

**MBA P720**  
**Strategic Management**  
**Fall 2026 Course Outline**

**Strategic Management Area**  
**DeGroote School of Business**  
**McMaster University**

**COURSE OBJECTIVE**

As the capstone to McMaster's MBA program, this course is designed to unify the functional knowledge you gained during the program. This course will also give you a working knowledge of how firms gain and sustain competitive advantage. In sum, this course will enhance your capacity to do the job of a general manager responsible for setting strategy and managing performance.

**INSTRUCTOR AND CONTACT INFORMATION**

Instructor

**Dr. Brent McKnight**  
[bmcknight@mcmaster.ca](mailto:bmcknight@mcmaster.ca)

TA

**Vineet Nagia (C02)**  
[vineet.mcmaster@gmail.com](mailto:vineet.mcmaster@gmail.com)

**Hasnain Khan (C01)**  
[khanm111@mcmaster.ca](mailto:khanm111@mcmaster.ca)

Office Hours: By Appointment – Zoom and in-person office hours will be posted around critical deliverable due dates

**Course Website:** <http://avenue.mcmaster.ca>

**COURSE ELEMENTS**

|                 |     |                |     |             |     |                 |     |
|-----------------|-----|----------------|-----|-------------|-----|-----------------|-----|
| Avenue:         | Yes | Leadership:    | Yes | IT skills:  | No  | Global view:    | Yes |
| Participation:  | Yes | Ethics:        | Yes | Numeracy:   | No  | Written skills: | Yes |
| Evidence-based: | Yes | Innovation:    | Yes | Group work: | Yes | Oral skills:    | Yes |
| Experiential:   | Yes | Guest speaker: | Yes | Final Exam: | No  |                 |     |

## COURSE DESCRIPTION

The central pursuit of strategic management is building and sustaining competitive advantage - and this course is structured around the analysis and practices of generating, sustaining, and valuing those differences. We apply this framework across a full range of strategic contexts.

The course is designed for managers at every level, not only those in senior leadership roles. Strategic decisions are made, shaped, and sometimes blocked in the middle of organizations, and the course takes that reality seriously throughout.

The primary vehicle for learning is a live case: a real company, analyzed in real time over the full term. The live case is supported by the case method, readings, simulations, in-class exercises, and written reflections.

## LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to complete the following key tasks:

- Apply a consistent analytical framework pertaining to generating, sustaining, and valuing competitive differences.
- Evaluate the durability of competitive advantages by identifying the conditions under which they erode, are imitated, or invert
- Assess corporate-level scope decisions including which businesses to own (horizontal diversification), when to access capabilities through partnerships rather than ownership (cooperative strategy), and when to extend competitive position internationally (geographic diversification).
- Analyze the organizational conditions that enable or constrain strategy execution, including how culture, identity, and structure dynamics shape the gap between intended and realized strategy.
- Synthesize course frameworks into a coherent, defensible position on what strategy is for and how it is created in practice.

## REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS

Course content, readings and case materials

- <http://avenue.mcmaster.ca>

\$ FREE

Cases and Readings

- Course Pack <https://hbsp.harvard.edu/import/1438540>

\$ FREE

TopHat membership

- An email invitation will be sent to you. See below for details.

\$ FREE

Airline Simulation

- credit card required

\$ 39.95 USD

## TOP HAT

We will be using the Top Hat ([www.tophat.com](http://www.tophat.com)) classroom response system prior to class.

You can visit the Top Hat Overview (<https://success.tophat.com/s/article/Student-Top-Hat-Overview-and-Getting-Started-Guide>) within the Top Hat Success Center which outlines how you will register for a Top Hat account, as well as provides a brief overview to get you up and running on the system.

An email invitation will be sent to you, but if you don't receive this email, you can register by simply visiting our course website. Our Course Join Code and websites are:

**C01 890818** <https://app-ca.tophat.com/e/890818/>

**C02 424289** <https://app-ca.tophat.com/e/424289/>

Should you require assistance with Top Hat at any time, please contact their Support Team directly by way of email ([support@tophat.com](mailto:support@tophat.com)), the in-app support button, or by calling 1-888-663-5491.

## EVALUATION

The course offers a balance of evaluation methods. Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

### *Components and Weights*

|                 |                                         |      |
|-----------------|-----------------------------------------|------|
| Simulation      | Strategy Airline Simulation (shared)    | 30%  |
| Engagement      | Classroom Engagement (individual)       | 25%  |
| Final Case Exam | Final case exam (shared and individual) | 45%  |
| Total           |                                         | 100% |

Note, students will remain in the same group for each of the shared components of the course.

### *Strategy Airline Simulation (30% shared)*

In the strategy airline simulation, you will run a fledgling regional airline in a computer simulated world. This simulation provides an environment where students can design, implement, and refine their strategy in a dynamic context. Students compete in groups against their classmates, making decisions across functional management areas related to aircraft acquisition, marketing, operations, human resource development, and financing.

The simulation is an exciting way to explore the complexities and challenges of running a business and integrating multiple functional areas.

Students will work together in groups of about 5, to compete against their classmates in the airline simulation. The airline simulation takes place in two stages.

