

Social Innovation Practicum

Syllabus, Spring 2025

Professor Hans Taparia

New York University Stern School of Business

E-mail: htaparia@stern.nyu.edu

Course Number:

BSPA-UB.70.001

Date/Time: Thursdays, 6:20 – 9:00 pm

Location: Tisch UC19

Office Hours: By appointment

COURSE DESCRIPTION:

Over the centuries, it is unquestionable that business innovation and market-based solutions have created tremendous value for society. However, it is also indisputable that traditional capitalist business models have externalized substantial costs to society—costs that have become all the more palpable in recent decades. These costs, caused by what economists refer to as market inefficiencies, are often morally indefensible and manifest in a variety of ways—ocean acidification that causes damage to fisheries, reduced agricultural yields due to climate change, chronic disease caused by poor diets, poverty wages that stem from monopsony power, and deforestation due to farmer poverty, to name a few.

Given the severity of these market inefficiencies, many entrepreneurs in recent years have been experimenting with the idea of applying business innovation to the task of solving societal problems and mitigating inefficiencies. This has given rise to an entirely new discipline called social entrepreneurship. Businesses, unlike their nonprofit counterparts, generate profits, giving them the ability to scale more easily. Therefore, in theory, if dedicated to solving a societal problem, business, as a vehicle, has the potential to solve that problem faster and more reliably. The complexity, though, is that the motivation for profits can quickly create power asymmetries between shareholders and other stakeholders like employees, suppliers, customers and the environment which, in turn, can compromise a societal mission.

Social Innovation Practicum is a course dedicated to exploring how business innovation can solve societal problems. Students will be introduced to several frameworks, some theory and a few examples, but the main focus of the class will be to develop an innovation that solves a real-life problem. To create some focus and to ensure depth of

analysis, we will focus on social and environmental problems in New York City with an eye toward developing innovations that have the potential to fundamentally reverse them. This course takes for granted that all humans have the capacity to innovate, but that we need to be in the right frame of mind to do so effectively. In Social Innovation Practicum, we will “practice” the art of innovation, by leveraging our powers of observation, engaging in field work and research, and drawing from a variety of tools to create solutions to social problems in this industry. For this experiential component, the class will be divided into teams of 4-5 students each.

COURSE OBJECTIVES

- To explore the power and complexities of applying business innovation to solving major societal or environmental problems.
- To provide students with the concepts and frameworks to engage in the process of applying business innovation to solve major societal or environmental problems.
- To gain an understanding of what it means to dive deep into a sector and a region to identify problems, needs and opportunities.

COURSE DELIVERABLES

Individual Assignments (40%)

For several classes (see course schedule below), there will be individual assignments due (e.g. essays, observation exercise). Excellent essays will conform to the standards of quality appropriate for professional business communication (i.e., suitable for publication and distribution). Specific elements of quality include:

- **Structure**: The introduction engages the audience; the body logically and concisely advances the argument; and the closing ties together and synthesizes the main point. In general, ideas are easy to distinguish and follow.
- **Coherence**: The paper addresses different ideas in distinct paragraphs with meaningful transitions; within each paragraph, ideas are underscored with supporting details.
- **Style**: The writer establishes a clear, consistent and recognizable voice; prose is concise, avoiding jargon or overblown wording.
- **Syntax and Grammar**: Sentences are grammatically complete and without error. Pronouns, subjects, verbs, tenses, and singulars/plurals all agree. All words are spelled properly.

Class Participation (10%)

The success of this course depends not only on your attendance, but also on your participation. The more you participate, the more fun and valuable the course will be for all of us. For every class, students are expected to read the supplemental readings and cases. Participation is measured using several criteria including actively your participation individually during the "discussion" part of our classes, in small group meetings, in the field with your team and during team presentations.

