

## **MOR-588: Corporate Strategy and Competitive Dynamics**

**Fall 2023, 3.0 Units, Monday and Wednesday, 12:30 to 1:50 pm, JKP 204**

**Instructor:** Peer C. Fiss  
**Office:** Hoffman Hall 521  
**Office Hours:** 2-3 pm on class days or by appointment (email me)  
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### **COURSE DESCRIPTION AND LEARNING OBJECTIVES**

The business landscape has undergone major transformations in the past decade. New organizational forms, including platforms and ecosystems have become dominant and legacy companies have fought aggressively with M&As, restructuring, and expanding into the online space. The success of these strategies depends on the degree to which companies can influence competitive conditions through pre-emptive and other tactics. Change and renewal are continuous.

This course explores the various modes of corporate development available to managers to drive growth and change. The course objectives are as follow:

1. Arm you with tools to select the appropriate strategy for a given situation.
2. Understand a variety of different business models and forms of competitive dynamics.
3. Develop a framework for selecting and executing mergers and acquisitions.
4. Acquire a comprehensive understanding of corporate leadership, renewal, and change.
5. Show command of these skills by developing a strategic proposal for a real-world firm

This is an applied, case- and project-based course with accompanying readings to help structure your thinking. I will post case preparation questions prior to each session. The readings offer a starting point for analyzing the case, but I encourage extension of the ideas, and to integrate them across topics and cases in our discussions. Given the nature of the course, we will also apply the lessons from the cases to understand the challenges and implications of relevant recent and on-going issues. Since corporate development is a complex phenomenon that we can only discuss in parts, it is important that you evolve your own mental framework throughout the course.

### **COURSE MATERIALS**

The readings and cases for this course are available as an online case packet from Harvard Business School Publishing. To order the case pack (reader), please go to the following web address (you need this unique address to order the case pack for this course):

<https://hbsp.harvard.edu/import/1083890>

You need to have a student account with HBS Publishing to get the reader. If you do not already have one, it is quick and easy to create one. Once you see the MOR 588 package, there is a button to PURCHASE MATERIALS. If you have technical difficulty, you may call Harvard Business Publishing technical support (800) 545-7685. They are available 24/7.

The remaining readings are available through Blackboard. To save costs, I use our library resources to place readings available through HBR on the course website.

I will be posting case preparation questions, lecture notes, and other information about assignments and group projects on Blackboard. Please check the Blackboard course page regularly.

## COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND EVALUATION

<u>Assignments</u>	<u>% of Overall Grade</u>
<i>Class Participation</i>	<i>15%</i>
<i>Executive Memos</i>	<i>20%</i>
<i>Group Project</i>	<i>45%</i>
<i>Final Assignment</i>	<i>20%</i>
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>100%</b>

### *Class Participation – 15%*

Regular attendance and participation are critical to successfully completing this course. I expect you to actively participate during class sessions and encourage you to prepare for class with your classmates. For cases, you should be prepared to set forth the core challenge facing the case protagonist(s), offer a critical assessment of the situation, and lay out cogently and persuasively a course of action. For readings, you should be prepared to outline the topic that each reading addresses, describe its central points, and offer your critical analysis of them. When cases and readings are assigned for the same day, you should be able to draw links between the case and reading in your discussion.

My evaluation of in-class participation is based on the following:

- *Relevance* – Does the comment or question meaningfully bear on the subject at hand? Irrelevant or inappropriate comments can detract from the learning experience.
- *Responsiveness* – Does the comment or question connect to what someone else has said?
- *Analysis* – Is the reasoning employed consistent and logical? Has data from course materials, personal experience, or general knowledge been employed to support the assertions/findings?
- *Value* – Does the contribution further the understanding of the issues at hand?
- *Clarity* – Is the comment concise and understandable?

During class sessions, I will frequently assume the role of a facilitator to encourage a discussion that includes perspectives from a variety of viewpoints and, secondly, to help pull together prevailing analyses and recommendations. The direction and quality of a discussion is the *collective responsibility of the class*.

