UCUG2804 (L01) - Cultivating the Entrepreneurial Mindset: Innovation, Opportunity, and Value Creation

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The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou)

UG Course Syllabus

[Course Title] Cultivating the Entrepreneurial Mindset: Innovation, Opportunity, and Value Creation

[Course Code] UCUG 2804

[No. of Credits] 3

[Any pre-/co-requisites] NO

[Medium of Instruction] English

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Guest Mentors: To be confirmed

Teaching Assistant: To be confirmed

Course Description

This course immerses students in the entrepreneurial mindset, with a focus on identifying meaningful problems, discovering opportunities, testing assumptions, and creating value. Entrepreneurship is treated not simply as the act of starting a company, but as a disciplined way of learning under uncertainty and addressing real needs across disciplines, organizations, and communities.

Working in small teams, students will investigate problems in accessible campus and everyday-life contexts, develop and test minimum viable products (MVPs), engage potential users, refine value propositions, and explore sustainable business models. The course combines short lectures, workshops, field-based customer discovery, peer critique, guest feedback, prototyping, and reflective practice.

The course rewards evidence, iteration, ethical judgment, and intellectual honesty. A project does not need to become a successful venture to earn a strong grade. Students who rigorously demonstrate that an idea should be changed, abandoned, or reframed may perform as well as teams whose solutions progress to a polished prototype.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

CILO#1: Explain the foundational concepts of entrepreneurship and innovation.

CILO#2: Analyze market opportunities and customer needs to identify viable business ideas.

CILO#3: Develop and test minimum viable products (MVPs) and refine business ideas based on customer feedback.

CILO#4: Create a sustainable business model that supports long-term growth and success.

CILO#5: Effectively communicate business ideas and strategies to various stakeholders.

Weekly Schedule & Weekly CILOs

Week	Date	Topics	Weekly CILOs	Tutorial / Project Activity
1	Sep 2, 2026	Entrepreneurial Thinking	CILO 1	Orientation; entrepreneurial identity map; problem-first challenge
2	Sep 9, 2026	Market Opportunities and Pain-Point Discovery	CILO 2	Campus observation; 5 Whys; individual pain-point submission
3	Sep 16, 2026	Idea Generation and Team Formation	CILOs 1-3	Pain-point gallery and voting; team formation; team charter; ideation sprint
4	Sep 23, 2026	Minimum Viable Products (MVPs)	CILOs 2, 3, 5	Rapid paper prototype; assumption mapping; MVP test-plan clinic
5	Sep 30, 2026	Experimentation and Hypothesis Testing	CILOs 2-4	Experiment design; pivot-or-persevere decision
-	Oct 7, 2026	National Day Holiday	-	No class
6	Oct 14, 2026	Developing Value Propositions (Guest Speaker)	CILOs 4, 5	Value proposition workshop; stakeholder role-play; proposal preparation

7	Oct 21, 2026	Mid-Course Proposal and Feedback	CILOs 2-5	20-minute team proposal; 8-minute Q&A; submit and obtain approval for the Week 8 fieldwork plan
8	Oct 28, 2026	Fieldwork: Customer Discovery	CILOs 2-4	Team fieldwork: carry out the approved customer-research plan; collect and document real-world evidence
9	Nov 4, 2026	Customer Validation and Product Core	CILOs 2-4	Evidence court; expanded validation; product-core statement; iteration review
10	Nov 11, 2026	Building Sustainable Business Models	CILO 4	Business Model Canvas; moat analysis; To C / To B / To G extension
11	Nov 18, 2026	Final Prototyping and/or Product Development	CILOs 3, 4	Studio workshop; prototype checkpoint; user micro-test; mentor feedback
12	Nov 25, 2026	Pitch Preparation (Guest Speaker)	CILO 5	Mock pitch; panel Q&A; evidence audit; final revision
13	Dec 2, 2026	Final Presentation and Reflection	CILOs 2-5	Final showcase; panel feedback; individual reflection and project debrief

Group Project-Based Learning Remarks

Students will normally work in teams of four. If the final enrollment makes four-person teams impractical, the instructor may approve selected teams of three or five. Teams are formed after individual pain points have been shared and discussed, so that membership is driven by commitment to a problem rather than friendship alone. Each team will complete a team charter that records roles, communication norms, decision rules, expected contributions, and procedures for addressing conflict.