**Practice and dashboard stage (20%).** Students will gain access to the simulation in mid September and begin a series of 3 practice rounds through early October. The objective of this first stage is two-fold. First, it should familiarize students with the simulation and how the system functions. Second, students will use these practice rounds to develop a dashboard support tool to assist strategic decision making during the simulation itself. This assignment responds to requests by students for opportunities to develop data analytical skills and experiences.

This will include a ***Dashboard Support Spreadsheet*** and a ***Strategy PowerPoint Deck***.

For more details about this assignment, see the Simulation Dashboard Assignment pdf on Avenue.

Late dashboards (spreadsheet and PowerPoint) will be penalized at a rate of 25% per day starting the Wednesday following the due date.

**Simulation Performance (10%)**

Teams will compete against one another for the glory of having their name on the Airline Simulation trophy. Teams will complete three rounds asynchronously in groups and then finish the simulation in-class. Check the Course schedule near the end of the syllabus for detailed dates.

In this simulation you compete against other teams in this class. Your team's simulation grade is determined using a ranked score of stock price (50%) and cumulative net income (50%); ties go to cumulative net income. In addition to the highest grade, the names of the team members with the highest performance will be immortalized on a plaque on a course trophy displayed prominently at the Ron Joyce Centre. Bragging rights included.

***Classroom Engagement (25% individual)***

**Pre-Class Quizzes and End of Class Reflection (10%).** Each class in this course focuses on a particular topic important for properly understanding strategic management. To guide your learning, prior to class you will answer questions pertaining to a) the prepared case, and b) strategic concepts and readings. The Top Hat platform will be used to facilitate this and aggregate answers will be shared during class to enhance learning.

At the end of each class, you will write short reflections. These will be written in booklets that will be collected at the end of each class. These will constitute half of this portion of your grade (5% of your final grade).

**Oral Participation (15%).** The daily classroom discussion represents a unique opportunity for you to develop and enhance your confidence and skill in articulating a personal position, reacting to new ideas, and receiving and providing critical feedback from a group of assertive and demanding colleagues. Much of your learning will come from these classroom experiences.

You are expected to come to each class having read cases and assigned readings with a readiness and willingness to contribute to class discussion. Close to half of each class will be focused on case discussions. It is not possible to contribute without having sufficiently prepared for the case. Analyzing the case using the tools and frameworks from the textbook and past classes will give you valuable insights.

A good contribution involves presenting a clear opinion, expressing it civilly, and supporting the opinion with sound logic. Every student shares the responsibility of creating an environment where each member of the class feels comfortable offering his or her opinion. Learning from others and contributing to the learning of others through the experience and insights you share is a key part of this learning process. Contribution will be graded based on quality, quantity, and consistency. Some of the things that will determine a contribution include:

- a) Relevance – Do your comments speak directly to the issues and concepts being addressed? Do they extend our understanding of those issues or concepts? Do they reflect your adequate preparation to participate in the discussion?
- b) Additivity – Do your comments reflect active listening to the comments of other class members? Have they incorporated insights introduced earlier and built upon them?
- c) Substance – Do your comments make a real contribution to the ideas being exchanged? Has anything new been gained from your contribution to the discussion?
- d) Persuasiveness – Have your points been well articulated, argued, and supported? Are your arguments convincing?
- e) Questioning – Have your comments reasonably questioned the comments of others or challenged their assumptions without disparaging the person who offered them?
- f) Amount of participation (this does NOT mean dominating the discussion, rather frequency of additive comments).

Participation will be graded by an in-class TA and/or peer grading.

Class should be treated as a professional meeting. If you are unable to attend a class or if you are going to be late, please email the professor *prior* to the start of class. Failure to do so will result in penalties to your classroom engagement grade. Students are permitted one absence per term

### ***Live Case Exam (20% individual) and (25% shared)***

Your final exam is a live case that starts on the first day of class. On the first day of class, real executives will make a presentation in your class detailing their organization, industry, and their strategic problem(s). You will receive an approximately 5-page case detailing the organization along with documents as appropriate. In addition, you will continue to engage the client, asking questions and clarifying the problem throughout the duration of the course.

You may be asked to sign a non-disclosure agreement (NDA) in support of this project.

The final exam takes place in four parts; two of which you will work in your groups to accomplish.

### PART 1: Live Case - Analysis (**Shared 15%**)

In part one, students will work in their course groups to conduct analysis of both the resources and capabilities within the firm as well as the external environment in which the firm is operating. Students will use knowledge gained in the course to apply strategic analysis frameworks to this analysis. This case *analysis* will be graded both on thoroughness and detail as well as how well the analysis highlights the “so what” implications of the internal and external analysis.

**Note:** While a SWOT analysis can be a useful brainstorming exercise, the strategy tools taught in the class are better ways of organizing this information. Strengths and weaknesses are best organized through VRIO analysis, value chain, and strategic understanding through generic strategy identification and strategy diamond resource analysis whereas opportunities and threats are best organized through PEST, Porter’s, Strategic Groups. Seek to show a holistic understanding of how these tools inter-relate.

Analysis portion of report **8-10 pages**, 12-point Times New Roman, single space, 1-inch margins. This page count is inclusive of exhibits and figures. Endnotes can take additional pages as necessary. Make sure to use figures to economize on space. The report must be completed in essay format.