### *Class Participation—Behavioral Anchor Rating Scale:*

#### Excellent Performance

- Initiates information relative to topics discussed.
- Accurately exhibits knowledge of assignment content.
- Clarifies points that others may not understand.
- Shares personal experiences or opinions related to topic.
- Offers relevant / succinct input to class.
- Actively participates in class exercises.
- Demonstrates ability to apply, analyze, evaluate & synthesize course material.
- Demonstrates willingness to attempt to answer unpopular questions.
- Builds on other students' contributions.

### Average Performance

- Participates in group discussions when asked.
- Demonstrates knowledge of course material.
- Offers clear, concise, “good” information on class assignments.
- Offers input, but tends to reiterate the intuitive
- Attends class regularly.

### Unacceptable Performance

- Fails to participate even when directly asked.
- Gives no input to discussions.
- Does not demonstrate knowledge of the readings.
- Shows up to class: does nothing.
- Distracts group / class.
- Irrelevant discussion

### ***Executive Memos – 20%***

Please select two (2) cases that will be covered during the term. For each of them, please prepare an executive memo on **what has happened since the end of the case**. The report should not exceed two pages double-spaced. You may attach exhibits if they are referenced in the text. Exhibits might include the application of a framework with clearly developed conclusions which are referenced in the memo.

Please use no more than half a page to discuss what happened after the case. **The focus of the memo should be on the lessons learned in light of the concepts and frameworks discussed throughout the course.** Accordingly, your memo should focus on the takeaways from what has happened since the case and how they generalize to help us understand corporate strategy and competitive dynamics. **The memos are due via Turnitin on Blackboard by the beginning of class on the day that we discuss the particular case you have chosen;** late assignments cannot be accepted for obvious reasons.

### ***Group Project – 45%***

The group project is intended to give you the opportunity to apply your learning from the course to a real-world context that is interesting, current, and relevant. Specifically, you will prepare an analysis of and recommendations regarding a key strategic challenge of a particular corporation selected by me.

For this year, I have been able to secure the cooperation Neighborhood Housing Services (NHS), the largest non-profit affordable homeownership provider in Southern California. NHS is facing a variety of challenges that make them a very attractive organization for our course. The President and CEO of NHS, Lori Gay, will join us towards the middle of the course to provide further information and answer your questions.

You will form teams of six students. **The teams should be finalized and emailed to me no later than September 15.** The deliverable will be a deck of about twenty annotated PPT slides outlining your analysis and recommendations to NHS. **Group projects are due as a softcopy via Turnitin on Blackboard by 8 pm on Wednesday, November 15.** I will be evaluating all projects and assigning grades for them.

In addition, the three top scoring teams will present their work to Lori Gay and her team, and she will provide feedback on their analysis that will benefit all teams. We will also pick the winning team during this session. **Project presentation will take place on Wednesday, November 29.**

**As an additional incentive, for members of the three top scoring teams the final assignment is optional.** Members of the winning team will receive a score of 100/100 points on the final assignment regardless of whether the team members choose to submit that final assignment or not. Members of the two runner-up teams

will receive a score of 95/100 if they do not submit a final assignment, or if they choose to submit, 95 points or the score of that assignment, whichever is higher.

### **Final Assignment – 20%**

The final assignment is intended to demonstrate your command of the corporate strategy issues we have covered over the course of the semester. Specifically, I will be providing you with a set of articles regarding current issues in corporate strategy. Of these articles, **you will select a subset and for each of them prepare an executive memo in response to the question.** The guidelines for these memos are the same as for the executive memos. The final assignment is open-notes, open-book and must be the result of entirely individual work. No collaboration of any form is permitted. You are welcome to conduct additional research beyond the articles provided and may rely on any external sources you find useful. Please be sure to properly provide credit for external sources; as you know, plagiarism – presenting someone else’s ideas as your own, either verbatim or recast in your own words – is a serious academic offense with serious consequences.

