

Strategy 302 — Business Strategy

Winter 2024

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Course Objectives

This course develops concepts and analytical frameworks for creating a sustainable competitive advantage. We adopt the perspective of a manager who has responsibility for a firm's performance. Such a manager needs to understand the basis for the current performance and identify the changes that are likely to affect future performance. The manager must then formulate and implement strategies using the firm's resources in order to compete successfully in its new environment. The strategy must define the scope of the firm's activities, the logic through which the activities result in better performance, and why the firm is able to carry out those activities better than its competitors.

The complexity of today's (and tomorrow's) competitive environment means that managers need to *think strategically* when confronting day-to-day issues. Our aim is to increase your ability to assume a leadership role in a company. We will do this in part by cultivating your ability to make well-grounded and insightful recommendations as to how your business should be competing.

In order to capture the pragmatic, action-oriented nature of the general manager's job and the complexity of the general manager's milieu, we teach this course through the case method. We supplement case discussions with readings, lectures, and conceptual analyses. A central goal is for you to develop internal frameworks and approaches for identifying and solving key strategic problems facing a business.

Course Materials and Preparation

■ *Course pack*

You are required to buy a course pack (available from the Kresge library; instructions here: <https://www.bus.umich.edu/kresgelibrary/services/coursematerials-instruction.html>).

■ *Preparation*

For the learning process to be effective, it is necessary that you prepare the cases/readings before class and actively participate in discussions during class. I expect you to be fully prepared for each class. Unless you have thought about and adopted a personal position, it is very hard to learn from others' contributions in the class. Place a premium on the logic behind your response. Use the concepts in the lecture notes to help you think about the case. You do not need to draw on information outside the case. It is also a good idea to talk about the cases with other students before class. Articulating your ideas in front of others and learning about their viewpoints will strengthen your strategy skills.

Evaluation

Your evaluation, or letter grade, is based on the standard Ross School of Business grading guidelines. Any changes to this distribution will be on the Ross website. Your evaluation will be determined by the following components:

- Case questions 10%
- In-class presentations 20%
- Strategic dilemma assignment 20%
- Quizzes 20%
- Group final 30%

Details about each of these components follow.

■ *Case questions*

The case questions grade depends on submitting the answers to the online questions for each case. These questions will be available on Canvas at least 72 hours before each class and need to be submitted by 10:00pm the night before the class.

Grading for each case question will be pass/fail, according to the following rubric:

Pass	Fail
Clearly written answer that uses course concepts and sound logic to derive a reasonable conclusion.	The answer was not submitted (late submissions are not accepted) or its connection to the course concepts was unclear or missing.
Clear effort was made to answer the question(s).	Little effort was put in to answer the question(s).

■ *In-class presentations*

Students will be assigned to present specific course content to the class several times during the term. This will usually be done with a group, but may also be done individually. I will discuss the details of this at the start of the course.

■ *Strategic dilemma assignment*

This individual assignment will ask you to describe and to analyze a strategic decision that a company is facing or did face within the last five years. The strategic dilemma should: (a) relate to concepts studied in the course; (b) be challenging, in that the answer should not be obvious; (c) allow for an elaboration of pros and cons behind the choice the company made or the options facing the company; and (d) stimulate a discussion that you think would interest your classmates.

The strategic dilemma is a short, self-contained mini-case that contains three parts: (i) a news article explaining a situation faced by a firm, (ii) two questions regarding what the firm

should do in that situation, and (iii) your proposed answers to these questions. We will discuss the assignment in detail in class.

This assignment has two rounds. In Round 1 (due on Tuesday, March 5th at 10:00 PM) you will submit a preliminary version of your strategic dilemma. Your peers will provide feedback on your analysis, including suggestions on how to improve your analysis and insight. The deadline to complete the peer evaluations is Thursday, March 14th at 10:00 PM. Then, in Round 2 (due on Tuesday, April 23rd at 10:00 PM), you can improve your strategic dilemma by incorporating the feedback received as well as any ideas you have had since Round 1 (you are free to change your dilemma in any way you want; you can even change which company you analyze).