Cite your work using the end note formatting found here though I am comfortable with Chicago or APA style: <https://library.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/businesscitation.pdf>

Student groups will submit their solutions through dropbox in Avenue. Submissions will be subject to the turnitin.com service and will be reviewed in accordance with the university’s academic integrity policy. Please be careful to read the case exam instructions carefully and to review the course AI policy.

Live Case analysis will be due **Sunday October 18<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm** on Avenue. Late submissions will be penalized at a rate of 25% per day beginning on the first Wednesday after the due date.

### PART 2: Live Case Strategic Gap (**Individual 5%**)

Students will submit a document outlining the strategic gap they intend to address in your Live Case Exam solution. Strategic gaps constitute mismatches between and among a firm’s internal resources/capabilities, the external environment, and the firm’s intended and realized strategy. Properly articulating a strategic gap is critical to a comprehensive live case solution as it focuses effort on a strategic solution. *These strategic gap submissions must be completed individually.*

Live Case Strategic Gaps will consist of **maximum 2 pages**, 12-point Times New Roman, single space, 1-inch margins. Additional pages for supporting or illustrative figures and tables are permitted.

Cite your work using the end note formatting found here though I am comfortable with Chicago or APA style: <https://library.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/businesscitation.pdf>

Students will submit their solutions through dropbox in Avenue. Submissions will be subject to the turnitin.com service and will be reviewed in accordance with the university's academic integrity policy. Please review the course AI policy.

Your Live Case Strategic Gap will be due to **Sunday November 1<sup>st</sup> at 11:59pm** on Avenue. Late submissions will be penalized at a rate of 25% per day beginning on the first Wednesday after the due date.

Students will be assigned a grade of 0% for missing work, 70% for meets expectation and 100% for exceeds expectations. No written feedback will be provided but can be sought during office hours or by appointment.

### PART 3: Live Case Exam (**Individual 15%**)

Students will submit solutions to the live case exam. These solutions constitute the recommendations you as a consultant to the client are making. This case exam will be graded on how well the proposed solution demonstrates an understanding of the client's strategy, an assessment of strengths and weaknesses including internal and external strategic fit, as well as how proposed solutions are argued to improve strategic fit and performance. *Each case solution must be completed individually.*

Live Case Exam portion **maximum of 7 pages**, 12-point Times New Roman, single space, 1-inch margins. This page count is *inclusive* of exhibits and figures. The report must be completed in essay format. Endnotes can take additional pages as necessary. Make sure to use figures to economize on space. The report must be completed in essay format. Long reports will be penalized at a rate of 10% per page.

Cite your work using the end note formatting found here though I am comfortable with Chicago or APA style: <https://library.mcmaster.ca/sites/default/files/businesscitation.pdf>. Cite your group report like an existing published work such as: "Group 5 Report, 2024". Do not append your group report to the submission as this will activate the plagiarism detection tool.

Students will submit their solutions through dropbox in Avenue. Submissions will be subject to the turnitin.com service and will be reviewed in accordance with the university's academic integrity policy. Please be careful to read the case exam instructions carefully and please review the course AI policy.

Your final solution to the case will be due to **Sunday November 22<sup>nd</sup> at 11:59pm** on Avenue. Exams that are handed in late will be penalized at a rate of 25% per day.

The case exam is considered the final comprehensive evaluation component of this course. As such, performance on this exam is critical for successful completion of this course.

### PART 4: Presentation to Executives (**Shared 10%**)

Following submission of the individual portion of the case exam, students will work in their course groups. They will share and then discuss their individual case exam solutions to arrive at a final recommendation and solution for the client executives. In these groups, students will then

prepare a **10-minute** presentation with supporting documentation for delivery as a final exam. Groups will have an **additional 5 minutes** to answer questions. This presentation will take place on the final day of class during normal class time.

Presentations will be graded based on four elements:

1. **Strategic Gap:** The presentation of a clear, concise, and well supported strategic gap. This includes supporting the explanation with key takeaways from strategic analysis covered in the course (ie Porter's, Value chain, Strategy Diamond, etc.). This problem may be articulated in terms of a mismatch between a firm's strategy and external environment and/or internal capabilities and features.
2. **Strategic Solution:** A clearly articulated strategic solution including why that solution is appropriate for the identified problem. Stronger solutions clearly explain how the strategic solution addresses mismatches of strategy and external and/or internal analyses.
3. **Implementation.** A well detailed implementation plan that includes short, medium, and long-term action items, key performance indicators (KPIs) and risks. Financials are required. While solutions do not need to be fully costed, groups should be able to answer questions about costs of the proposed strategy, revenue impacts and rough payback periods. *A lack of financials will result in a 20% grade penalty.*
4. **Professionalism.** Presentations should be professional which includes appropriate attire, clarity of presentation, and well answered questions. Stronger presentations pay attention to client branding including current logos and appropriate firm colours.

