

MBA M740
Corporate Reputation and Brand Management
Winter 2026 Course Outline

Information, Marketing, Operations Area
DeGroote School of Business
McMaster University

COURSE OBJECTIVE

This course is designed to build on your understanding of the role a brand plays in driving shareholder value for an organization and how an organization can influence that brand and value. Attention will be paid to the organization as a brand with value itself.

INSTRUCTOR AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Wed 19.00 – 22:00

Dr. Vandana Deswal
Instructor
deswalv@mcmaster.ca

Office: RJC
Office Hours: On request

Sophia Koutsikaloudis
TA
koutsisk@mcmaster.ca

Office Hours: On request

COURSE ELEMENTS

Credit Value: 3	Leadership: Yes	IT skills: No	Global view: Yes
Avenue: Yes	Ethics: Yes	Numeracy: Yes	Written skills: Yes
Participation: Yes	Innovation: Yes	Group work: Yes	Oral skills: Yes
Evidence-based: No	Experiential: Yes	Final Exam: No	Guest speaker(s): Yes

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course combines the view that corporate reputation is an important asset entrusted by the shareholders and board to the CEO and the management team with an examination of the art and science of Brand Management. This course is taught through a variety of methods: case studies, readings, lectures, group projects, and guest lectures. The goal is to understand the importance and elements that help achieve sustainable competitive advantage in the marketplace. The course will focus on the development of strong brands from the consumer perspective and how this will support a business's own brand and result in increased shareholder value. Class time will be comprised primarily of lecture and discussion.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to complete the following key tasks:

- Understand and appreciate the importance of having a balanced approach to reputation management and branding with a focus on employees and key stakeholders, as well as on financial success.
- Understand the evolution of corporate reputation in the digital age.
- Identify the important opportunities and challenges facing a business and set out a course of action for dealing with them.
- Understand the process involved in building a brand and why it is an important and powerful part of the guiding philosophy for most organizations and an important element in a cohesive and sustainable business strategy.
- To develop the knowledge and perspective necessary to facilitate the development of strong brands and businesses.
- To become familiar with the opportunities and boundaries presented by brand management tasks and decisions in a wide cross section of industries.
- To develop an understanding of how to manage brands for continued growth and profitability.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS

Avenue registration for course content, readings, and case materials

- <http://avenue.mcmaster.ca>

\$ FREE

Sinek, Simon (2009), *Start with why*. Portfolio Penguin \$ 25
➤ Purchase a copy at the bookstore.

OPTIONAL COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS

Learning in this course results primarily from in-class discussion and participation of comprehensive business cases as well as out-of-class analysis. The balance of the learning results from the

➤ Percy/ Rosenbaum-Elliott (2019) *Strategic Brand Management*, 4/e, Oxford University Press \$84.99

EVALUATION

Learning in this course results primarily from in-class discussion and participation of comprehensive business cases as well as out-of-class analysis. The balance of the learning results from the lectures on strategic concepts, from related readings, and from researching your presentations, cases, assignments, simulation decisions and projects. All work will be evaluated on an individual basis except in certain cases where group work is expected. In these cases, group members will share the same grade adjusted by peer evaluation. Your final grade will be calculated as follows:

Components and Weights

In-Class Participation	Class Attendance & Participation	10%
Assignment 1 (week 4)	Corporate Reputation (individual)	25%
Assignment 2 (week 7)	Brand Resilience Assignment (group)	25%
Assignment 3 (week 9)	'Start with Why' Analysis (individual)	15%
Assignment 4 (week 12)	Final Brand Plan (group)	25%
Total		100%

NOTE: The use of a McMaster standard calculator is allowed during examinations in this course. See McMaster calculator policy at the following URL:

www.mcmaster.ca/policy/Students-AcademicStudies/UndergraduateExaminationsPolicy.pdf

Grade Conversion

At the end of the course your overall percentage grade will be converted to your letter grade in accordance with the following conversion scheme:

LETTER GRADE	PERCENT	POINTS
A+	90-100	12
A	85-89	11
A-	80-84	10
B+	75-79	9
B	70-74	8
B-	60-69	7
F	00-59	0

Attendance & Class Participation

It is our belief that highly interactive environments are the breeding grounds for excellence in stimulating idea generation, enhancing communication skills, improving analytical processes, fostering collaborative networks, testing assumptions, and having fun! This is also the time and place to develop the assertiveness and communication skills that are necessary for success in business. Consequently, we value and reward contributions. You will be presented with many opportunities to participate. For our class, contribution relates to:

- Actively participating in class discussion/workshops.
- Offering analysis in a critical and constructive manner.
- Eager / willing to participate in the daily class activities.
- Your ability to communicate clearly (i.e., quantity of dialogue is not the same as quality).
- Demonstrate initiative to bring new and relevant knowledge to class discussions/workshops.

