

Entrepreneurship and Innovation

PROF. ALESSANDRO PALMARIN

OVERVIEW

Area: Business / Entrepreneurship

Course Code IB / MG 350

Dates: 7 – 16 January 2026

Term: Winter

Course Description

In recent years, global economic uncertainty has reshaped the job market, making traditional career paths in large corporations less accessible and less appealing to younger generations. In this evolving context, entrepreneurship is emerging as a powerful and proactive alternative—a way to create value, solve real-world problems, and shape one's own professional journey.

This course is designed to explore the entrepreneurial process in depth, with a particular focus on the creation and growth of Small and Medium Enterprises (SMEs). Through the analysis of international case studies and business models, students will gain direct insight into the dynamics of start-ups, scale-ups, and innovation-driven companies operating in diverse industries and markets.

To enrich the learning experience, two guest entrepreneurs and innovators will lead live webinars focused on business model innovation and opportunity identification.

The course is highly interactive and practice-oriented, encouraging students to take initiative, work in teams, and actively engage in classroom debates, role-plays, and applied exercises.

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

- Understand the core dimensions of entrepreneurship as a mindset and as a process;
- Recognize the key challenges and opportunities in starting and managing a business;
- Evaluate and design business models in different market contexts;
- Develop practical skills for identifying, testing, and pitching business opportunities.

Course requirements

- (a) Students are expected to regularly attend class sessions and to actively take part in class debate and case discussions; Students are expected to be prepared on the assigned readings;
- (b) Students are expected to deliver one group assignments and present it to the class.

Course readings and materials

All the readings and lecturer's slides will be available

Evaluation and Grading

Class participation	25% of final grade
Group assignment & presentation	60% of final grade
Proactivity and quality of classroom presence	15 % of final grade

Rules of conduct

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory and no absence/s will be excused. Unexcused absences will prevent students from being admitted to the final exam. In case of health issues, students will need to inform both Cattolica International Office (at international.advisor@unicatt.it) and the professor and provide a medical certificate.

Should students, for Covid-related issues, be prevented from traveling to Milan and taking in-person courses, but still would like to join the program, Università Cattolica will decide on a case by case basis whether or not the student will be authorized to join virtually.

Attendance will still be mandatory for all classes (exceptions to this rule will only be made for students who find themselves in a time zone that complicates live participation and if the course allows for asynchronous access to course content). Students attending live streaming must activate microphone and camera unless otherwise specified by the instructors.

Company visits (when in-person) will be substituted with an alternative academic activity

Exam Date: The exam date cannot be re-scheduled. Unexcused absences will result in a failing grade. In cases of unforeseeable circumstances such as illness or injury on the day of the exams, the student must submit a medical certificate and communicate his/her absence to the Professor and UCSC International Office via email prior to the exam. If the student does not justify his/her absence through sufficient documentation and with adequate notice before the final test, the student will receive an automatic Failed.

Bio of the instructor

Alessandro Palmarin is an entrepreneur, strategic advisor, and founder of **NIO Cocktails**, a company created to democratize high mixology through premium pre-mixed cocktails in an innovative design format. Under his leadership, the company grew into an international player, selling over 2.5 million cocktails in more than 20 countries by 2023. Later that year, Alessandro sold a majority stake in NIO Cocktails to a global beverage group, while retaining a strategic role on the Board of Advisors.

He holds a degree in Economics from Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore and has built his career in management and leadership positions at international companies such as Calzedonia Group, Levi's, Vodafone, and Swarovski.

Today, Alessandro is the founder of **NOMAD**, a strategic and organizational consulting firm that supports companies across Europe in areas such as brand positioning, sales growth, team development, and business model innovation. Staying true to the spirit of entrepreneurship and exploration, Alessandro runs NOMAD while traveling across Europe in a camping car, blending work and life on the road.

He is a guest speaker and lecturer at Università Cattolica del Sacro Cuore, SDA Bocconi, and USI – Università della Svizzera Italiana in Lugano.