The group project has three connected team submissions: a Mid-Course Proposal, a Final Pitch, and a Final Business Plan. The Business Plan is the last major submission and should incorporate what the team learns from the Final Pitch and Q&A. Every team assessment includes an individual component: each student must answer individual questions in the Mid-Course Proposal and Final Pitch, and each student must submit an individual authorship and learning statement with the

Business Plan. A Supporting Evidence Portfolio must accompany the Business Plan to substantiate customer research, experiments, validation, iterations, sources, and individual contributions.

Customer Discovery, Fieldwork, and Fallback Routes

Projects should begin with problems that students can investigate safely and realistically, preferably within the campus or other readily accessible communities. By the end of Week 7, each team must submit a detailed fieldwork plan covering the research question, target participants, access method, roles, interview/observation protocol, consent and privacy, evidence to collect, risks, timetable, and fallback route. The plan must be approved before fieldwork begins.

Week 8 is a designated fieldwork week. Instead of a regular classroom session in W4-202, teams carry out their approved customer-discovery plan in the agreed location and time, then organize and upload the evidence collected. If direct access fails, the team must use the approved fallback route, such as remote interviews, structured analysis of public evidence, or another instructor-approved method.

- Remote or online interviews with relevant participants;
- Structured analysis of public reviews, forums, competitor offerings, or other credible secondary evidence;
- A carefully designed simulated interview or research-plan exercise when genuine access is impossible.

Project Iteration and Decision Gates

Gate	Timing	Required Evidence	Possible Decision
Problem / MVP Gate	Weeks 2-4	Observed pain point, target user, assumptions, first MVP test	Continue, narrow, reframe, or replace the problem
Proposal Gate	Week 7	Problem evidence, value proposition, test history, next validation plan	Proceed, pivot, or pause pending stronger evidence
Validation / Model Gate	Weeks 9-10	Customer evidence, product core, iteration record, business-model logic	Build prototype, redesign, or justify no-go conclusion
Showcase Gate	Weeks 12-13	Complete evidence trail, prototype or tested representation, reflection	Communicate learning and defend conclusions

Assessment and Grading

This section explains the assessed work in the order you will complete it. For every assessment, read the four parts: what it is, what you need to do, what you must submit, and how it will be marked. The assessment weights add to 100%.

Assessment at a Glance

No.	Assessment	Who	Weight	When
1	Weekly Check-in Questions and Participation	Individual	10%	Weeks 1-6 and 9-12; 1 point each
2	Mid-Course Team Proposal + Individual Q&A	Team + individual	15%	Week 7: October 21
3	Final Team Pitch + Individual Q&A	Team + individual	25%	Week 13: December 2
4	Final Business Plan + Evidence Portfolio + Individual Statement	Team + individual	25%	December 4, after the Final Pitch
5	Individual Final Reflection	Individual	15%	December 4, after the final class
6	Peer Evaluation and Contribution Record	Individual	10%	Interim: Week 7; final: December 4

Important: The sequence is intentional. The Final Pitch takes place on December 2. The Final Business Plan, final Peer Evaluation, and Individual Final Reflection are then submitted on December 4 so students can use panel feedback and complete their personal reflection after the final class.

Assessment 1: Weekly Check-in Questions and Participation

Who completes it: Each student

Weight: 10%

When: Weeks 1-6 and 9-12 (10 eligible class meetings; Weeks 7, 8, and 13 are excluded)

What this assessment is: This assessment rewards preparation and active learning during class. It is not an attendance-only mark.

What you need to do

- Attend the eligible class meeting and submit a response to the announced check-in question.
- Take part in workshops, experiments, critique, and project decisions; active responsibility can also provide a recovery opportunity for a missed check-in point when approved.
- Give specific, useful feedback and behave professionally.