*Please submit presentations files and any other material through Avenue prior to the start of class on the day of presentation.*

| ACTIVITY                         | DELIVERY     | DESCRIPTION                                                                                                                                              | TOOL(S)                                                                                |
|----------------------------------|--------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Live Lecture and Case Discussion | Synch        | Lecture content taught in conjunction of assigned cases.<br><br>Core content available in PowerPoint                                                     | Lecture PowerPoint available in Avenue                                                 |
| Readings                         | Asynch       | Tied to weekly discussion prompts, lecture content, and case learning                                                                                    | Reading links in Avenue, assigned case readings from course pack, and textbook reading |
| Class Preparation and Reflection | Synch/Asynch | Prior to class students will answer questions to test understanding of case and reading content. Following class students will reflect on their learning | TopHat and Pen/Paper                                                                   |
| Simulation                       | Synch/Asynch | Strategy simulation games to be conducted asynchronously in practice and asynchronously and synchronously for the final simulation                       | Interpretive Solutions                                                                 |

### ***Grade Conversion***

At the end of the course your overall percentage grade will be converted to your letter grade in accordance with the following conversion scheme.

| LETTER GRADE | PERCENT | POINTS |
|--------------|---------|--------|
| <b>A+</b>    | 90-100  | 12     |
| <b>A</b>     | 85-89   | 11     |
| <b>A-</b>    | 80-84   | 10     |
| <b>B+</b>    | 77-79   | 9      |
| <b>B</b>     | 73-76   | 8      |
| <b>B-</b>    | 70-72   | 7      |
| <b>F</b>     | 00-69   | 0      |

### ***Communication and Feedback***

Students that are uncomfortable in directly approaching an instructor regarding a course concern may send a confidential and anonymous email to the respective Area Chair or Associate Dean:

<http://mbastudent.degroote.mcmaster.ca/contact/anonymous/>

Students who wish to correspond with instructors or TAs directly via email must send messages that originate from their official McMaster University email account. This protects the confidentiality and sensitivity of information as well as confirms the identity of the student. Emails regarding course issues should NOT be sent to the Administrative Assistant.

Instructors are encouraged to conduct an informal course review with students by Week #4 to allow time for modifications in curriculum delivery. Instructors should provide evaluation feedback for at least 10% of the final grade to students prior to Week #8 in the term.

|                      |
|----------------------|
| <b>GENERATIVE AI</b> |
|----------------------|

Effective use of generative AI is an increasingly important skill in the workforce. To help you prepare for the workforce, I am supportive of students using generative AI in the process of completing assignments for this course.

Used well, AI can sharpen your analysis: it can stress-test recommendations, surface a counterargument you had not considered, or help you make sense of information faster.

However, used poorly, it becomes a substitute for the judgment this course is meant to build and it permits an offloading of the work that is intended to facilitate your learning. Using generative AI poorly in your career can have critical consequences as managers expect you to process, refine, and respond to the results of AI prompts before engaging with your work.

The expectation in the course is not to avoid generative AI but to use it mindfully, deliberately, transparently, and in a way that extends your own thinking rather than replacing it.

A more complete set of instructions for mindfully using Generative AI is to be found on Avenue2Learn and will be discussed in class.

## ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behaviour in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behaviour can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: “Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty”), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at:

[www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity)

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

1. Plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one’s own or for which other credit has been obtained.
2. Improper collaboration in group work.
3. Copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations

## AUTHENTICITY/PLAGIARISM DETECTION

*Some courses may* use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through the plagiarism detection software must inform the Instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

**All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld** (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster’s use of Turnitin.com please go to [www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity](http://www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity).

## RESEARCH USING HUMAN SUBJECTS

Research involving human participants is premised on a fundamental moral commitment to advancing human welfare, knowledge, and understanding. As a research intensive institution, McMaster University shares this commitment in its promotion of responsible research. The fundamental imperative of research involving human participation is respect for human dignity and well-being. To this end, the University endorses the ethical principles cited in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans:  
<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca>

McMaster University has mandated its Research Ethics Boards to ensure that all research investigations involving human participants are in compliance with the Tri-Council Policy Statement. The University is committed, through its Research Ethics Boards, to assisting the research community in identifying and addressing ethical issues inherent in research, recognizing that all members of the University share a commitment to maintaining the highest possible standards in research involving humans.

If you are conducting original research, it is vital that you behave in an ethical manner. For example, everyone you speak to must be made aware of your reasons for eliciting their responses and consent to providing information. Furthermore, you must ensure everyone understands that participation is entirely voluntary. Please refer to the following website for more information about McMaster University's research ethics guidelines:

<http://reo.mcmaster.ca/>

Organizations that you are working with are likely to prefer that some information be treated as confidential. Ensure that you clarify the status of all information that you receive from your client. You **MUST** respect this request and cannot present this information in class or communicate it in any form, nor can you discuss it outside your group. Furthermore, you must continue to respect this confidentiality even after the course is over.

## COURSES WITH AN ONLINE ELEMENT

*Some courses may* use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course.

The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

## MISSED ACADEMIC WORK

### *Missed Mid-Term Examinations / Tests / Class Participation*

Please do not use the online [McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#) as this is for Undergraduate students only. The MBA program will not accept an MSAF.

When students miss regularly scheduled term work which contributes 10% or more to the final grade, for legitimate reasons as determined by the [DSB Student Services – Academic Office](#) (DSSAO (DSB Student Services Academic Office)), the activity necessary to compensate for the missed work will be determined by the course instructor. The compensatory activities assigned will vary with the nature of the course and the missed requirement. They include, but are not restricted to, an alternative assignment, a rescheduled midterm exam, or re-weighting the marks for the missed component to other mark components. Documentation explaining such missed work must be provided to the DSSAO (DSB Student Services Academic Office) **within five (5) working days** of the scheduled date for completion of the work.