The final assignment is due as a **softcopy via Turnitin on Blackboard by 8 pm on Wednesday, December 6.**

<b>ADDITIONAL INFORMATION</b>
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#### **AI Policy**

In this course, I encourage you to use artificial intelligence (AI)-powered programs to help you with assignments that indicate the permitted use of AI. You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus, they are not yet prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. To adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced in your work and provide the prompts used to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity. Please review the instructions in each assignment for more details on how and when to use AI Generators for your submissions.

#### **Use of Recordings**

Pursuant to the USC Student Handbook ([www.usc.edu/scampus](http://www.usc.edu/scampus), Part B, 11.12), students may not record a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class. In addition, students may not distribute or use notes or recordings based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than personal or class-related group study by individuals registered for the class. This restriction on unauthorized use applies to all information that is distributed or displayed for use in relationship to the class.

#### **Open Expression and Respect for All**

An important goal of the educational experience at USC Marshall is to be exposed to and discuss diverse, thought-provoking, and sometimes controversial ideas that challenge one’s beliefs. In this course we will support the values articulated in the USC Marshall “[Open Expression Statement](#).”

<b>STATEMENT ON ACADEMIC CONDUCT AND SUPPORT SYSTEMS</b>
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#### **Academic Integrity:**

The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas.

Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see [the student handbook](#) or the [Office of Academic Integrity's website](#), and university policies on [Research and Scholarship Misconduct](#).

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

### **Students and Disability Accommodations:**

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. [The Office of Student Accessibility Services](#) (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodation is not retroactive. More information can be found at [osas.usc.edu](http://osas.usc.edu). You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at [osasfrontdesk@usc.edu](mailto:osasfrontdesk@usc.edu).

### **Support Systems:**

[Counseling and Mental Health](#) - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

[988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline](#) - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call

The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access

mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

[Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services \(RSVP\)](#) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

[Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX \(EEO-TIX\)](#) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

[Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment](#) - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

[The Office of Student Accessibility Services \(OSAS\)](#) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

[USC Campus Support and Intervention](#) - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

[Diversity, Equity and Inclusion](#) - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

[USC Emergency](#) - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

[USC Department of Public Safety](#) - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call

Non-emergency assistance or information.

[Office of the Ombuds](#) - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

[Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice](#) - (323) 442-2850 or [otfp@med.usc.edu](mailto:otfp@med.usc.edu)

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

## ABOUT YOUR PROFESSOR

Peer Fiss is the Jill and Frank Fertitta Chair of Business Administration and a Professor of Management & Organization, and Sociology (by courtesy). He also serves as the Associate Vice Dean for Research for the Marshall School. Peer is an expert on strategic management, change, and organization. His recent work has focused on creating strategies for sustained competitive advantage, the role of categories in structuring competition and markets, and set analytics. At Marshall, Peer teaches at the MBA and executive level. He speaks to Fortune 500 companies on a variety of issues around their strategic planning processes. Peer was the 2015 winner of the Golden Apple teaching award for the MBA Core. He was also the winner of a 2015 USC Mellon Mentoring Award for mentoring graduate students and the 2020 Marshall Faculty Award for PhD Mentoring. He holds a Ph.D. from Northwestern University and a master's degree from the University of Hamburg. He is married with two children and lives in South Pasadena.

COURSE SCHEDULE				
Session	Date	Topic	Case	Reading
1	21-Aug	Introduction to the course		
2	23-Aug	Opening case	Alphabet Eyes New Frontiers #9 717 418	
Module I: Diversification				
3	28-Aug	Frameworks for Understanding Corporate Strategy		Creating Corporate Advantage
4	30-Aug	Related Diversification: Vertical	Cannabusiness in Washington D.C.	
	4-Sep		<b>Labor Day</b>	
5	6-Sep	Related Diversification: Product/Skill	International Management Group (IMG)	
6	11-Sep	From Related to Unrelated Diversification		Strategies of Unrelated Diversification;
7	13-Sep	Unrelated Diversification	Danaher Corporation	
8	18-Sep	Unrelated Diversification	Danaher Corporation	
9	20-Sep	Review of Issues in Diversification		
Module II: Business Model and Platform Competition				
10	25-Sep	Business Model and Platform Competition	Walmart, Inc. takes on Amazon.com	
11	27-Sep	Business Model and Platform Competition	Voice Wars	Why Some Platforms Thrive and Others Don't
12	2-Oct	Guest Lecture on Business Ecosystem: Gabriel Rossman, UCLA	Dungeons & Dragons: Repairing Ecosystem Trust	

