

Airline Management and Strategy

Credits: 6

Language of Instruction: English

Faculty: Prof. dr. Wouter Dewulf

Course Description

The airline industry is one of the most dynamic, competitive and strategically complex sectors within global transport. Airlines operate in an environment characterised by high fixed costs, volatile demand, strong regulatory pressure, geopolitical uncertainty, sustainability expectations, labour constraints and intense competition between different business models. This course provides an in-depth academic and applied exploration of airline management and strategy, with particular emphasis on how airlines create, capture or destroy value within the broader air transport ecosystem.

The course aims to equip participants with a strategic and analytical framework for understanding and critically assessing the economic, commercial, and operational logic behind airline decision-making. Students examine the role of airlines within the aviation value chain and analyse their relationships with airports, ground handlers, air navigation service providers, governments, suppliers, customers and other key stakeholders. Particular attention is given to the interactions among business models, market positioning, route networks, fleet choices, financial performance, and competitive dynamics.

Topics covered include air transport demand and supply, airline business models and strategies, network and fleet optimisation, airline finance, airline marketing, airline-airport relations, air cargo economics, strategic alliances, sustainability, disruptions and innovation. Theoretical insights are complemented by applied case studies on airlines and markets, as well as project work in which students develop and present a business plan for a start-up airline.

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Analyse the role, business logic and competitive strategies of airlines and other actors in the aviation value chain;
- Evaluate airline business models, route-network, fleet and marketing choices in relation to demand, competition and financial performance;
- Assess how regulation, sustainability, disruption, strategic alliances, airports and air cargo dynamics shape airline strategy;
- Develop evidence-based strategic recommendations and a coherent airline business plan using real-world data and assumptions.

This course is particularly relevant for students interested in airline strategy, aviation management, transport economics, airport-airline relations, air cargo, infrastructure policy and the broader strategic development of the air transport industry.

The course is designed as a blend of interactive lectures, working sessions, case-based discussions, guest lectures, site visits and project-based learning. Active participation is expected throughout the course. Students will work in groups to develop a start-up airline concept, including its business model, network and fleet choices, financial logic, marketing positioning, and final business plan. Please bring a laptop and be prepared to work with real-world data, assumptions and strategic trade-offs.