Acceptable reasons for missed work, along with the [Petition for Missed Term Work](#) and the [MBA Student McMaster University Student Health Certificate](#), can be found on the DeGroote MBA Student website ([mbastudent.degroote.mcmaster.ca](http://mbastudent.degroote.mcmaster.ca)). Please direct any questions about acceptable documentation to the MBA Academic Advisors ([askmba@mcmaster.ca](mailto:askmba@mcmaster.ca)).

University policy states that a student may submit a **maximum of three (3) Petition for Missed Term Work** per academic year, after which the student must meet with the Director of the program.

If term work is missed without an approved reason, students will receive a grade of zero (0) for that component.

### **Missed Final Examinations**

Students must be available for the duration of the posted exam period regardless of their personal exam schedule. This is to ensure student availability throughout the entire exam period in the event that an exam must be rescheduled due to unforeseen circumstances (university closure, power outage, storm policy, etc.). A student who misses a final examination without valid reason will receive a mark of 0 on the examination.

Students who have missed a final exam for a valid reason can apply to the DSSAO ([DSB Student Services Academic Office](#)) to write a deferred examination by submitting an [Application for Deferring a Final Exam](#) with supporting documentation. The application must be made **within five days** of the scheduled exam.

The [Application for Deferring a Final Exam](#) and the [MBA Student McMaster University Student Health Certificate](#) can be found on the DeGroote MBA Current Student website ([mbastudent.degroote.mcmaster.ca](http://mbastudent.degroote.mcmaster.ca))

Deferred examination privileges, if granted, are normally satisfied during the deferred examination period as set by the [Office of the Registrar](#).

Requests for a second deferral or rescheduling of a deferred examination will not be considered.

## STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY SERVICES

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) offers various support services for students with disabilities. Students must activate their accommodation(s) (e.g., extra-time, alone room, etc.) via [mySAS](#) portal at the beginning of each term, normally, within the first three (3) weeks of classes. If a student with a disability chooses NOT to take advantage of an SAS accommodation and chooses to sit for a regular exam, a petition for relief may not be filed after the examination is complete. The SAS website is:

<http://sas.mcmaster.ca>

### *Use of Test Accommodations at McMaster University Burlington Campus Ron Joyce Centre*

Whereas Student Accessibility Services (SAS), on Main Campus, determines all MBA student accommodations, the MBA Faculty Office manages the coordination of accommodations for tests, midterms, and exams at the Ron Joyce Centre in Burlington.

### **Process for Students**

- Student Accessibility Services (SAS) now uses the online [mySAS](#) Portal for graduate students to share accommodation letters with their instructors and Faculty/Program. Students are responsible for activating their accommodations each term through the [mySAS](#) Portal. Once activated, an approved accommodation letter will be automatically sent to the instructors associated with the student's enrolled courses for that term.
- Students must engage the DSSAO (DSB Student Services Academic Office) to implement their accommodation(s) (e.g., extra-time, alone room, etc.) for each upcoming test, midterm, or exam, at **least two weeks in advance**. Students can do this by emailing DeGroote MBA SAS scheduling office at [DSBSAS@mcmaster.ca](mailto:DSBSAS@mcmaster.ca) or completing the [Accommodation Implementation form](#). If a student cannot meet this deadline, they should contact [DSBSAS@mcmaster.ca](mailto:DSBSAS@mcmaster.ca) to discuss alternative arrangements. The program is committed to exploring flexibilities where possible to support students.
- All tests, midterms, and exams are booked synchronously with the class's start time. Any deviations from the start time (e.g. start earlier than the class to enable completion at the same end time) requires a discussion with their instructor on protocol at the time of accommodation activation.
- Students will leverage the accommodation (e.g., extra-time, alone room, etc.), in a designated testing room. Rooms will be booked according to the student's SAS accommodation. Unless the accommodation states otherwise, students should expect that they will be writing in a room with other students. One or more invigilators will always be in the room.
- Following the request to implement the accommodation(s), [dsbsas@mcmaster.ca](mailto:dsbsas@mcmaster.ca) will reach out to the student with their test, midterm, or exam details, including the date, time, and room number. As there may be other students writing tests in the room, we ask that students enter the room quietly and leave all personal items at the front of the room.

All policies and procedures, including restroom access, how extra-time is allocated for assessments under Universal Design, and the submission of memory aids in advance, are consistent with those of SAS on Main Campus. The only variance in procedure is communication around, and physical location of, assessment. There is not a dedicated testing space at RJC. Existing classrooms and lecture halls will be used for most testing. All SAS-approved accommodations will be honoured by our staff; however, core testing elements are not eliminated in alternative testing formats. Students should expect and plan for invigilation, incidental noise, and other potential distractions.