What you must submit

- One response in the announced format for each of the 10 eligible class meetings.
- If you miss a check-in opportunity, you may ask to earn the point by taking clear responsibility for a substantial class activity. This is not automatic and must be agreed and recorded by the instructor/TA.

How it will be marked

Item	Points	Earned	Not earned	Recovery option	Important note
10 weekly check-in questions	10 (1 each)	1 point for being present and submitting a response	0 for no response	A missed point may be recovered by taking substantial responsibility in a class activity, with instructor/TA approval	Correctness is not graded. Weeks 7, 8, and 13 do not have a check-in point.

Assessment 2: Mid-Course Team Proposal + Individual Q&A

Who completes it: Team submission and presentation; every student answers individual questions

Weight: 15%

When: Week 7, October 21

What this assessment is: This is the first formal decision gate. Your team explains the problem, current evidence, proposed value, and the next experiment. The panel then checks each student's understanding.

What you need to do

- Prepare an evidence-led proposal rather than a sales pitch.

- Explain the problem, target customer, evidence collected, value proposition, key assumptions, and next test.
- After the 20-minute team presentation, the group will have 8 minutes of Q&A. Every student must answer at least one individual question without assistance from teammates.
- Use feedback to write a short team decision memo: continue, pivot, narrow, or pause.

What you must submit

- Team proposal slides or one-page visual summary.
- Evidence appendix used in the presentation.
- 20-minute team presentation followed by 8 minutes of Q&A for each group.
- One-page team decision memo submitted after the hearing.

How it will be marked

Criterion	Points	Excellent	Competent	Developing	Insufficient
Team: problem and evidence	4	[3.40-4.00] Problem, customer, urgency, and evidence are precise and convincing.	[2.80-3.39] Problem and evidence are clear.	[2.00-2.79] Problem is understandable but evidence is limited.	[0-1.99] Problem is unclear or unsupported.
Team: value proposition	3	[2.55-3.00] Strong fit between evidence, alternatives, and proposed value.	[2.10-2.54] Proposal is coherent and linked to the problem.	[1.50-2.09] Important links remain assumed.	[0-1.49] Proposal is solution-first or inconsistent.
Team: next experiment	3	[2.55-3.00] Specific, ethical, feasible, decision-relevant test with fallback.	[2.10-2.54] Feasible test addresses a key uncertainty.	[1.50-2.09] Plan lacks detail, measures, access, or contingency.	[0-1.49] Plan is infeasible or tests the wrong issue.
Individual Q&A	5	[4.25-5.00] Student answers precisely with evidence and acknowledges uncertainty.	[3.50-4.24] Student explains own work and answers competently.	[2.50-3.49] Answers are partial, generic, or rely on teammates.	[0-2.49] Student cannot explain the project or own contribution.

Assessment 3: Final Team Pitch + Individual Q&A

Who completes it: Team presentation; every student answers individual questions

Weight: 25%

When: Week 13, December 2

What this assessment is: This is the public presentation of what your team learned and what you now recommend. It comes before the written Business Plan so you can use panel feedback to improve the final document.

What you need to do

- Tell an evidence-led story from problem discovery to final recommendation.
- Demonstrate the prototype or tested representation and explain what was actually tested.
- Explain value creation, business-model logic, limitations, and next steps.
- Each student must answer individual questions about the project and their own area of work.

What you must submit

- Final pitch deck.
- Prototype/demo or tested representation.
- 20-minute team pitch followed by 10 minutes of panel questions, including individual Q&A.