13	4-Oct	Business Model and Platform Competition	The Video Streaming Wars in 2019: Can Disney catch Netflix?	
14	9-Oct	Business Model and Platform Competition	Redfin: Redefine Real Estate,	
Module III: Acquisitions				
15	11-Oct	Introduction to Acquisitions		Mergers and Acquisitions: Overcoming pitfalls...
16	16-Oct	Focus Case: NHS	Visit by Lori Gay, CEO, NHS	Strategic Planning materials for NHS
17	18-Oct	Focus Case: NHS	Call with Lori Gay, CEO, NHS	
18	23-Oct	Acquisitions	Cadbury Schweppes: Capturing Confectionery (A)	
19	25-Oct	Acquisitions	Cadbury Schweppes: Capturing Confectionery (B) (handed out in class)	
20	30-Oct	Acquisitions	\$19B 4 txt app WhatsApp ....omg!	
21	1-Nov	Acquisitions	No class -- work on group projects	
22	6-Nov	Closing Out the Module on Acquisitions	PepsiCo's Restaurants	
Module IV: Structure and Execution				
8-Nov	8-Nov	8-Nov	8-Nov	8-Nov
24	13-Nov	Strategy and Structure	CyberArk: Protecting the Keys to the IT Kingdom	
25	15-Nov	Strategy and Structure	Unilever's New Global Strategy: Competing Through Sustainability	
26	20-Nov	Review of course themes, catching up on current events		
	22-Nov		<b>Thanksgiving</b>	
27	27-Nov	Conclusion/Recap/Questions	Course wrap up	
28	29-Nov	Project Presentation	Project Presentation	



Marshall Graduate Program Learning Goals	MOR 588 Objectives that support this goal	Assessment Method*
<b><i>Learning Goal #1: Develop Personal Strengths.</i></b>		
<b>Our graduates will develop a global and entrepreneurial mindset, lead with integrity, purpose and ethical perspective, and draw value from diversity and inclusion.</b>		
1.1 Possess personal integrity and a commitment to an organization’s purpose and core values.		
1.2 Expand awareness with a global and entrepreneurial mindset, drawing value from diversity and inclusion.	1-4	Class discussion, executive memos, group project, final assignment
1.3 Exhibit awareness of ethical dimensions and professional standards in decision making.	1-5	Class discussion, executive memos, final assignment
<b><i>Learning Goal #2: Gain Knowledge and Skills.</i></b>		
<b>Our graduates will develop a deep understanding of the key functions of business enterprises and will be able to identify and take advantage of opportunities in a complex, uncertain and dynamic business environment using critical and analytical thinking skills.</b>		
2.1 Gain knowledge of the key functions of business enterprises.	1, 2	Class discussion, executive memos, group project, final assignment
2.2 Acquire advanced skills to understand and analyze significant business opportunities, which can be complex, uncertain and dynamic.	1-5	Class discussion, executive memos, group project, final assignment
2.3 Use critical and analytical thinking to identify viable options that can create short-term and long-term value for organizations and their stakeholders.	1-5	Class discussion, executive memos, group project, final assignment
<b><i>Learning Goal #3: Motivate and Build High Performing Teams.</i></b>		
<b>Our graduates will achieve results by fostering collaboration, communication and adaptability on individual, team, and organization levels.</b>		

3.1 Motivate and work with colleagues, partners, and other stakeholders to achieve organizational purposes.		Group project
3.2 Help build and sustain high-performing teams by infusing teams with a variety of perspectives, talents, and skills and aligning individual success with team success and with overall organizational success.		
3.3 Foster collaboration, communication and adaptability in helping organizations excel in a changing business landscape.		Class discussion, group project