This course will explore how media companies have confronted, adapted and transformed in the face of existential threats. The course will use a combination of case studies and in-class presentations from senior industry executives to examine the various strategies incumbent media companies pursue to address secular, life-threatening threats to their business models -- in some cases remaking entire industries through decisive, bold action, in others ignoring obvious threats to the ultimate detriment of their business. Guests will include executives of companies who have faced these threats, executives of emerging companies that have or are threatening incumbent media companies, leading media analysts, and expert practitioners who will highlight practical approaches to achieving entrepreneurial success in the face of these existential challenges.

The course will comprise six classes. Each class will explore a different sector of the media industry and how a specific company or companies within that sector responded to existential threat. For each class, students will be assigned materials both about the sector and the companies we will examine (in one class a case study will be used), and will be expected to have read and absorbed the material to stimulate substantive in-class discussion.

The primary objective of the course is to enable students to develop a framework for understanding how the media and entertainment industries anticipate, confront and ultimately address the challenge of existential change. Through this process, students will develop a greater appreciation for how managers successfully (or not) work through such challenges, i.e. what questions they ask, what priorities they set, and how they ultimately define success.

This course will focus on all aspects of a Company’s path to transformation - including understanding the core business and its drivers, identifying (early) potentially company-threatening problems, and implementing corrective operational, financial, and legal, marketing/communications, organizational and cultural solutions to such problems. The course will also focus on issues that help or hinder rapid transformation.

The key issues for each case will be:
- What is the Company’s historic business model?
- What specifically are the secular issues it faces and how fatal could they be?
- Is the core, or historic, business sustainable? All, part or none.
- How specifically is the Company working to evolve?
  - What are the main barriers and obstacles?
  - Are there alternatives?
  - What is the Company trying to achieve with its new business strategy? Is it trying to protect its old business, milk it, or jettison it for an entirely new business?
  - What are the major impediments to future success and how did the Company navigate?
  - What takeaways can be learned from the Company’s success or failure to adapt?
Grading

- Project - 60%. The class will be divided into groups of approximately 4-6 students. During the course of the semester, each group will choose a specific media company that is facing secular change and prepare an approximate 10 slide PowerPoint presentation. The presentation must discuss: the Company’s business, the threat it faced, the specific issues that the threat required the Company to confront, how the Company adapted, what alternative strategies the Company could have pursued and then argue whether the Company acted correctly and was or will be successful. All students in a group will receive the same grade. Students will be expected to choose their group by Class Two, and to have chosen the company they will analyze by Class Three. The groups will present and defend their project during Class Six before a panel of experts and fellow classmates.

- Class Participation - 30%. For each class, students will be expected to have read the course material assigned in the syllabus and to take active part in the class discussions and will be evaluated based on such participation.

- Assignments – 10%. From time to time, students will be asked to submit a short writing, less than one page, on a relevant topic.
Class One: 10/29 Overview and Pay TV: HBO Facing the Competition

Overview/Introduction
- Course goals and objectives
- Why study media to understand corporate response to existential threats
- Big current themes in the media industry
- Analytic framework - Transformation Roadmap discussion
  - Readings
    - End-Game Strategies for Declining Industries, Kathryn Rudie Harrigan and Michael E. Porter, HBR

HBO’s Past, Present and Future with CEO Richard Plepler
- Topics/Questions
  - What are HBO’s historic assets, business model, revenue streams and customer base?
  - What are the threats facing HBO?
  - Was HBO’s decision to go over the top the right move? Has it been successful, and has it adequately addressed the threats it faces?
  - Did HBO have alternatives – what were they?
- Readings
  - Jason Hirschhorn’s @MediaREDEF, dated August 13, 2018 – Bigger and Better HBO
  - HBO battles ‘Game of Thrones’ chill with subscriber growth, article in Financial Times July 13, 2017 by Matthew Garrahan
  - On the run with Rich Greenfield, the straw that stirs Media Twitter, article in Fast company, June 28, 2018 by Nicole Laporte
- Guest
  - Richard Plepler, CEO, HBO
• Class Two: 11/12 TV/Film and Programming
  