The strategic dilemma will be graded following Round 2. Your strategic dilemma will determine 15% of your final grade. The quality of your peer evaluations will determine 5% of your final grade.

■ *Quizzes*

We will have two quizzes—on Tuesday, February 20th and Tuesday, April 2nd—during class. The quizzes will have multiple choice and short answer questions, and will cover the concepts from the lecture notes. Practice questions will be provided on Canvas prior to each quiz. These quizzes provide an opportunity for you to engage with the course material individually and to get an idea of your progression in the course.

■ *Group final*

The final for the course will be a group-based project, which will be discussed in class. The group-based assignments serve at least two educational objectives: 1) they provide an opportunity to practice your skills in strategic analysis and 2) they offer a chance to tap into the rich perspectives available in your team. Part of your group final grade will depend on the quality of your deliverable, while another part will be based on the ratings you receive by the other members of your group.

Office Hours

I encourage you to talk to me about any aspect of your work. I am very accessible. I will post my office hours as an announcement on Canvas.

Class Policies

The class policies detailed below are consistent with School policy:

1. **You are expected to attend every class session.** The only exception is absences due to sudden family or health emergencies attested to by a doctor's letter and a letter signed by you. All other absences (including for job-related reasons) will reduce your grade, up to and including Failure.
2. For fairness and consistency to all students, please do not request special treatment, such as "make-up" work. Note that Career Services can help you manage any job-related conflicts that might arise. Learning to make judgments and trade-offs, manage

- your time and negotiate are all part of your necessary training and development as a business leader.
3. **Please use the Attendance Reporting link** on your iMPact site to report any class absence. The direct link is: <http://www.bus.umich.edu/impact/Profile/ClassAttendance.aspx>. You do not need to email me separately.
 4. Late entries and early departures from class are not only violations of school policy, but also signs of disrespect for the instructor and your classmates. Leaving and re-entering the class during a class session disrupts everyone's learning, and will be noted in evaluating your class participation.
 5. The slides used in class (if any) will be uploaded to Canvas after class.

Additional Information

■ ***Health and Safety***

For the safety of all students, faculty, and staff on campus, it is important for each of us to be mindful of safety measures that have been put in place for our protection. By returning to campus, you have acknowledged your responsibility for protecting the collective health of our community. Your participation in courses on an in-person basis is conditional upon your adherence to all safety measures mandated by the State of Michigan and the University, including maintaining physical distancing of six feet from others, and properly wearing a face covering in class. Other applicable safety measures may be described in the [Wolverine Culture of Care](#) and the [University's Face Covering Policy for COVID-19](#). Your ability to participate in this course in-person as well as your grade may be impacted by failure to comply with campus safety measures. Individuals seeking to request an accommodation related to the face covering requirement under the Americans with Disabilities Act should contact the [Office for Institutional Equity](#). If you are unable or unwilling to adhere to these safety measures while in a face-to-face class setting, you will be required to participate on a remote basis (if available) or to disenroll from the class. I also encourage you to review the [Statement of Students Rights and Responsibilities](#), which includes a COVID-related Statement Addendum.

■ ***Wellness and Mental Health***

As a student, you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance or reduce a student's ability to participate in daily activities. University of Michigan is committed to advancing the mental health and wellbeing of its students. If you or someone you know is feeling overwhelmed, depressed, and/or in need of support, services are available. You can learn more about the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus [here](#), including our campus' office of [Counseling and Psychological Services](#) ("CAPS"). You may also find helpful the [well-being resources for students](#) offered through the University's office of student life.

The Ross School of Business has a CAPS Embedded Counselor available to its students. Embedded Counselors are located in school/college buildings and services are tailored to the school's climate. For more information, please visit the [CAPS Embedded Model](https://caps.umich.edu/caps-embedded-model) site. [caps.umich.edu/caps-embedded-model](mailto:jkaplan@umich.edu). To schedule, please email [Julie Kaplan](mailto:jkaplan@umich.edu), LMSW. Also, the services offered by CAPS have been adapted to the unique needs of our community during COVID. You can schedule a tele-health appointment remotely from their home page. You may also find helpful their resources directly addressing mental health and wellness during COVID [here](#). If you have an urgent matter when CAPS is closed, please call 734-764-8312 to connect with [CAPS After Hours](#).