### ON-LINE PROCTORING

**Some courses may** use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

### CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [\*Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities\*](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online.**

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in University activities. Student disruptions or behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

### ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [\*RISO\*](#) policy. Students should submit their request to the SEAO ***normally within 10 working days*** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

## COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

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## POTENTIAL MODIFICATIONS TO THE COURSE

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COURSE POLICIES

Your registration and continuous participation (e.g. on A2L, in the classroom, etc.) to the various learning activities of MBA P720 will be considered to be an implicit acknowledgement of the course policies outlined above, or of any other that may be announced during lecture and/or on A2L. **It is your responsibility to read this course outline, to familiarize yourself with the course policies and to act accordingly.**

Lack of awareness of the course policies **cannot be invoked** at any point during this course for failure to meet them. It is your responsibility to ask for clarification on any policies that you do not understand.

|                        |
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| <b>COURSE SCHEDULE</b> |
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### BUSADMIN P720 - Strategic Management

| Date                            | Overview and Learning Goals                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Readings and Cases                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Dates and Deadlines                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1-Week of Sep 7 <sup>th</sup>   | <b>Introduction to Strategic Management</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding strategic management</li> <li>Live case introduction</li> <li>Introduction to the course</li> </ul>                                                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Class 1 Readings</u> available through Avenue</li> <li>Live Case Presentation in Class</li> </ul>                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 2-Week of Sep 14 <sup>th</sup>  | <b>External analysis for a changing environment</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Adding dynamism to industry analysis</li> <li>Strategic groups</li> <li>Uncertainty, foresight, and visioning</li> </ul>                                                                         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><u>Class 2 Readings</u> available through Avenue</li> <li>In Class Exercise</li> </ul>                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |
| 3-Week of Sep 21 <sup>st</sup>  | <b>Who decides whether your difference is valuable?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How to generate valuable differences</li> <li>Understanding the basis and scope of advantage</li> <li>How different is optimal?</li> <li>Value Chain analysis</li> </ul>                     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Case:</b> Ferrari: Shifting to Carbon Neutrality</li> <li><u>Class 3 Readings</u> available through Avenue</li> </ul>                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Simulation Practice Round 1 due Saturday September 26<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> <li><i>Live Case Questions Due Sunday September 27<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> </ul>       |
| Week of Sep 28 <sup>th</sup>    | Truth and Reconciliation – No Class for Wednesday class<br>The Tuesday class will occur and complete Class 4 – Where do resources and capabilities come from and how do they evolve?                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Simulation Practice Round 2 due Wednesday September 30<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> <li><i>Simulation Practice Round 3 due Sunday October 4<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> </ul> |
| 4 – Week of Oct 5 <sup>th</sup> | <b>Where do resources and capabilities come from and how do they evolve?</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Horizontal Diversification</li> <li>Vertical Integration – Make vs Buy and Build Borrow Buy framework</li> <li>Building resource-based competitive advantage</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Case:</b> Chegg, Inc.: Getting Schooled by ChatGPT</li> <li><u>Class 4 Readings</u> available through Avenue</li> <li>In Class Exercise (one laptop per group needed)</li> </ul>                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Simulation Dashboard due Friday 9<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> <li><i>Simulation Round 1 due Sunday 11<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> </ul>                                      |
| 5-Week of Oct 12 <sup>th</sup>  | <b>Analyzing strategic alliances as a mechanism to compete</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Understanding strategic alliances</li> <li>Understanding mergers and acquisitions</li> </ul>                                                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><b>Case:</b> Tiffany and Swatch: Lessons from an International Strategic Alliance</li> <li><u>Class 5 Readings</u> available through Avenue</li> <li>Workshop: <b>Live Case Strategic Gap</b></li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li><i>Simulation Round 2 due Thursday 15<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> <li><i>Live Case Group Analysis due Sunday October 18<sup>th</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> </ul>                       |

|                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|--------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Week of Oct 19<sup>th</sup></b>   | <b>Building and sustaining ecosystems to drive strategy</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Alliances, platforms, and ecosystems</li> <li>• Disruptive technologies</li> <li>• Regulatory arbitrage</li> </ul>                              | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Case:</b> The strategic transformation of John Deere: Precision Agriculture, AI, and the Internet of Things</li> <li>• <u>Class 6 Readings</u> available through Avenue</li> </ul> |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>6-Week of Oct 26<sup>th</sup></b> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>In Class Simulation</b></li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Completing Rounds 4-8 in class</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Simulation Round 3 prior to start of class</i></li> <li>• <i>Live Case Individual – Strategic Gap Due Sunday November 1<sup>st</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> </ul> |
| <b>Week of Nov 2<sup>nd</sup></b>    | In Class Working Week for Live Case                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Workshop: Live Case Individual Strategic Solution</b></li> </ul>                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>7-Week of Nov 9<sup>th</sup></b>  | <b>Strategic considerations when expanding internationally</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Strategies for entering foreign markets</li> <li>• Operating a global firm</li> </ul>                                                        | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Case:</b> Tim Hortons: Bringing Canada's iconic coffee to China</li> <li>• <u>Class 7 Readings</u> available through Avenue</li> </ul>                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>8-Week of Nov 16<sup>th</sup></b> | <b>Strategizing through a changing organization</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Growth and competitive advantage</li> <li>• Organizational design and structure</li> <li>• Organizational culture, capabilities and strategy</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Case:</b> Corporate Strategy at Berkshire Partners</li> <li>• <u>Class 8 Readings</u> available through Avenue</li> </ul>                                                          | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <i>Live Case Individual – Strategic Solution Due Sunday November 22<sup>nd</sup> at 11:59pm</i></li> </ul>                                                        |
| <b>9-Week of Nov 23<sup>rd</sup></b> | <b>“What is Strategy” revisited</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Intended and Realized Strategy</li> <li>• Improvisation in Organizations</li> <li>• Giving Voice to Values</li> </ul>                                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Case:</b> Honda (distributed in class)</li> <li>• <u>Class 9 Readings</u> available through Avenue</li> </ul>                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
| <b>Week of Nov 30<sup>th</sup></b>   | Final Case Presentations                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | Live Case presentations to client                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                                                            |