You will be given the opportunity to view your participation grade halfway through the semester. At that time or any other time, if you are feeling like you are not receiving ample opportunity to participate, let the instructors know early so the situation can be addressed.

Name cards and class pictures are used to help give credit for your participation. You **must** have a name card with your full first and last name clearly written and displayed in front of you for every class.

Course Deliverables

Assignment #1 – Corporate Reputation Assignment

Individual | 25% | Due Week 4

This individual assignment requires students to examine a real-world corporate reputation challenge and assess how organizations manage reputation risk in complex, high-stakes environments. Students will analyze the context of the reputation issue, evaluate organizational responses and stakeholder reactions, and develop strategic, ethical, and evidence-based recommendations for reputation recovery and long-term trust building.

The assignment emphasizes critical thinking, application of corporate reputation frameworks, and the ability to translate theory into actionable managerial decisions.

Detailed instructions, submission requirements, and evaluation criteria will be provided on Avenue to Learn.

Assignment #2 – Strategic Brand Resilience Amidst Black Swan Turmoil

Group | 25% | Due Week 7

This group assignment challenges students to explore how brands can prepare for, respond to, and recover from extreme uncertainty caused by unexpected, high-impact events. Working in teams, students will assess the implications of a disruptive external shock on a selected brand and develop integrated strategies addressing crisis communication, brand adaptation, stakeholder engagement, and financial resilience.

The assignment emphasizes strategic foresight, cross-functional thinking, collaboration, and the ability to make decisions under uncertainty. An in-class presentation component will assess teams' ability to communicate and defend their strategies effectively.

Detailed instructions, presentation expectations, and evaluation criteria will be provided on Avenue to Learn.

Assignment #3 – 'Start with Why'
Individual | 15% | Due Week 9

This individual assignment invites students to critically examine Simon Sinek's Start with Why framework and its relevance to corporate reputation and brand management. Students will analyze how purpose-driven leadership is articulated and enacted across selected organizations and evaluate its impact on brand credibility, stakeholder trust, and long-term brand performance.

The assignment emphasizes theoretical integration, critical evaluation of real-world brand practices, and reflective insight into the strategic role of purpose in leadership and reputation management.

Detailed instructions, expectations, and evaluation criteria will be provided on Avenue to Learn.

Assignment #4 – Brand Revitalization and Expansion
Group | 25% | Due Week 12

This capstone group project requires students to develop a comprehensive brand revitalization and market exploration plan for an established brand facing declining relevance. Students will conduct a brand audit, assess market and competitive dynamics, and propose integrated strategies for revitalizing the brand while exploring opportunities for growth in new markets.

The project emphasizes strategic analysis, creativity, feasibility, teamwork, and professional level presentation skills. Both written and in-class presentation components are required.

Detailed instructions, expectations, and evaluation criteria will be provided on Avenue to Learn.

ACTIVITY	DELIVERY	DESCRIPTION	TOOL(S)
Live Lectures	In-person	3 hr. live session; opportunity to elaborate on content, present challenges, engage discussion	In-Class
Readings	Asynchronous	Tied to weekly discussion prompts	From assigned textbooks, or as provided on Avenue
Guest Lectures	In-person/Zoom	1.5 hr. live session	In-Class/Zoom
Group Discussions	In-person	Breakout rooms during lecture	In-Class

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

Students that are uncomfortable in directly approaching an instructor regarding a course concern may send a confidential and anonymous email to the respective Area Chair or Associate Dean:

<http://mbastudent.degrote.mcmaster.ca/contact/anonymous/>

Students who wish to correspond with instructors or TAs directly via email must send messages that originate from their official McMaster University email account. This protects the confidentiality and sensitivity of information as well as confirms the identity of the student. Emails regarding course issues should NOT be sent to the Administrative Assistant.

Instructors are encouraged to conduct an informal course review with students by Week #4 to allow time for modifications in curriculum delivery. Instructors should provide evaluation feedback for at least 10% of the final grade to students prior to Week #8 in the term.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

You are expected to exhibit honesty and use ethical behavior in all aspects of the learning process. Academic credentials you earn are rooted in principles of honesty and academic integrity.

