



040096 KU Family Firm Internationalization (MA) | 2026 SS

Chair of International Business: <https://international-business.univie.ac.at/>

Information about the course:

Course Details

4.00 ECTS (2.00 SWS) | compulsory attendance | continuous assessment | course format: on site | SPL 4 - Wirtschaftswissenschaften | max. 50 participants | Language: English

Start: Tuesday, March 3rd, 18:30

Course Instructor: Dr. Francesco Debellis

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For all inquiries regarding contents of the course, please contact Dr. Debellis

For all administrative inquiries, please contact Ms. Viktoria Kiss viktoria.kiss@univie.ac.at

Objectives & Content

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 Policies

The course has “prüfungsimmanenten Charakter”. Attendance is compulsory throughout the semester. More than two absences will automatically result in a “fail” grade. Attendance is compulsory during assessment (e.g. midterm and final exams, Presentations etc.).

Both the course and the exams will be held in **English**. During the course active participation is required during all lessons.

Students wishing to take this course must register via u:find/u:space 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 14th March 2026. 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 3rd March 2026 (Introduction). As failure to do so will result in their exclusion from the course.

Course Structure

Lectures usually take place on Tuesdays from 6:30 pm to 8:00 pm in HS 3. On 10 March, a guest lecture will be held in HS 4 by the CEO of the SPAR Group. On 17 March, an event on women leadership in family firms will take place in the Skylounge (12th Floor), featuring both practitioners and academics as keynote speakers. The content of both the 10 March and 17 March guest lectures constitutes an integral part of the course and will be included in the final examination. Participation in these two events is compulsory. The final two sessions dedicated to research project presentations on 16 and 23 June 2026 will take place in the afternoon and will occupy the entire afternoon.

Performance & Assessment

The evaluation is structured as follows:

- Participation in class discussion (20%)
- Final exam (50%)
- Report and Presentation of a Group project - further details will be discussed on lecture 1 (30%)

A minimum of 50 percent of the points needs to be attained overall to pass the course. The grading system is as follows:

90% - 100% | 1

80% - 89% | 2

70% - 79% | 3

50% - 69% | 4

Dates & Content

Session	Date/Time	Room	Agenda	Reference Readings
(1)	3 March 2026 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 3	Introduction to the Course. Governance of international family firms.	Arregle et al. 2017 ETP Debellis et al. 2021 JWB Kano et al. 2021 JIBS
(2)	10 March 2026 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 4	Guest Lecture - CEO SPAR	
(3)	17 March 2026 (3 pm – 5 pm)	SKY- LOUNGE	Praxis event – Guest lecture Women leadership in family firms	
(4)	24 March 2026 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 3	Goals, strategy and foreign entry modes of family firms	Arregle et al. 2019 JIBS Banalieva & Eddleston 2011 JIBS Kano & Verbeke, 2018 GSJ Debellis et al. 2020 JIM Hennart et al. 2019 JIBS
(5)	14 April 2026 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 3	Family firms in Global Value Chains	Debellis et al 2024 JIBS
(6)	21 April 2026 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 3	Innovation through tradition in family firms	Rondi et al. 2024 SEJ
(7)	28 April 2026 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 3	Recap/Summary	
(8)	12 May 2026 (6.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 3	Final Exam	
(9 – 10)	16 June 2026 (4.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 15	Group presentations	
(11-12)	23 June 2026 (4.30 pm – 8 pm)	HS 15	Group presentations	

Registration/De-Registration

<https://ufind.univie.ac.at/>

Literature

Exam preparation material.

The study material is based on the following research papers which will be available on moodle. 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., Buckley, P. J., & De Massis, A. (2024). Family firms and the governance of global value chains. *Journal of International Business Studies*, 1-14.
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.
10. Rondi, E., Magrelli, V., Debellis, F., & De Massis, A. (2024). The evolution of craft work in the strategic development of a family enterprise. *Strategic Entrepreneurship Journal*.

Optional Reading (books)

De Massis A & Rondi E. (2024). *The Family Business Book. A roadmap for entrepreneurial families to prosper across generations*. Pearson Financial Times Series.

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