  o Media Industry in Turmoil
    ▪ Reading
      • Media Wargames Netflix, Disney, Warner Media and Viacom A Tale of Four Divergent Strategies; BTIG Research
    ▪ Guest
      • Rich Greenfield, Media Futurist, Media & Tech Analyst at BTIG & Angel Investor
  
  o Challenges to Traditional Programming Models
    ▪ Topics/Questions
      • Why were traditional general entertainment channels (cable and broadcast) such “cash cows” for two generations? And what happened to disrupt their business?
      • Are there new programming models that can replace the historic and highly successful ones for general entertainment channels?
      • Specifically, for Turner (TBS, TNT, Cartoon, Adult Swim), what strategies could they deploy?
    ▪ Reading
      • [to come]
    ▪ Guest
      • Kevin Reilly, President of TNT and TBS and Chief Content Officer for Turner Entertainment Networks
Class Three: 11/19 News Businesses in Flux

- CNN’s Quandry with CEO Jeff Zucker
  - Topics/Questions
    - Is cable television news viable in the digital age?
    - Can cable news channels survive with an aging/changing audience?
    - Is CNN diluting or strengthening its brand by expanding its definition of news to include original series programming?
    - Is CNN’s business model better served by presenting the news objectively, or subjectively?
    - Advent of digital and video threats

  - Reading
    - [to come]

  - Guest
    - Jeff Zucker, CEO, CNN

  - Topics/Questions
    - What was/is the existential threat facing USN&WR
    - What are their key assets?
    - Was/Is any of the core business sustainable?
    - How should they allocate resources between the core and new businesses?
    - Have they employed the right strategy or, if not, what else should they have done?

  - Reading
    - [to come]

  - Guest
    - Eric Gertler, Chairman, USN&WR

- The Threat to Newspapers: The Case of The New York Times
  - Topics/Questions
    - What is the industry’s historic business model?
    - What existential threat or threats do they face?
    - Is there a future for newspapers?
    - Has the industry developed an effective counter-strategy? Did it wait too long to implement it?
    - Were there better options?
    - What has The New York Times done differently or better (or worse) than others in the industry and is its future more or less assured than others?
  - Reading
  - Guest
    - Mark Thompson, President and CEO, The New York Times Company

- The Challenges Facing Townsquare Media: An introduction to a company in transition in the face of existential threat
  - Discussion and presentation on the secular challenges faced by broadcast radio and Townsquare Media and what steps it has taken to evolve
  - Reading
    - [to come]
  - Guest
    - Bill Wilson, CO-CEO, Townsquare Media
• Class Five: 12/3 Music and Entertainment: Sony and Viacom

  o The Music Industry: Sony’s Issues

    ▪ Topics/Questions
      • Discussion of evolution of the music industry and the effects of piracy, digital downloading and streaming
      • What was Sony Music’s historic core business model and how has it reacted to the threats above?
      • Did Sony Music make the right choices when faced with threats in the post Napster era and what other choices did they have?

    ▪ Reading
      • The New York Times article, “In Shift to Streaming, Music Industry has Lost Billions” dated March 24, 2016

    ▪ Guest
      • Michael Lynton, Former Chairman and CEO, Sony Corporation of America and EVP, officer in charge of music and pictures businesses at Sony Corporation

  o A Media Company in the Crucible: The Decline (and Rebirth?) of Viacom

    ▪ Topics/Questions
      • What was Viacom’s historic business model and what posed the biggest risk to it
      • What missteps did Viacom make over the past 5 years?
      • Is Viacom’s new strategy viable
      • Should Viacom have merged with CBS

    ▪ Reading
      • Viacom Research Report [to come]

    ▪ Guest
      • Shari Redstone, President of National Amusements as well as vice-chairwoman of CBS Corporation and Viacom
• Class Six: 12/10: Course Wrap-Up
  
  o Final Presentations
    ▪ Guest Panel to Assist in Review of Class Projects
    ▪ To come
  
  o Summary and Evaluation