SCHEDULE

Lesson 1: Course overview, Entrepreneurship Today & Opportunity Recognition

7 January 2026, 2PM \ 6PM

Topics:

- Introduction and overview of the course: aims, organization, assessment
- Students' presentation
- The entrepreneurship as a result of the process of human evolution
- The current environment in which an entrepreneur moves.
- Who is an entrepreneur today?
- The nature of entrepreneurial opportunities
- Sources of opportunity & forms of opportunity
- Industries that favor new firms
- Impact of new technologies and social changes in the emergence new business opportunities

Recommended readings:

- Cognitive mechanisms in entrepreneurship, by Baron
- Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind, Harvill Secker, 2014

Class assignment:

- Identify / select among those provided by the lecturer a business opportunity
- List main changes and trends in the industry: demand, customers, technology etc
- Identify how new technologies and social changes might affect these industries



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Lesson 2: From Global Trends to Business Models

8 January 2026, 11AM – 1PM \ 2PM – 5PM

Topics:

- Macro-economic and technological trends (Industry 4.0)
- Business purpose: socio-economic integration
- What is a business model?
- How, when, and why we use a business model
- Introduction to business model canvas

Recommended readings:

- Why the Lean Start-up Changes Everything, by Steve Blank

Guest Speaker (2PM – 3:30 PM):

- Alessandro Bozzoli – CEO & Founder AUDES GROUP
Design-Driven Disruption in Workwear: How Audes Brought Fashion to a Standardized Industry

Lesson 3: Value proposition design and customer development process

9 January 2026, 10AM – 1PM \ 2PM – 5PM

Topics:

- Value Proposition design: Making it sharp, pointy...and laser-like.
- Ensure a product-market fit
- Review of the market side of business model canvas

Recommended readings:

- Market + Sizing + Overview, by International Finance Corporation
- Value Proposition, by A. Osterwalder and Y. Pigneur
- The Customer Centricity Playbook, by Fader and TomsGroup work:

Group work:

- Design the value proposition canvas and your customer development process

Guest Speaker (2PM – 3:30 PM):

- Mirko Brignani – CEO LabGo Srl
Turning Physical Products into Digital Platforms: Data-Driven Scale and Smart Value Creation

Lesson 4: Business model – product side. Analysis of key activities and teams

12 January 2026, 10AM – 1PM \ 2PM – 6PM (Theatre)

Topics:

- Activities, resources, partners, and revenue streams
- The difference between the Product Side & the Market side
- Identifying product value: value proposition and competitive advantage
- Structure and roles of key team and operational clarity: challenges, task delivery, roles and responsibilities
- Cross-functional collaboration and integration with corporate strategy
- Measure product performance

Group work:

- Design the product side of the business model
- Assess your team composition

Laboratory (2PM-6PM), co-teaching with Elisa Rota (expert in Theatre and Creativity training)

Body, gesture, eye contact: how to maximize physical impact and narrative in a professional Environment.

Introduction of methodology and techniques of social theatre: the adult's authorial function and its expressive, verbal and non-verbal resources; the metaphors of art as a dramaturgical reservoir; "play" as training for individual and collective creation.



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Lesson 5: Investor Readiness & Funding Strategy

13 January 2026, 10AM – 1PM \ 2PM – 5PM (Theatre)

- Blue ocean strategy: the entry point into the business model canvas
- Positioning map and criteria to identify and monitor competitors
- Fundraising pathways: grants, angels, VC, corporate, crowdfunding
- Key early-stage metrics: CAC, LTV, churn, conversion, payback time
- Managing risk-perception & credibility

14:00–17:00 (14:00–16:00 Guest — *Luca Bollani, TTANK VC*)

Dialogue — *Inside the Mind of a VC*

- What makes a founder fundable?
- How investors decide in the first 90 seconds

Lesson 6: Off-Site Visit — Railroad Brewery & StradaFerrata Distillery

14 January 2026, 1PM – 6PM

Focus:

- From craft manufacturing to business scale-up
- Operations → distribution → cash flow realities
- Taste the product → understand the experience

Reflection Task:

- Shoe Dog: A Memoir by the Creator of Nike, by Phil Knight
- Blue Ocean Strategy: From Theory to Practice, by Kim & Mauborgne

Learning Outcomes

- Link theory to real entrepreneurial operations
- Recognize the complexity of execution and supply chain



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Lesson 7: From business model to business plan

15 January 2026, 10AM – 1PM \ 2PM – 5PM

Topics:

- How, when, and why we use a business plan
- How to transform a business model in a plan
- Coaching session

Guest Speaker: 10:00–12:00

Jeck Scardy, Chimera Studio

Creativity Without Barriers: Turning Ideas into Brands that Inspire

Lesson 8: Presentation of groupwork and summary of the course

16 January 2026, 10AM – 1PM \ 2PM – 4PM

Topics:

- Students present their work
- Conclusion of the course
- Feedback from student