students may miss three classes unexcused. Absences beyond three will result in a 1% reduction in this grade for each class period missed. If you experience a prolonged absence due to life circumstances, email the professor to plan how to complete the course or arrange for an Incomplete. (Please ensure you are connected to MSUnet 3.0 instead of Guest.)

Participation (150 points, 15%):

Participation involves in-class and out-of-class participation.

In-class participation is 5% of your grade and is based upon your contributions to discussions during class. Quality of contributions should be the focus over quantity.

Out-of-class contributions is 10% of your grade and requires that you submit answers to case questions for all five (5) of the cases assigned in the course pack. These questions are available on D2L and need to be submitted before the class begins at 12:40 PM. Each case question will be worth 2% and will be graded according to the following rubric:

High Pass (2%)	Low Pass (1%)	Fail (0%)
Clear effort was made. Answer correctly uses course concepts and sound logic to derive a reasonable conclusion.	Clear effort was made but answer incorrectly uses course concepts and/or is not logical. Conclusion is unrealistic.	Little to no effort was made or the answer was not submitted on time (late submissions not accepted).

Quizzes (300 points, 30%):

We have two in-class quizzes covering material from the assigned textbook chapters. Each quiz will contribute 15% to your final grade and will consist of both multiple-choice questions and essays. Quizzes are not cumulative. You are allowed a 3x5 notecard, filled out front and back, during each quiz.

Groupwork (450 points, 45%):

Group Dilemma is 15% of your grade. This assignment will ask your team to describe and to analyze a strategic decision that a company is facing or did face within the last two years. The dilemma has three written parts: (i) a news article explaining a situation faced by a firm (no longer than 500 words), (ii) two questions regarding what the firm should do in that situation, and (iii) your proposed answers to these questions (no longer than 2 pages single spaced). The deliverable is thus a self-contained mini case that is due on D2L before Friday October 17 at 5 PM. Detailed instructions to follow.

Group Final is 30% of your grade. As a group, you will conduct an exhaustive and intensive strategic examination of an industry of your choice, 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. 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 deliverables are an executive summary (due on D2L before Wednesday November 26 at 5 PM) and a group presentation (presented in class on either December 2 or 4). Detailed instructions to follow.

Group Peer Evaluations (50 points, 5%):

Students will evaluate the contributions of their team members, including themselves, with respect to both groupwork deliverables. Such evaluations can, when evidence is provided, adjust the groupwork grades of individual team members. These adjustments can be either up or down.

Graded Course Activities:

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

Description	Points	Percentage
Attendance	50	5%
Participation	150	15%
Quizzes	300	30%
Groupwork	450	45%
Peer Evaluations	50	5%
Total Possible	1000	100%

Grading Scale

Note: Your final grade will be based on 1,000 points, as noted above under “Graded Course Activities.”

Letter Grade	Percentage	Performance
4.0	≥ 92.5%	Excellent
3.5	88.0 – 92.4%	Very Good
3.0	81.0 – 87.9%	Good
2.5	75.0 – 80.9%	Fairly Good
2.0	70.0 – 74.9%	Satisfactory
1.5	65.0 – 69.9%	Poor
1.0	60.0 – 64.9%	Very Poor
0.0	≤ 59.9%	Failing

Final Grades may be graded on a curve: The curve will be adjusted to ensure the average course grade will be between 3.2 and 3.4, per Management Department policy, for MGT 409 as the capstone business course. This, however, does not preclude issuing lower individual grades, including grades of 1.0 or zero when deserved.

Late Assignments: Late assignments are not accepted. If you need to miss a quiz or the final group presentation, please talk with the professor as soon as possible.

Technology and Media

Email

You can reach out to me through D2L or 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

- Course Recordings: 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.
- Commercialized Lecture Notes: Commercialization of lecture notes and university-provided course materials is prohibited for this course.

Related Policies:

- [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 course 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.

Classroom Response Clickers

The students should use iClicker app for attendance recording. The attendance app will allow you to mark your attendance from the class till 10 minutes after the class starts.

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](#).

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.

Policies for Student Athletes

- [Student Athletes](#)

MSU COVID-19 Directives

COVID-19 information: This class will abide by all MSU directives concerning health and safety regarding COVID-19. Specifically, all students and instructors in this course will adhere to policies as detailed on [Together We Will](#).

Self-Monitoring & Exposure to COVID-19.

If feeling ill, students should contact MSU's COVID-19 hotline at 855-958-2678 or contact their health care provider. Faculty and staff should contact their primary care physician.

Health and Safety Compliance and reporting.

Those who come to MSU facilities must commit to the personal responsibility necessary for us to remain as safe as possible, including following the specific guidelines outlined in this syllabus and provided by MSU more broadly. There may be times when action will be necessary to reinforce expectations.

This classroom will be cleaned daily. Students are welcome to use disinfectant wipes to wipe shared surfaces. Students should keep personal items (e.g. cell phones, laptops, books, etc.) to themselves and clean.