■ *Academic Integrity and Community Values*

Personal integrity and professionalism are fundamental values of the Ross School community. You have a duty to be familiar with and understand the Ross School's Statement of Community Values, the Ross School Academic Honor Code, and the Ross School Code of Student Conduct including all campus public health policies. **In light of COVID our community has enhanced the Code of Student Conduct to include our commitment to each other and adherence to campus and School public health policies.** Each of these, including a Statement of Student Rights and Responsibilities, may be found in the Ross School Impact on [Ross Community Values](#). In addition every student at the University of Michigan accepts the rights and responsibilities of membership in the University's academic and social community. These rights and responsibilities are clearly laid out in [The Statement](#). By enrolling in this course you confirm that you have read and understood these statements and policies, and further that you agree to abide by them. The Ross Community Values site contains valuable information and links on writing and how to check to make sure you have not plagiarized the work of others. Claimed ignorance of these codes and policies will be viewed as invalid should a violation take place. In all cases if you have questions please address them with the professor as far **in advance** as possible.

Any violation of the Ross School Academic Honor Code such as plagiarism, otherwise passing off anyone else's work as your own, unauthorized collaboration, use of materials generated for use during past offerings of this course, or any form of cheating will be referred to the Community Values Committee. Possible penalties include course failure with a permanent notation of an honor policy violation on your transcript and even expulsion. As a community we are all still adapting and learning how this applies to hybrid and remote learning environments, but the same principles of academic integrity apply.

■ *Accommodations*

The University of Michigan is committed to providing equal opportunity for participation in all programs, services and activities. Students wishing to receive testing accommodations must register with the University of Michigan [Services for Students with Disabilities \(SSD\)](#) office as soon as possible. Students must then submit their Verified Individualized Services and Accommodations (VISA) form online as early as possible, **but no later than two weeks prior to the first test or quiz for which accommodations are requested**. Accommodations arrangements are not guaranteed for students who submit their VISA form with less than two weeks' notice.

Requests must be sent using the [Ross Accommodations Request Form](#) and must include a scanned or photographed copy of the VISA form. This form only needs to be submitted once during your academic career with Ross unless your accommodations eligibility expires.

In rare cases, the need for an accommodation arises after the two week deadline has passed (example: a broken wrist). In these cases, students should still contact SSD and the Ross Accommodations Coordinator. However, due to logistical constraints, we cannot guarantee that an accommodation can be made after the two week deadline has passed.

Questions can be directed to the Ross Accommodations Coordinator at RossAccommodationsCoordinator@umich.edu.

■ ***Recordings***

Faculty may choose to record some or all of the delivery of the course material. These recordings may be made available to other students in your assigned course section to support learning of those affected by illness or unforeseen circumstances. If you have questions about class recording policies, please contact the faculty the first week of class.

Students may not record or distribute any class activity without written permission from the instructor, except as necessary as part of approved accommodations for students with disabilities. This applies to both the live recording of an actual class, as well as the duplication of any recordings shared by the faculty with the course participants. Any approved recordings may only be used for the student's own private use.

■ ***Class Materials and Policy Related to their Use***

To enhance health and safety, improve sustainability, and ensure equal learning access, all materials for Ross courses will be made available in electronic format only. Printed copies of course paks ("TextPaks") are available in addition to the electronic version. Please see our course Canvas site and/or contact the [Kresge Library](#) for further information.

All materials generated for the course are intended for use by current students in this class only, unless you have the permission of your instructor. You are not permitted to use materials related to the class that were generated by the professor or students in previous versions of this course. A violation of this policy may be a violation of the Ross Community Values Code and may result in disciplinary action.