

**Syllabus: Special Topics in International Business**  
**Family Firm Internationalisation (4ECTS) SS2024**  
**040096**

**Course Instructor:**

Dr. Francesco Debellis

Chair of International Business, University of Vienna, Faculty of Business, Economics and Statistics,  
Department of Marketing and International Business

Email: [francesco.debellis@univie.ac.at](mailto:francesco.debellis@univie.ac.at)

Office hours for students: by appointment only

For all inquiries, please contact Judith Ladenstein, Tel. +43 1 4277-38012,

Email: [judith.ladenstein@univie.ac.at](mailto:judith.ladenstein@univie.ac.at)

Webpage: <https://international-business.univie.ac.at/>

**Course Description and Objectives:**

This course provides students with theoretical frameworks of how to work entrepreneurially and professionally, in and with family firms, and manage effectively the unique challenges that these organizations face when operating in the international context.

Family firms are the most ubiquitous form of business organization globally and the enduring influence of families on business and society is an essential part of the backbone of any world economy. Family businesses are different from any other profit-seeking organization due to the family's influence on the firm's strategic goals, governance structures and competitive resources. We will consider how aspects such as ownership, succession, sibling rivalry and relationships with non-family members affect the international strategic choices of family firms in terms of entry modes, location choices, strategic partnerships, processes and post-entry dynamics. Consistently with its practice-oriented nature, this course will include also guest lectures from family business leaders, consultants and experts, in order to foster interactions between the students and the entrepreneurial community.

By the end of the course, students should be able to:

- Understand the unique strategic and managerial challenges for family firms operating internationally.
- Identify strengths and weaknesses of family firms in the international context.
- Critically appraise how family heterogeneity in terms of family structures, functions, interactions and events affect family firm internationalization choices.
- Consider the different strategic drivers of family business behaviour at international level.
- Comprehend how the factors occurring over time to the family and the business affect internationalization process and outcomes.
- Evaluate how contextual factors, such as institutions, market and industry contingencies affect family firm internationalization.

Course Textbook and Additional Readings:

**Exam preparation material.**

The study material is based on the following research papers. Moreover, at the end of each lesson, slides in .pdf format will also be provided and will be part of the exam preparation material.

1. Arregle, J. L., Duran, P., Hitt, M. A., & Van Essen, M. (2017). Why is family firms' internationalization unique? A meta-analysis. *Entrepreneurship Theory and Practice*, 41(5), 801-831.
2. Arregle, J. L., Hitt, M. A., & Mari, I. (2019). A missing link in family firms' internationalization research: Family structures. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 50(5), 809-825.
3. Banalieva, E. R., & Eddleston, K. A. (2011). Home-region focus and performance of family firms: The role of family vs non-family leaders. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 42(8), 1060-1072.
4. Debellis, F., De Massis, A., Petruzzelli, A. M., Frattini, F., & Del Giudice, M. (2020). Strategic agility and international joint ventures: The willingness-ability paradox of family firms. *Journal of International Management*, 27(1), 100739.
5. Debellis, F., Rondi, E., Plakoyiannaki, E., & De Massis, A. (2021). Riding the waves of family firm internationalization: A systematic literature review, integrative framework, and research agenda. *Journal of World Business*, 101-144.
6. Debellis, F. & Rondi, E., (2021). *How do family firms orchestrate their Global Value Chain?*, in: Leppäaho, T., & Jack, S., Handbook on family firm internationalization. Palgrave.
7. Hennart, J. F., Majocchi, A., & Forlani, E. (2019). The myth of the stay-at-home family firm: How family-managed SMEs can overcome their internationalization limitations. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 50(5), 758-782.
8. Kano, L., Ciravegna, L., & Rattalino, F. (2021). The family as a platform for FSA development: Enriching new internalization theory with insights from family firm research. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 52(1), 148-160.
9. Kano, L., & Verbeke, A. (2018). Family firm internationalization: Heritage assets and the impact of bifurcation bias. *Global Strategy Journal*, 8(1), 158-183.

**Optional Reading (book)**

- Zellweger, T. (2017). *Managing the family business: Theory and practice*. Edward Elgar Publishing.

Course Evaluation:

The evaluation is structured as follows:

1. Participation in class discussion (10%)
2. Midterm examination: Multiple-choice exam (20% of the final grade)
3. Final exam: Open-ended questions covering the whole content of the course (40%)
4. Report and Presentation of a Group project - further details will be discussed on lecture 1 (30%)

Evaluation standard

- 90% - 100% | 1  
80% - 89% | 2  
70% - 79% | 3  
50% - 69% | 4

Course policies and useful information:

- Both the course and the exams will be held in **English**. During the course active participation is required during all lessons.
- Lectures usually take place on Tuesdays from 6.30 pm till 8 pm. The final day for the research project presentation (**25<sup>th</sup> June 2024**) will take the **entire afternoon** (check syllabus).
- During the course there will be two guest lectures by scholars or entrepreneurs of international family firms that will be used to observe “on the pitch” some concepts that we will face during the first theoretical lessons. The practical cases discussed with the entrepreneurs/guest speakers will be part of the open-ended questions of the final written exam. Therefore, attendance to guest lectures is mandatory. **The dates of the guest lectures will be agreed upon based on the availability of the guest speakers; therefore, the day and time may be different from the usual class. The dates and times of the guest lectures will be communicated during the first class of the course.**
- Students wishing to take this course *must register via u:find/u:space* (with points) during the registration period. The maximum number of participants is 50.
- Registered students who, for whatever reason, are not able to take the course *must de-register* electronically by the 13<sup>th</sup> March 2024. Students who decide to drop the course after this deadline will be graded with 5 (failed).

*It is absolutely essential that all registered students attend the first session on 5th March 2024 (Introduction/Vorbesprechung) as failure to do so will result in their exclusion from the course*

SESSIONS	ROOM	AGENDA	REFERENCE READINGS
(1) 5 Mar 2024 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 16	Introduction to course, definition of family firm, strengths and weaknesses of family firms in the international context.	Arregle et al. 2017 ETP Debellis et al. 2021 JWB Kano et al. 2021 JIBS
(2) 9 Apr 2024 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 16	Governance of international family firms	Arregle et al. 2019 JIBS Debellis & Rondi 2021 – chapter Kano & Verbeke 2018 GSJ
(3) 16 Apr 2024 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 16	Goals, strategy and performance of international family firms	Banalieva & Eddleston 2011 JIBS Hennart et al. 2019 JIBS
(4) 23 Apr 2024 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 16	Location and foreign entry mode choices by family firms	Debellis et al. 2020 JIM
(5) 30 Apr 2024 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 16	<b>Midterm Exam</b>	
(6) tbd	tbd	Guest lecture	
(7) 14 <sup>th</sup> May (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 6	Guest Lecture “Expanding globally, preserving tradition and family values” Speaker: Mrs. Carmen Lehner, Family Manager ALPLA	
(8) 4 Jun 2024 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 16	Recap/summary	
(9) 11 Jun 2024 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 16	<b>Final Exam</b>	
(10) 25 Jun 2024 (11) <b>(4.45 pm - 8pm)</b> (12)	HS 16	<i>Group presentations</i>	