How it will be marked

Criterion	Points	Excellent	Competent	Developing	Insufficient
Team: evidence and learning story	6	[5.10-6.00] Compelling evidence trail; clear problem, learning, and limits.	[4.20-5.09] Credible evidence supports a coherent story.	[3.00-4.19] Some evidence is relevant but gaps remain.	[0-2.99] Claims are unsupported or contradict evidence.
Team: prototype/demo	4	[3.40-4.00] Fit-for-purpose demo clearly supports tested claims.	[2.80-3.39] Demonstrates core functions and basic testing.	[2.00-2.79] Partial or weakly linked to evidence.	[0-1.99] Missing or cannot support claims.
Team: business logic	4	[3.40-4.00] Value, adoption/revenue, feasibility, responsibility, and sustainability are integrated.	[2.80-3.39] Business logic is coherent with minor gaps.	[2.00-2.79] Important assumptions remain untested.	[0-1.99] Logic is generic or implausible.

Team: pitch delivery	3	[2.55-3.00] Concise, well structured, visual, and professionally timed.	[2.10-2.54] Clear and mostly well delivered.	[1.50-2.09] Uneven, overlong, or overly dependent on slides.	[0-1.49] Unclear or incomplete presentation.
Individual Q&A	8	[6.80-8.00] Student responds precisely, uses evidence, and shows ownership beyond a narrow task.	[5.60-6.79] Student explains own work and answers most questions well.	[4.00-5.59] Answers are partial, generic, or depend on teammates.	[0-3.99] Student cannot explain the project, decisions, or own contribution.

Assessment 4: Final Business Plan + Supporting Evidence Portfolio + Individual Statement

Who completes it: Team Business Plan and Evidence Portfolio; individual statement from every student

Weight: 25%

When: December 4, after the Final Pitch

What this assessment is: This is the final written project. The Business Plan is the main document. It should incorporate relevant feedback from the Final Pitch. The Evidence Portfolio supports the claims in the plan. The individual statement identifies what each student personally did and learned.

What you need to do

- Revise the plan after the Final Pitch and panel feedback.
- Make a clear evidence-based case covering the problem, customers, solution, market, competitors, business model, feasibility, risks, validation, implementation, and next steps.
- Use the Evidence Portfolio to substantiate interviews, tests, results, sources, iterations, and contribution records.
- Each student writes and submits their own authorship and learning statement.

What you must submit

- One team Business Plan, approximately 4,000-5,000 words excluding appendices.
- One team Supporting Evidence Portfolio or appendix with dated, traceable artifacts.
- One individual authorship and learning statement per student, approximately 500 words, submitted separately.

How it will be marked

Criterion	Points	Excellent	Competent	Developing	Insufficient
Team: problem and customer	4	[3.40-4.00] Specific opportunity supported by strong, triangulated customer evidence.	[2.80-3.39] Clear problem and relevant evidence.	[2.00-2.79] Plausible problem but evidence is narrow.	[0-1.99] Problem/customer are assumed or unsupported.
Team: value proposition and solution	3	[2.55-3.00] Compelling fit among needs, alternatives, and proposed value.	[2.10-2.54] Coherent solution linked to needs.	[1.50-2.09] Important links remain assumed.	[0-1.49] Solution-first or inconsistent.
Team: market and competitors	3	[2.55-3.00] Credible analysis of users, buyers, stakeholders, market, alternatives, and competitors.	[2.10-2.54] Covers the main factors with suitable evidence.	[1.50-2.09] Partial or mainly descriptive analysis.	[0-1.49] Major actors/alternatives omitted; unsupported claims.
Team: business model and feasibility	5	[4.25-5.00] Integrates delivery, resources, partners, costs, revenue/adoption, risk, ethics, and sustainability.	[3.50-4.24] Coherent and feasible with minor gaps.	[2.50-3.49] Key feasibility assumptions are underdeveloped.	[0-2.49] Model is generic, implausible, or disconnected.
Team: validation and implementation	3	[2.55-3.00] Evidence drives iteration and a specific staged plan with measures and contingencies.	[2.10-2.54] Relevant validation and workable next steps.	[1.50-2.09] Limited validation or vague next steps.	[0-1.49] No credible validation or feasible plan.