The instructor's evaluation of your participation will be evaluated using these criteria:

- When questions were presented to the class, how active was your participation?
- When you answered questions or commented on reading-related or discussion-related material in class, how accurately did you use concepts previously discussed?
- When you asked questions or commented on reading-related or discussion-related material in class, how creative (as opposed to redundant or repetitive) was your thinking?
- As this class involves significant time doing field and team work, how active were you in that process?
- During your field work, how enterprising were you in accessing new resources and maneuvering unforeseen circumstances?

Group Assignments (50%)

For most of the semester, you will work in teams of 4 to 5 people on an exciting innovation for the food industry. This project will entail: (1) conducting market observation and ethnography exercises, (2) conducting industry research and analysis, (3) identifying key need-gaps in the domain, (4) conceiving and developing a product innovation that fills the need-state and need-gap and (5) developing a business model for your idea.

A note on teams: Peer evaluations will assist me in assessing the contribution each team member makes to the business plan. Individual grades therefore may be significantly better (or worse) than the team grade. Only in circumstances where a team member has not contributed, and where the balance of the team has attempted, unsuccessfully, to correct the problem with the individual and myself, can a team member be removed. Arrange a meeting with me at the first sign of trouble.

COURSE GRADING

Date	Title	% of Grade	Group	Individual
1/30	Social Innovation and market failure essay	15		√
2/13	NYC essay	15		√
2/20	Observation Collage	10		√
2/27	(1) Literature review, (2) list of domain experts + questionnaire, (3) user lists + questionnaire	10	√	
3/6	Completed expert and user questionnaires	10	√	
3/13	Need-Gap presentations	10	√	
4/10	Product Idea presentations	10	√	
4/24	Final Presentation	10	√	
	Class Participation	10		√

ABOUT THE INSTRUCTOR

Hans Taparia joined New York University's Stern School of Business in 2014 and is currently a Clinical Professor of Business and Society. He teaches courses on social entrepreneurship, professional responsibility and marketing.

Professor Taparia has spent most of his career as an entrepreneur. He co-founded and led one of America's leading health food brands, Tasty Bite, which was then sold to Mars. He was also the co-founder of a management consulting firm and incubator, through which he co-founded Bangalore-based Tejas Networks, one of the world's leading telecommunications product companies that is now part of the Tata Group.

Hans is also an investor in the health foods space. He serves on several boards, including the board of the Acumen Fund, one of the original pioneers in social impact investing. Hans writes regularly for publications including The New York Times and Stanford Social Innovation Review, and has a Bachelor of Science degree from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

COURSE SCHEDULE & READINGS

January 23rd: Stakeholder Theory and Social Entrepreneurship

- Course Overview
- Introductions
- Stakeholder theory
- Quick Review of Social Entrepreneurship

Readings:

- Video: [What is Stakeholder Theory?](#), by Edward Freeman
- [Social Entrepreneurship: Definition and Boundaries](#), Technology Innovation Management Review, Abu-Saifan, Sameer
- How to Make Stakeholder Capitalism Work, Stanford Social Innovation Review by Hans Taparia

January 30th: Case Studies in Social Innovation

- What do we mean by social innovation?
- Case examples
- Social innovation and market failure

Readings:

- Market Failure Teaching Note by Rachel Kowal
- Fin-Tech Innovation: [Esusu web site](#) (review tabs under “Company” and “Resources”)
- Food Innovation: [The Amazon of Quinoa Bowls](#), The New York Times, Jane Black

Individual Homework Due (15% of grade):

Individual Assignment: Write a 2-3 page double-spaced essay on the following: Briefly describe the innovation and business models of Esusu and Everytable. What market failures do they reverse and why? How does their innovation or business model reverse them? Submit on Assignments on Brightspace by 6 pm on January 30, 2025.

