

AEB6385 - MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR AGRIBUSINESS FIRMS
Spring 2026. (3 credits)

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LECTURE Online asynchronous lectures and other course materials will be posted on Canvas

OFFICE HOURS I am available by appointment every week for office hours on Zoom or on the phone. I encourage students' frequent communication with me. Please don't hesitate to reach out! ***My virtual office door is always open for you (and if you happen to be on UF Gainesville campus, please stop by my office)!***

FRE CONTACTS Dr. Gao Zhifeng, Graduate Coordinator, zfgao@ufl.edu
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COMMUNICATION The best way to get a hold of myself is by emailing me either directly to my email or via Canvas. Make sure to [enable emails for course announcements](#) and read this syllabus thoroughly. I will post important announcements on Canvas sparingly.

COURSE OVERVIEW

AEB 6385 is an integrated online course for the Food and Resource Economics Department MS Agribusiness and MAB program. It is designed to help students synthesize across their formal and informal learning of the general principles of marketing, finance, accounting and human resource management. The course presents both the theory and the practical application of strategic management concepts using case study method to facilitate students' learning and development of this basic skill set. Students will be exposed to a wide range of organizations and business strategies through case study analysis that will be completed individually and in small groups and will require students to assume the role of business consultants to address strategic and operational issues facing agribusiness firms.

COUSE OBJECTIVES

Given active engagement in this course, at the end of this course students will:

1. Understand the key concepts of strategy formulation and competitive analysis.
2. Synthesize knowledge across business functional areas and apply this knowledge to the analysis of real-world contemporary agribusiness management issues.
3. Prepare for successful professional careers in agribusiness management by gaining an educational experience that will position students for a competitive market-place advantage.
4. Master the art of informed decision-making, critical-thinking, strategic management, and business analysis.
5. Transition from the state of dependent to self-directing learning.

6. Develop effective written and oral communication skills and ability to work well in a team environment.

TEACHING APPROACH

This course is delivered in asynchronous online format. Lectures will be recorded and posted for students every week on the course website on Canvas. The instructor will act as a facilitator, moderator and a lecturer to help you gain understanding of strategic management, identify linkages between strategy and other business functional areas, and apply the concepts of strategic management and competitive advantage to the analysis of real-world business situations using case studies.

Case study method: A substantial portion of the class time will be devoted to the analysis of cases studies in agribusiness and other industries specifically hand-picked to provide students with experience to analyze real-world agribusiness challenges. Cases provide a way for students to gain a basis for analysis and decision-making necessary for successful professional careers. Cases will present students with a wide range of issues a business can face and will help students develop analysis and problem-solving skills. There are many ways to address a problem and generally there is no one correct answer, but there are strategies that are clearly better than others and those that are obviously wrong. This can be summarized in a popular phrase applied to case analysis “there are no right answers, but there are wrong answers.”

EXPECTATIONS FOR AEB6385 STUDENTS

Our success in the online asynchronous course will greatly depend on the same commitment we all bring to the physical classroom. We will adopt the same rules and norms (watch posted lectures, participate in online discussions, engage with other students through online discussions and group work, communicate with the instructor frequently via office hours and email). To be successful in this course, a student should:

1. Read ALL of the material contained on the course website. There is a lot of helpful information that can save you time and help you meet the objectives of the course
2. Watch posted lecture material and complete assigned readings in each week’s module.
3. Take full advantage of the discussion boards by actively participating in online discussions and by asking for help or clarifications of the material if you need it.
4. Do not wait to ask questions! Waiting to ask a question might cause you to miss a due date.
5. Do your work well before the due dates. Things happen. If your computer goes down when you are trying to submit an assignment, you'll need time to get to another machine.
6. Back up your work!

STUDENT FEEDBACK

I welcome students’ feedback about the course, including content, assignments, and the style of lectures and discussions. I am committed to making this course a positive and valuable learning

experience for each student. I will be collecting your feedback throughout the semester using anonymous surveys. You are also always welcome to talk to me directly.

COURSE MATERIALS

Required:

1. *Strategic Management* by Frank Rothaermel
2. Course packet – Available for purchase from Harvard Business Publishing (after you register as a “student” user). This packet contains cases and articles we will be using during class. Instructions for purchasing the course packet are provided on the course Canvas page.

Supplementary:

1. *The Case Study Handbook: A Students’ Guide* by Ellet William, Harvard Business Review Press, 2018.
2. Readings posted by instructor on Canvas course site. If you are enrolled, you should have access to it. I will post relevant course materials on this site (i.e., syllabus, group information, readings, etc.). Please check the site on a regular basis.