Team: Evidence Portfolio	2	[1.70-2.00] Complete, dated, traceable, organized, and accurately sourced.	[1.40-1.69] Mostly complete and traceable.	[1.00-1.39] Important artifacts/dates/sources missing.	[0-0.99] Inaccessible, unreliable, or fabricated evidence.
Individual authorship and learning statement	5	[4.25-5.00] Specific, verifiable contribution; insightful learning and response to feedback.	[3.50-4.24] Credible contribution and clear learning.	[2.50-3.49] Contribution/learning is vague or partly evidenced.	[0-2.49] Missing, unverifiable, or inconsistent with records.

Assessment 5: Individual Final Reflection

Who completes it: Each student

Weight: 15%

When: December 4, after the final class

What this assessment is: This is one final individual reflection on what you learned, what you contributed, and how evidence changed your thinking across the whole course. It is submitted once, at the end of the course.

What you need to do

- Record important assumptions, decisions, feedback, mistakes, and changes in your thinking.
- Use specific dated examples from the project rather than writing a general diary.
- Explain your own contribution and what you would do differently next time.

What you must submit

- No interim journal submission is required. You may keep private notes during the semester to help you prepare the final reflection.
- One final reflection of approximately 1,000-1,500 words.
- Links or references to specific Business Plan/Evidence Portfolio items where relevant.

How it will be marked

Criterion	Points	Excellent	Competent	Developing	Insufficient

Critical reflection	5	[4.25-5.00] Clearly explains how and why thinking changed and what remains uncertain.	[3.50-4.24] Shows clear learning and thoughtful reflection.	[2.50-3.49] Mainly describes events; limited analysis.	[0-2.49] Superficial, generic, missing, or inconsistent.
Use of evidence	4	[3.40-4.00] Uses specific dated evidence to test conclusions and assumptions.	[2.80-3.39] Uses relevant examples linked to conclusions.	[2.00-2.79] Evidence is vague or weakly connected.	[0-1.99] Claims are unsupported or unreliable.
Integration of course concepts	3	[2.55-3.00] Accurately applies and connects multiple course concepts to interpret the project experience.	[2.10-2.54] Correctly uses relevant course concepts to explain learning.	[1.50-2.09] Mentions concepts but connections are partial or superficial.	[0-1.49] Course concepts are absent, inaccurate, or not applied.
Future application	3	[2.55-3.00] Gives specific, feasible, transferable next steps.	[2.10-2.54] Identifies relevant next steps.	[1.50-2.09] Next steps are generic.	[0-1.49] No meaningful future application.

Assessment 6: Peer Evaluation and Contribution Record

Who completes it: Each student submits confidentially

Weight: 10%

When: Interim in Week 7; final submission December 4

What this assessment is: This assessment helps distinguish individual contribution within team work. Ratings must be supported by specific examples and project records.

What you need to do

- Evaluate every teammate and yourself using the stated criteria.
- Give specific behavioral examples, not comments about personality.
- Keep the team contribution log accurate throughout the semester.

What you must submit

- Confidential interim and final peer-evaluation form.
- Contribution log showing task ownership and completion.

How it will be marked

Criterion	Points	Excellent	Competent	Developing	Insufficient
Reliability	3	[2.55-3.00] Consistently delivers agreed work on time and communicates risks early.	[2.10-2.54] Usually reliable; minor lapses resolved.	[1.50-2.09] Repeated delays or reminders affect progress.	[0-1.49] Regularly fails to deliver or disengages.
Quality and intellectual contribution	3	[2.55-3.00] High-quality work materially improves team reasoning and evidence.	[2.10-2.54] Solid, useful contribution.	[1.50-2.09] Limited/routine work or substantial rework needed.	[0-1.49] Minimal, unverifiable, or harmful contribution.
Collaboration	2	[1.70-2.00] Includes others and resolves disagreement constructively.	[1.40-1.69] Respectful and cooperative.	[1.00-1.39] Communication/collaboration inconsistent.	[0-0.99] Behavior damages trust or team functioning.
Documentation and accountability	2	[1.70-2.00] Accurate records and constructive response to feedback.	[1.40-1.69] Adequate records and accountability.	[1.00-1.39] Records incomplete or accountability inconsistent.	[0-0.99] Work cannot be attributed or responsibility is avoided.