Academic dishonesty is to knowingly act or fail to act in a way that results or could result in unearned academic credit or advantage. This behavior can result in serious consequences, e.g. the grade of zero on an assignment, loss of credit with a notation on the transcript (notation reads: "Grade of F assigned for academic dishonesty"), and/or suspension or expulsion from the university.

It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the Academic Integrity Policy, located at:

www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity

Students are responsible for being aware of and demonstrating behavior that is honest and ethical in their academic work. Such behavior includes:

- following the expectations articulated by instructors for referencing sources of information and for group work.
- asking for clarification of expectations as necessary.
- identifying testing situations that may allow copying.
- preventing their work from being used by others (e.g., protecting access to computer files); and
- adhering to the principles of academic integrity when conducting and reporting research.

AUTHENTICITY/PLAGIARISM DETECTION

Some courses may use a web-based service (Turnitin.com) to reveal authenticity and ownership of student submitted work. For courses using such software, students will be expected to submit their work electronically either directly to Turnitin.com or via an online learning platform (e.g. A2L, etc.) using plagiarism detection (a service supported by Turnitin.com) so it can be checked for academic dishonesty.

Students who do not wish their work to be submitted through plagiarism detection software must inform the instructor before the assignment is due. No penalty will be assigned to a student who does not submit work to the plagiarism detection software.

All submitted work is subject to normal verification that standards of academic integrity have been upheld (e.g., on-line search, other software, etc.). For more details about McMaster's use of Turnitin.com please go to www.mcmaster.ca/academicintegrity.

COURSES WITH AN ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, Moodle, Thinking Cap, etc.). Students should be aware that, when they access the electronic components of a course using these elements, private information such as first and last names, usernames for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course.

The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses on-line elements will be deemed consent to this disclosure. If you have any questions or concerns about such disclosure, please discuss this with the course instructor.

ON-LINE PROCTORING

Some courses may use online proctoring software for tests and exams. This software may require students to turn on their video camera, present identification, monitor and record their computer activities, and/or lock/restrict their browser or other applications/software during tests or exams. This software may be required to be installed before the test/exam begins.

CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS

As a McMaster student, you have the right to experience, and the responsibility to demonstrate, respectful and dignified interactions within all of our living, learning and working communities. These expectations are described in the [Code of Student Rights & Responsibilities](#) (the “Code”). All students share the responsibility of maintaining a positive environment for the academic and personal growth of all McMaster community members, **whether in person or online**.

It is essential that students be mindful of their interactions online, as the Code remains in effect in virtual learning environments. The Code applies to any interactions that adversely affect, disrupt, or interfere with reasonable participation in university activities. Student disruptions or behaviors that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, Webex or Zoom for delivery), will be taken very seriously and will be investigated. Outcomes may include restriction or removal of the involved students’ access to these platforms.

ATTENDANCE

Arriving late or missing class disrupts the learning experience for both you and your peers. Punctuality and attendance are crucial to maintaining a respectful, professional, and productive environment for everyone, including our faculty.

MISSED ACADEMIC WORK

Missed Mid-Term Examinations / Tests / Class Participation

Please do not use the online [McMaster Student Absence Form \(MSAF\)](#) as this is for Undergraduate students only. The MBA program will not accept an MSAF.

When students miss regularly scheduled term work which contributes 10% or more to the final grade, for legitimate reasons as determined by the Student Experience – Academic Office (SEAO), the activity necessary to compensate for the missed work will be **determined by the course instructor**. The compensatory activities assigned will vary with the nature of the course and the missed requirement. They include, but are not restricted to, an alternative assignment, a rescheduled midterm exam, or re-weighting the marks for the missed component to other mark components. Documentation explaining such missed work must be provided to the SEAO within five (5) working days of the scheduled date for completion of the work.

Acceptable reasons for missed work, along with the [Petition for Missed Term Work](#) and the [MBA Student McMaster University Student Health Certificate](#), can be found on the DeGroote MBA Student

website (mbastudent.degrote.mcmaster.ca). Please direct any questions about acceptable documentation to the MBA Academic Advisors (askmba@mcmaster.ca).

University policy states that a student may submit a maximum of three (3) Petition for Missed Term Work per academic year, after which the student must meet with the Director of the program.

If term work is missed without an approved reason, students will receive a grade of zero (0) for that component.