February 6th: Acquainting ourselves with New York City

- New York's social and environmental challenges
- Workshop on what kind of city might we envision?
- Team formation

Readings:

- [Where are the Big Ideas for New York City?](#) The New York Times, August 5, 2023

February 13th: Observation and Ethnography

- Observation
- Ethnography

Readings:

- [An Introduction to Fieldwork and Ethnography](#), Yale Human Relations Area
- [Basic Interviewing Tips](#), Ethnography Matters
- The Field Guide to Human Centered Design, IDEO, read pages 37 – 55

Individual Homework Due (15% of grade):

Individual Assignment: Write a 2-3 page double-spaced essay on the following: Describe one or more social / environmental problems in New York City that you encounter regularly. What is the root cause of that problem (be sure to do your own research to investigate this and make a compelling case for this)? If you were the Mayor of New York City, what would you do to solve it? If you were a social entrepreneur, what would your innovation be to solve it? Submit on Assignments on Brightspace by 6 pm on February 13, 2025.

February 20th: Domain Analysis – Part I

- Conducting a literature review
- Identifying domain experts
- Identifying users / constituents

Readings:

[Methods for Literature Review](#), National Institutes of Health

Individual Homework Due (10% of grade):

Submit observation collage on Assignments on Brightspace by 6 pm on February 20, 2025.

February 27th: Domain Analysis – Part II

- Domain sizing and segmentation
- Competitive Analysis
- Review of other solutions in the domain – e.g. nonprofit, government

Group Homework Due (10% of grade):

Team Leads to submit your (1) literature review, (2) list of domain experts + questionnaire, (3) user lists + questionnaire on Assignments on Brightspace by 6 pm on February 27, 2025.

March 6th: Need-Gap Workshop

- Need-Gap Workshop

Readings:

- The Field Guide to Human Centered Design, IDEO, pages 75 - 88

Group Homework Due (10% of grade):

Team Leads submit completed expert and user questionnaires on Assignments on Brightspace by 6 pm on March 6, 2025.

March 13th: Need-Gap Presentations

- Need-Gap Presentations

Group Homework Due (10% of grade):

Team Leads to submit Need-Gap presentations on Assignments on Brightspace by 6 pm on March 13, 2025.

March 20th: From Need-Gaps to Innovation

- Insight Generation
- Idea Generation

- Prototyping

Readings:

- The Field Guide to Human Centered Design, IDEO, pages 94 – 121 and pages 129-131 (case study on Asili)

April 3rd: Prototyping Workshop

- Prototyping Workshop

April 10th: Product Idea Presentations

- Product Idea Presentations

Group Homework Due (10% of grade):

Team leads to submit Product Idea Presentations on Assignments on Brightspace by 6 pm on April 10, 2025.

April 17th: Business Modeling

- Business Modeling for Entrepreneurs

Readings:

- Note on Business Model Analysis for the Entrepreneur, Harvard Business Review
- [Why the Lean Startup Changes Everything](#), Harvard Business Review

April 24th: Final Presentations (Part I)

- Final Presentations

Group Homework Due (10%):

Team leads to submit Final Presentations on Assignments on Brightspace by 6 pm on April 24, 2025

May 1st: Final Presentations (Part II)

- Final Presentations

GENERAL INFORMATION

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Our undergraduate [Academics Pillar](#) states that *we take pride in our well-rounded education and approach our academics with honesty and integrity*. Indeed, integrity is critical to all that we do here at NYU Stern. As members of our community, all students agree to abide by the NYU Stern Student Code of Conduct, which includes a commitment to:

- Exercise integrity in all aspects of one's academic work including, but not limited to, the preparation and completion of exams, papers and all other course requirements by not engaging in any method or means that provides an unfair advantage.
- Clearly acknowledge the work and efforts of others when submitting written work as one's own. Ideas, data, direct quotations (which should be designated with quotation marks), paraphrasing, creative expression, or any other incorporation of the work of others should be fully referenced.
- Refrain from behaving in ways that knowingly support, assist, or in any way attempt to enable another person to engage in any violation of the Code of Conduct. Our support also includes reporting any observed violations of this Code of Conduct or other School and University policies that are deemed to adversely affect the NYU Stern community.