How Team and Individual Marks Work

- Mid-Course Proposal: 10 points are based on the team proposal and 5 points on each student's individual Q&A.
- Final Pitch: 17 points are based on the team pitch and 8 points on each student's individual Q&A.
- Final Business Plan: 20 points are based on the team plan and evidence; 5 points are based on each student's individual authorship and learning statement.

- Team scores may be adjusted by up to plus or minus 10 percentage points for that team task when peer evaluations and contribution records show a clear, material difference in contribution. The instructor reviews the evidence; peer ratings do not create an automatic adjustment.

Attendance, Submission, and Evidence Rules

Rule	What it means for you
Attendance and leave	Attend scheduled classes and required course activities. If you cannot attend, request leave and inform the instructor as early as possible. Unexcused absence is considered in the overall Weekly Check-in Questions and Participation assessment.
No late submission	Late submissions are not accepted and normally receive zero. Only a formally approved exceptional arrangement under university procedures can change a deadline.
Team contribution concerns	Raise problems early. The instructor may review contribution records, hold individual check-ins, revise roles, require a recovery plan, or adjust individual marks when there is clear evidence of persistent non-contribution or harmful behavior.
Evidence integrity	Interview notes, images, results, quotations, and data must be authentic, dated, and traceable. Fabricated or misleading evidence is an academic-integrity matter.

A project may conclude that the original idea is not viable and still earn an A-range mark. The team must show a complete evidence trail, well-designed tests, honest interpretation, meaningful iteration, and a defensible conclusion. A polished prototype cannot compensate for weak or fabricated evidence.

Academic Integrity and Responsible Research

Students must accurately represent the origin of ideas, evidence, data, quotations, and creative work. Fabricated interviews, invented customer evidence, manipulated findings, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, or misrepresentation of individual contribution may constitute academic misconduct. Teams must protect participant privacy and avoid collecting unnecessary sensitive information.

Course AI Policy

Generative AI tools may be used as learning and production aids when permitted for a particular task. They may support brainstorming, drafting interview questions, language improvement, prototyping, coding, data organization, or visual development. AI output is not customer evidence and may not replace genuine observation, interviewing, testing, judgment, or reflection.

1. Disclosure: submissions must identify the AI tool used, the purpose of use, and the material contribution of the tool.
2. Verification: students remain responsible for checking accuracy, bias, sources, code, calculations, and claims.
3. Human evidence: simulated AI personas or AI-generated responses may not be presented as interviews with real customers.
4. Privacy: confidential, personal, or identifiable participant information must not be entered into public AI systems.
5. Authorship: students must be able to explain and defend all submitted work. Undisclosed or uncritical use may be treated as academic misconduct.

Indicative Learning Resources

- (2026). *The founder's playbook: Building an AI-native startup*.
- Hopp, C., Antons, D., Kaminski, J., & Salge, T. O. (2018). Disruptive innovation: Conceptual foundations, empirical evidence, and research opportunities in the digital age. *Journal of Product Innovation Management, 35*(3), 446-457. https://doi.org/10.1111/jpim.12448
- Kawasaki, G. (2015). *The art of the start 2.0: The time-tested, battle-hardened guide for anyone starting anything*. Portfolio.
- Spinelli, S., Jr., & Adams, R. J. (2016). *New venture creation: Entrepreneurship for the 21st century*(10th ed.). McGraw-Hill Education.
- von Hippel, E. (1988). *The sources of innovation*. Oxford University Press.
- von Hippel, E. (2005). *Democratizing innovation*. MIT Press.
- von Hippel, E. (2017). *Free innovation*. MIT Press.

Additional cases, videos, templates, and tools will be provided through Canvas.

Important Note

This syllabus provides the planned structure of the course. Dates, guest contributors, room arrangements, and selected activities may be adjusted to support learning or respond to operational constraints. Any material change will be communicated through Canvas.

Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due