Missed Final Examinations

Students must be available for the duration of the posted exam period regardless of their personal exam schedule. This is to ensure student availability throughout the entire exam period in the event that an exam must be rescheduled due to unforeseen circumstances (university closure, power outage, storm policy, etc.). A student who misses a final examination without valid reason will receive a mark of 0 on the examination.

Students who have missed a final exam for a valid reason can apply to the SEAO to write a deferred examination by applying for Deferring a Final Exam with supporting documentation. The application must be made within five days of the scheduled exam date or the application may be denied.

The Application for Deferring a Final Exam and the MBA Student McMaster University Student Health Certificate can be found on the DeGroote MBA Current Student website (mbastudent.degrote.mcmaster.ca)

Deferred examination privileges, if granted, are normally satisfied during the examination period at the end of the following semester. In select cases, the deferred examination may be written at a time facilitated by the SEAO and agreed to by the course instructor.

Requests for a second deferral or rescheduling of a deferred examination will not be considered.

Failure to write an approved deferred examination at the pre-scheduled time will result in a zero (0) mark for that examination, except in the case of exceptional circumstances where documentation has been provided and approved. Upon approval, no credit will be given for the course, and the notation N.C. (no credit) will be placed on the student's transcript.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) offers various support services for students with disabilities. Students are required to inform SAS of accommodation needs for course work at the outset of term. Students must forward a copy of such SAS accommodation to the instructor normally, within the first three (3) weeks of classes by setting up an appointment with the instructor. If a student with a disability chooses NOT to take advantage of an SAS accommodation and chooses to sit for a regular exam, a petition for relief may not be filed after the examination is complete. The SAS website is:

<http://sas.mcmaster.ca>

Use of Test Accommodations at McMaster University Burlington Campus Ron Joyce Centre

Whereas Student Accessibility Services (SAS), on Main Campus, determines all MBA student accommodations, the MBA Faculty Office manages the coordination of accommodations for tests, midterms, and exams at the Ron Joyce Centre in Burlington.

Process for Students

- Students must activate their accommodation(s) (e.g., extra-time, memory aid, etc.) for each upcoming test, midterm, or exam, at least two weeks in advance. Students can do this by emailing their Instructor and the DeGroote MBA SAS scheduling office at DSBSAS@mcmaster.ca. If a student cannot meet this deadline, they should contact DSBSAS@mcmaster.ca to discuss alternative arrangements. The program is committed to exploring flexibility where it is possible to support students.
- All tests, midterms, and exams are booked synchronously with the class's start time. Any deviations from the start time (e.g. start earlier than the class to enable completion at the same end time) requires a discussion with their instructor on protocol at the time of accommodation activation.
- Students will leverage the accommodation (e.g., extra time, memory aid, etc.), in a designated testing room. Rooms will be booked according to the students' SAS accommodation. Unless the accommodation states otherwise, students should expect that they will be writing in a room with other students. One or more invigilators will always be in the room.
- Following the request to activate the accommodation(s), dsbsas@mcmaster.ca will reach out to the student with their test, midterm, or exam details, including the date, time, and room number. As there may be other students writing tests in the room, we ask that students enter the room quietly and leave all personal items at the front of the room.

All policies and procedures, including restroom access, how extra-time is allocated for assessments under Universal Design, and the submission of memory aids in advance, are consistent with those of SAS on Main Campus. The only variance in procedure is communication around, and physical location of, assessment. There is not a dedicated testing space at RJC. Existing classrooms and lecture halls will be used for most testing. All SAS-approved accommodations will be honored by our staff; however, core testing elements are not eliminated in alternative testing formats. Students should expect and plan for invigilation, incidental noise, and other potential distractions.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR RELIGIOUS, INDIGENOUS OR SPIRITUAL OBSERVANCES (RISO)

Students requiring academic accommodation based on religious, indigenous or spiritual observances should follow the procedures set out in the [RISO](#) policy. Students should submit their request to their Faculty Office **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation or to the Registrar's Office prior to their examinations. Students should also contact their instructors as soon as possible to make alternative arrangements for classes, assignments, and tests.

COPYRIGHT AND RECORDING

Students are advised that lectures, demonstrations, performances, and any other course material provided by an instructor include copyright protected works. The Copyright Act and copyright law protect every original literary, dramatic, musical and artistic work, **including lectures** by University instructors.

The recording of lectures, tutorials, or other methods of instruction may occur during a course. Recording may be done by either the instructor for the purpose of authorized distribution, or by a student for the purpose of personal study. Students should be aware that their voice and/or image may be recorded by others during the class. Please speak with the instructor if this is a concern for you.