## Learning Objectives and Readings<sup>1</sup>

### *Class 1 - Introduction to Strategic Management*

**Central Question** Sustainable competitive advantage is the holy grail of strategy — but is it fact or fiction? And as a manager, what is your role in the quest?

#### **Learning Objectives**

1. Explain what strategy is and why it's harder than it sounds
2. Explain why trying to build one permanent, lasting advantage might be the wrong goal
3. Describe the difference between strategic management and planning
4. Identify what a strategic gap is and why it is important for strategic management.

#### **FURTHER READING**

- Porter, M.E. (1996) What is Strategy (Course pack – HBR article)

### *Class 2 - External analysis for a changing environment*

**Central Question** What competitive differences will actually matter in the future — and what forces are already working to erode them before you get there?

#### **Learning Objectives**

1. Use Porter's Five Forces to explain why some industries are more profitable than others
2. Name the conditions under which Five Forces analysis breaks down — including platforms, regulatory capture, industry convergence, and missing complementors
3. Combine PEST factors with industry structure to build a forward-looking view of competitive conditions
4. Explain how the assumptions an analyst brings to environmental analysis shape the conclusions they reach

#### **REQUIRED READING**

- A strategy for thriving in uncertainty <https://www.bain.com/insights/a-strategy-for-thriving-in-uncertainty/>

#### **FURTHER READING**

- Industry Analysis Video 1 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UUKAX0E4ckM> (12:52 minute video)
- Industry Analysis Video 2 <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMZS2l0Urck> (10:35 minute video)
- Refresher: Porter's 5 Forces <https://hbr.org/video/3590615226001/the-explainer-porters-five-forces>
- Confronting Uncertainty in Strategy <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/how-to-confront-uncertainty-in-your-strategy>
- The Uncertainty Advantage <https://www.strategy-business.com/article/The-Uncertainty-Advantage?gko=6b60b>

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<sup>1</sup> The first person to email me saying they saw this in the syllabus gets a 1% bonus on their final grade.

### ***Class 3 – Who decides whether your difference is valuable?***

**Central Question** Who decides whether your difference is valuable — you or your customer?

#### **Learning Objectives**

1. Explain how firms create value through cost leadership, differentiation, and focus — and be clear that pricing is a marketing decision, not a strategic one
2. Use willingness-to-pay analysis to assess how much value a firm actually creates and for whom
3. Use value chain analysis to trace exactly where a firm's competitive differences are generated
4. Evaluate the scope decisions that define a firm's competitive position

#### **REQUIRED READING**

- Ferrari: Shifting to Carbon Neutrality (Course pack – Case)
- The Art of Optimal Distinctiveness: Balancing Novelty and Familiarity  
<https://cmr.berkeley.edu/2025/03/the-art-of-optimal-distinctiveness-balancing-novelty-and-familiarity/>

### ***Class 4 - Where do resources and capabilities come from and how do they evolve?***

**Central Question** If your competitors can see everything you do, why can't they copy it?

#### **Learning Objectives**

1. Explain the difference between resources and capabilities
2. Apply VRIO analysis as a systems-level diagnostic, not a checklist of individual assets
3. Explain why competitors can't simply copy most advantages by buying the same resources
4. Evaluate make-vs-buy-vs-borrow decisions using both cost logic and capability logic
5. Understand horizontal diversification tradeoffs

#### **REQUIRED READING**

- Chegg Inc.: Getting Schooled by ChatGPT (Course pack – Case)
- Make or Buy: Three pillars of sound decision making  
<https://www.strategyand.pwc.com/gx/en/insights/2011-2014/make-three-pillars-sound-decision.html>

#### **FURTHER READING**

- Corporate Growing Pains: Build, Borrow or Buy?  
<https://knowledge.insead.edu/strategy/corporate-growing-pains-build-borrow-or-buy-2318>
- Corporate vs Business Strategy Explainer <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=X50pXorhtjY>

### ***Class 5 - Analyzing strategic alliances as a mechanism to compete***

**Central Question** When does sharing your competitive advantage with a partner strengthen it — and when does it give it away?