COURSE EVALUATION

Your final grade will consist of the following components:

Graded Activity	Activity Type	Points
Contribution to Online Discussions	Individual	75
Case Study Analysis Memos	Individual	65
Quizzes	Individual or Team	60
Concept Application Activities	Individual	140
Final Case Analysis Project & Presentation	Individual or Team	100
TOTAL		460

The following grading scale will be used:

93 – 100%	A	80 – 82.9	B-	66 – 69.9	D+
90 – 92.9	A-	76 – 79.9	C+	63 – 65.9	D
86 – 89.9	B+	73 – 75.9	C	60 – 62.9	D –
83 – 85.9	B	70 – 72.9	C-	≤59.9	E

IMPORTANT: After any grade is posted, should you believe that your exam/assignment is incorrectly graded or that your grade was posted incorrectly, please contact the instructor **within 7 days**. To be considered, you must provide (1) the graded work in question and (2) a written explanation of why you are requesting the re-grade. **After 7 days have passed, your posted grade will be assumed to be correct and final.**

DESCRIPTION OF COURSE ASSIGNMENTS

Contribution to Online Discussions:

Discussions in this course will focus on analyzing case studies, engaging with weekly assigned reading materials, and applying lecture and textbook concepts to real business situations described in the case studies. Students will be provided with a set of discussion questions and must choose one to answer. The first discussion post, due by Wednesday, should provide a comprehensive response to the chosen question, demonstrating a thorough understanding and analysis of the assigned materials. The second discussion post, due by Sunday, requires students to respond thoughtfully to a peer's post. Note that simple responses such as "I agree!" or "Good point" are insufficient. Instead, responses should contribute meaningfully to the discussion by building on, questioning, or providing new perspectives on your peer's points.

Thoughtful contribution to online class discussions is critical for your success in this course and for creating an active and productive learning environment for all students. The quality of your learning experience in this course will directly depend on your and your classmates' preparation, active participation in online discussions and responses to the posts of your peers. What you will gain in this class directly depends on what you put in – not just in terms of preparing for the class (watching/reading lecture material, reading and analyzing cases), but also in terms your willingness to be open to ideas and perspectives of other students. Because cases analysis uses real business situations that often involve uncertainty, risk and lack of information, it is inevitable that different solutions will be proposed. Respectful and constructive discussions, particularly when addressing differing opinions, are both encouraged and essential for a productive learning experience.

Case Study Analysis Memos:

Throughout this course, we will analyze a series of business case studies. Each student will prepare a 2-page (single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font) memo for the assigned cases studies. Students will be provided with discussion questions that will guide their case study analysis. Each case will be tailored to the specific material covered in lecture and textbook to enable students to apply the theory to real world business issues.

Quizzes, Concept Application Activities:

Throughout the semester, we will have a series of quizzes/application activities. Quizzes will test students' basic understanding of the material and will draw on the material presented in lectures and covered in the textbook. Application activities will require students to apply the material to a specific business challenge.

Final Case Analysis Project & Presentation:

This assignment is a major component of the course and is due at the end of the semester. It consists of two parts (1) **written report** and (2) **presentation**. Unlike the shorter case study memos, the final case study analysis requires a more in-depth approach and should be **5-6 pages long** (single-spaced, 12-point Times New Roman font), excluding tables, graphs, and references. Students are expected to **synthesize and apply** the knowledge and concepts of business strategy and

competitive advantage **learned throughout the semester**. The case study will be assigned early in the semester to give students sufficient time to conduct a thorough analysis and prepare their final report and presentation.

Students will assume the role of business consultants presenting their analysis to a company's board of directors. As such, the written report must:

- Be professional in appearance and content.
- Be original and use proper English grammar and formal language.
- Demonstrate a comprehensive and well-structured analysis.
- Written reports will be checked for plagiarism and use of AI.

You will be graded based on the comprehensiveness of your analysis, but points will be deducted if a report is not well formatted, looks sloppy or has grammatical errors. Students can choose to work in groups on this assignment (2-3 students maximum).

Students will present their analysis to the instructor either live via Zoom or by submitting a recorded presentation, with the choice of format left to the students.

NOTE: Any and all items presented on this syllabus are subject to change. Any changes and additional announcements will be made in class as the semester progresses. By enrolling in this class, you agree to the terms outlined in this syllabus.