The Stern Code of Conduct and Judiciary Process applies to all students enrolled in Stern courses and can be found here: <https://www.stern.nyu.edu/uc/codeofconduct>.

To help ensure the integrity of our learning community, prose assignments you submit to Brightspace will be submitted to Turnitin. Turnitin will compare your submission to a database of prior submissions to Turnitin, current and archived Web pages, periodicals, journals, and publications. Additionally, your document will become part of the Turnitin database.

GENERAL CONDUCT & BEHAVIOR

Students are also expected to maintain and abide by the highest standards of professional conduct and behavior. Please familiarize yourself with Stern's Policy in Regard to In-Class Behavior & Expectations:

(<http://www.stern.nyu.edu/portal-partners/current-students/undergraduate/resources-policies/academic-policies/index.htm>)

and the NYU Student Conduct Policy:

<https://www.nyu.edu/about/policies-guidelines-compliance/policies-and-guidelines/university-student-conduct-policy.html>).

GRADING GUIDELINES

Grading Information for Stern Core Courses

At NYU Stern, we strive to create courses that challenge students intellectually and that meet the Stern standards of academic excellence. To ensure fairness and clarity of grading, the Stern faculty have adopted a grading guideline for core courses with enrollments of more than 25 students in which approximately 35% of students will receive an “A” or “A-“ grade. In core classes of less than 25 students, the instructor is at liberty to give whatever grades they think the students deserve, while maintaining rigorous academic standards.

Grading Information for Stern Elective Courses

At NYU Stern, we strive to create courses that challenge students intellectually and that meet the Stern standards of academic excellence. To ensure fairness and clarity of grading, the Stern faculty have agreed that for elective courses the individual instructor or department is responsible for determining reasonable grading guidelines.

STUDENT ACCESSIBILITY

If you will require academic accommodation of any kind during this course, you must notify me at the beginning of the course (or as soon as your need arises) and provide a letter from the Moses Center for Student Accessibility (212-998-4980, mosescsa@nyu.edu) verifying your registration and outlining the accommodations they recommend. For more information, visit the CSA website:

<https://www.nyu.edu/students/communities-and-groups/student-accessibility.html>

STUDENT WELLNESS

Classes can get stressful. I encourage you to reach out if you need help. The NYU Wellness Exchange offers mental health support. You can reach them 24/7 at [212 443 9999](tel:2124439999), or via the “NYU Wellness Exchange” app. There are also drop in hours and appointments. Find out more at:

<http://www.nyu.edu/students/health-and-wellness/counseling-services.html>

NAME PRONUNCIATION AND PRONOUNS

NYU Stern students now have the ability to include their pronouns and name pronunciation in Albert. I encourage you to share your name pronunciation and pronouns this way. Please utilize this link for additional information: [Pronouns & Name Pronunciation](#)

RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES AND OTHER ABSENCES

NYU's [Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. You must notify me in advance of religious holidays or observances that might coincide with exams, assignments, or class times to schedule mutually acceptable alternatives. Students may also contact religiousaccommodations@nyu.edu for assistance.

NYU Stern is committed to ensuring an equitable educational experience for all students regardless of identity or circumstances and strives to recognize the obligations its students have outside of Stern. Please review all class dates at the start of the semester and review all course requirements to identify any foreseeable conflicts with exams, course assignments, projects, or other items required for participation and attendance. If you are aware of a potential conflict, please contact me as soon as possible to discuss any potential conflicts to determine whether/how they can be accommodated.

INCLUSION STATEMENT

This course strives to support and cultivate diversity of thought, perspectives, and experiences. The intent is to present materials and activities that will challenge your current perspectives with a goal of understanding how others might see situations differently. By participating in this course, it is the expectation that everyone commits to making this an inclusive learning environment for all.