#### **Learning Objectives**

1. Explain why firms form alliances, joint ventures, and pursue mergers and acquisitions
2. Evaluate what makes alliances succeed or fail
3. Analyze an alliance as a learning race
4. Assess the strategic fit between alliance partners: how much value does the alliance create, how is it likely to be divided, and what happens when one partner decides the division isn't fair?
5. Distinguish between alliances that genuinely build competitive advantage and alliances that just delay a confrontation

#### **REQUIRED READING**

- Tiffany and Swatch: Lessons from an International Strategic Alliance (Course pack – Case)
- Strategic Alliances That Work: Selecting the Right Partner (Course pack – HBR article)

#### **FURTHER READING**

- Innovation Power of Alliances <https://www.bcg.com/publications/2022/innovation-power-of-alliances>
- Why your next deal may be a partnership <https://www.strategy-business.com/article/Why-Your-Next-Deal-May-Be-a-Partnership> .
- When Bigger Isn't Always Better – McKinsey <https://www.mckinsey.com/business-functions/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/when-bigger-isnt-always-better>

### ***Class 6 - Building and sustaining ecosystems to drive strategy***

**Central Question** When your competitive arena is a platform, are you differentiating a product — or designing the rules of a game that others have to play?

#### **Learning Objectives**

1. Explain how platform and ecosystem businesses work differently from traditional businesses in how they create, capture, and share value
2. Identify the conditions that cause markets to tip toward one dominant platform
3. Build a strategy for competing as a participant inside an existing platform
4. Evaluate the governance choices platform operators make and the consequences for participants, regulators, and the platform itself

#### **REQUIRED READING**

- The strategic transformation of John Deere: Precision Agriculture, AI and the Internet of Things (Course pack – Case)
- Pipelines, Platforms, and the New Rules of Strategy (Course Pack - HBR Article)

#### **FURTHER READING**

- Ecosystems for the Rest of Us <https://www.strategy-business.com/article/Ecosystems-for-the-rest-of-us>
- Platform ecosystems <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yAFSRq-NYTY>
- The CNH Industrial Autonomous Tractor Concept <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T7Os5Okf3OQ>

- AI Driven Competitive Advantage Isn't the Future, It's Now <https://iveybusinessjournal.com/ai-driven-competitive-advantage-isnt-the-future-its-now/>

## ***Class 7 – Strategic considerations when expanding internationally***

**Central Question** If your competitive advantage is built for one context, can it survive or even make sense in another?

### **Learning Objectives**

1. Compare different ways of entering international markets and evaluate the strategic trade-offs of each
2. Apply the CAGE framework to assess how much friction exists between geographic markets
3. Understand how a firm's competitive strategy must be rethought in the context of geographic expansion

### **REQUIRED READING**

- Tim Hortons: Bringing Canada's iconic coffee to China (Course pack – Case)
- 5 Common Challenges of International Business You Should Consider <https://online.hbs.edu/blog/post/challenges-of-international-business>
- SKIM Options for Competing in International Markets <https://opentextbc.ca/strategicmanagement/chapter/options-for-competing-in-international-markets/>

### **FURTHER READING**

- Chapter 7 Competing in International Markets <https://opentextbc.ca/strategicmanagement/part/chapter-7/>
- Global Flows: The ties that bind in an interconnected world. <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/strategy-and-corporate-finance/our-insights/global-flows-the-ties-that-bind-in-an-interconnected-world>
- Next Generation Global Organizations [https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/dotcom/client\\_service/Organization/PDFs/Next\\_generation\\_global\\_organizations.ashx](https://www.mckinsey.com/~media/mckinsey/dotcom/client_service/Organization/PDFs/Next_generation_global_organizations.ashx)

## ***Class 8 – Strategizing through a changing organization***

**Central Question** If your organization can't see past what it believes it is, how do you change what it does?

### **Learning Objectives**

1. Explain how organizational structure and culture act as both a competitive asset and a strategic constraint
2. Explain how growth strains what originally made a firm excellent: what a company gains in scale and what it reliably loses in the process
3. Apply agency theory to explain why the interests of owners and managers don't naturally align
4. Explain how a firm's identity shapes and limits its strategic choices

### **REQUIRED READING**

- Corporate Strategy at Berkshire Partners (Course pack – Case)

- Groysberg, Lee, Price, and Cheng (Jan-Feb 2018) The Leader's Guide to Corporate Culture (Course Pack - HBR Article)

#### **FURTHER READING**

- The Business of Culture <https://iveybusinessjournal.com/the-business-of-culture/>
- Simon Sinek: How to Build a Company That People Want to Work For <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=INjECrw7YYs> (9 minutes)
- Five Bold Moves to Quickly Transform your Organization's Culture <https://www.mckinsey.com/capabilities/people-and-organizational-performance/our-insights/five-bold-moves-to-quickly-transform-your-organizations-culture>

### ***Class 10 – “What is Strategy” revisited***

**Central Question** Sustainable competitive advantage: fact or fiction? And after everything you've learned, what is strategy actually for?

#### **Learning Objectives**

1. Explain the difference between the strategy a firm intends and the strategy that actually emerges
2. Explain why improvisation is a strategic capability, not a sign that planning failed
3. Apply the generating / sustaining / valuing lens as an integrating framework across the whole course
4. Write and share a personal theory of strategy in class, grounded in your own experience and the course frameworks

#### **REQUIRED READING**

- Honda A (only read the A case prior to class) (Course pack – Case)
- Strategic Resilience and Agility <https://www.forbes.com/sites/marccrossan/2025/04/11/strategic-resilience-and-agility-4-ways-to-thrive-in-a-chaotic-world/>