Schedule

W	Topics	Textbook readings, Case studies, Assignments
1	• Course overview • Case study analysis method	• EW Ch. 7, 8 (posted on Canvas) • Case Analysis Coach
2	• Understanding Strategy	• FR Ch. 1 + Readings posted in this week's module • Concept Application Activity
3	• Strategic leadership • Vision, mission, values	• FR Ch. 2 + Readings posted in this week's module • Concept Application Activity • Online case study discussion
4	• External Environment: analysis of competitive forces • Analysis of agricultural environment	• FR Ch. 3 + Readings posted in this week's module • Quiz • Online case study discussion
5	• Internal Analysis • Resources, Capabilities and Core Competencies	• FR Ch. 4 + Readings posted in this week's module • Online case study discussion • Case Study memo
6	• Corporate Social Responsibility • Sustainable Corporate Strategy	• FR Ch. 5 + Readings posted in this week's module • Quiz • Online case study discussion

7	Sustainable Corporate Strategy	- Readings posted in this week's module - Concept Application Activity - Online case study discussion
8	Business Strategy: Product Differentiation & competitive advantage	- FR Ch. 6 - Online case study discussion - Case Study Memo
9	- Cost Leadership - Blue Oceans	- FR Ch. 6 - Quiz/Application Activity - Online case study discussion - Case Study Memo
10	Spring Break – No classes	
11	Innovation & Entrepreneurship	- FR Ch. 7 - Quiz - Online case study discussion
12	- Corporate Strategy: Vertical Integration & Diversification - Strategic Alliances	- FR Ch. 8 - Online case study discussion - Case Study Memo
13	Mergers & Acquisitions	- FR Ch. 9 - Online case study discussion - Case Study Memo
14	Review of concepts covered during the semester	Quiz
15	Final Case Analysis Presentations and Reports: <i>Sandlands Vineyards</i>	- Final Case Analysis Reports - Case Analysis Presentations will be scheduled during this week.

COURSE & UNIVERSITY POLICIES

This syllabus is a contract between the students and the instructor. Each student can be assured that I will hold everyone to the same standards and policies.

ACADEMIC POLICIES AND RESOURCES

Academic policies for this course are consistent with university policies. See <https://syllabus.ufl.edu/syllabus-policy/uf-syllabus-policy-links/>

CAMPUS HEALTH AND WELLNESS RESOURCES

Visit <https://one.uf.edu/whole-gator/topics> for resources that are designed to help you thrive physically, mentally, and emotionally at UF. Please contact UMatteWeCare for additional and immediate support.

SOFTWARE USE

All faculty, staff and students of the university are required and expected to obey the laws and legal agreements governing software use. Failure to do so can lead to monetary damages and/or criminal penalties for the individual violator. Because such violations are also against university policies and rules, disciplinary action will be taken as appropriate.

PRIVACY AND ACCESSIBILITY POLICIES

- Instructure (Canvas)
 - [Instructure Privacy Policy](#)
 - [Instructure Accessibility](#)
- Zoom
 - [Zoom Privacy Policy](#)
 - [Zoom Accessibility](#)

COURSE NETIQUETTE

This course will you a blend of face-to-face and online instruction. Please remember that online classroom is in fact a classroom, and certain behaviors are expected when you communicate with the instructor and your peers. When communicative online you should always:

- Treat your instructor and classmates with respect in email or any other communication.
- Always use your professors' proper title: Dr. or Prof.
- Unless specifically invited, don't refer to your instructor by first name.
- Use clear and concise language.
- Remember that all college level communication should have correct spelling and grammar (this includes discussion boards).
- Avoid slang terms such as "wassup?" and texting abbreviations such as "u" instead of "you."
- Use standard fonts such as Ariel, Calibri or Times new Roman and use a size 10 or 12 pt. font
- Avoid using the caps lock feature AS IT CAN BE INTERPRETED AS YELLING.
- Limit and possibly avoid the use of emoticons like :) or 😊.
- Be cautious when using humor or sarcasm as tone is sometimes lost in an email or discussion post and your message might be taken seriously or sound offensive.
- Be careful with personal information (both yours and other's).
- Do not send confidential information via e-mail.

EMAIL NETIQUETTE

- Always start the subject line with AEB4325, followed by a short, descriptive subject line.
- Always use your professors' proper title: Dr. or Prof.
- Be brief.
- Sign your message with your name and return e-mail address.

LAUREN'S PROMISE: I will listen and believe you if someone is threatening you.

Lauren McCluskey, a 21-year old honors student athlete, was murdered on October 22, 2018, by a man she briefly dated on the University of Utah Campus. We must all take actions to ensure this never happens again. Any form of sexual harassment or violence will not be excused or tolerated at the University of Florida.

If you are experiencing sexual assault, relationship violence, or stalking, you can take the following actions:

- If you are in immediate danger, call 911.
- Report it to me, and I will connect you to resources.
- Seek confidential sources of support and help:
 - [UFPD Office of Victim Services](#): 51 Museum Road, 352-392-5648
 - [Sexual Assault Recovery Services \(SARS\)](#): Infirmary Building, 352-392-1161
 - Alachua County Rape Crisis Center (confidential): 352-264-6760