POTENTIAL MODIFICATION TO THE COURSE

The instructor and university reserve the right to modify elements of the course during the term. The university may change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances. If either type of modification becomes necessary, reasonable notice and communication with the students will be given with explanation and the opportunity to comment on changes. It is the responsibility of the student to check their McMaster email and course websites weekly during the term and to note any changes.

RESEARCH USING HUMAN SUBJECTS

ONLY IF APPLICABLE

Research involving human participants is premised on a fundamental moral commitment to advancing human welfare, knowledge, and understanding. As a research-intensive institution, McMaster University shares this commitment in its promotion of responsible research. The fundamental imperative of research involving human participation is respect for human dignity and well-being. To

this end, the University endorses the ethical principles cited in the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans:

<http://www.pre.ethics.gc.ca>

McMaster University has mandated its Research Ethics Boards to ensure that all research investigations involving human participants follow the Tri-Council Policy Statement. The University is committed, through its Research Ethics Boards, to assisting the research community in identifying and addressing ethical issues inherent in research, recognizing that all members of the University share a commitment to maintaining the highest possible standards in research involving humans.

If you are conducting original research, it is vital that you behave in an ethical manner. For example, everyone you speak to must be made aware of your reasons for eliciting their responses and consent to providing information. Furthermore, you must ensure everyone understands that participation is entirely voluntary. Please refer to the following website for more information about McMaster University's research ethics guidelines:

<http://reo.mcmaster.ca/>

Organizations that you are working with are likely to prefer that some information be treated as confidential. Ensure that you clarify the status of all information that you receive from your client. You **MUST** respect this request and cannot present this information in class or communicate it in any form, nor can you discuss it outside your group. Furthermore, you must continue to respect this confidentiality even after the course is over.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Students may use generative AI only for brainstorming their work throughout the course so long as the use of generative AI is referenced and cited following citation instructions given in class. Use of generative AI outside the stated use of brainstorming without citation will constitute academic dishonesty. It is the student's responsibility to be clear on the limitations for use and to be clear on the expectations for citation and reference and to do so appropriately.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COURSE POLICIES

Your registration and continuous participation (e.g. on A2L, in the classroom, etc.) to the various learning activities of MBA XXXX will be an implicit acknowledgement of the course policies outlined above, or of any other that may be announced during lecture and/or on A2L. **It is your responsibility to read this course outline, to familiarize yourself with the course policies and to act accordingly.**

Lack of awareness of the course policies **cannot be invoked** at any point during this course for failure to meet them. It is your responsibility to ask for clarification on any policies that you do not understand.

COURSE SCHEDULE

MBA M740 **Corporate Reputation and Brand Management** **Winter 2026 Course Schedule**

WEEK	 DAYS	ASSIGNMENT
1	Jan 7	Lecture: Introduction to Corporate Reputation and Brand Management Discuss: Class Outline, Schedule, Participation, Courseware Discuss: Selecting team members
2	Jan 14	Lecture: Understanding Corporate Reputation Discuss: Corporate Reputation Assignment <i>DUE: Group members and Brand selection</i>
3	Jan 21	Lecture: Understanding Your Brand (Part-1) Discuss: 'Start with Why' Assignment
4	Jan 28	Lecture: Understanding Your Brand (Part-2) <i>DUE: Assignment 1 – Corporate Reputation</i>
5	Feb 4	Lecture: Understanding Your Brand's Equity
6	Feb 11	Lecture: Communicating Your Brand
7	Feb 25	Lecture: Measuring Your Brand's Performance <i>Due: Assignment 2 - Brand Resilience</i>
8	Mar 4	Brand Resilience Symposium
9	Mar 11	Lecture: Brand Management Strategies (Part-1) <i>Due: Assignment 3 – 'Start with Why' Analysis</i>

10	Mar 18	Lecture: Brand Management Strategies (Part-2) Discuss: Brand Plan assignment
11	Mar 25	Lecture: People as Brand Touch Points
12	April 1	Final Brand Plan Presentations <i>DUE: Assignment 4 - Final Brand Plan</i>
13	April 8	Final Brand Plan Presentations

This course outline is intentionally flexible. Lecture topics and sequencing may be adjusted to reflect class progress, emerging business contexts, and learning needs. Assignment submissions are due the evening prior to the scheduled class for that week unless otherwise communicated.