



**Business M727 E
Marketing Communications
Fall 2026 Course Outline**

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

COURSE OBJECTIVE

Equip students with the strategic thinking, practical tools, and creative confidence to develop effective Integrated Marketing Communications. Students will learn to translate business and consumer insights into clear brand and communications strategies, and bring those strategies to life through compelling creative ideas, integrated media plans, and measurable outcomes.

INSTRUCTOR AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Monday Evening 19:00-22:00
Joel Leavitt, Instructor
Instructor
leavitja@mcmaster.ca

Office Hours: Before class and
by appointment as required
Class Location: RJC

Student TA
To be confirmed

Course website: <http://avenue.mcmaster.ca>

COURSE ELEMENTS

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

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the strategic role of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) in building and growing brands in an evolving marketplace. Students will learn how to diagnose business and brand challenges, uncover consumer and marketplace insights, identify growth opportunities, and translate marketing objectives into compelling communications strategies.

Through real-world cases, practical exercises, and team projects, students will develop the skills to move from insight to strategy to execution. They will learn how to build strong brand positioning, develop effective creative and media briefs, evaluate creative ideas, select the right mix of media channels, and establish meaningful measures of success.

By the end of the course, students will have developed a complete IMC campaign, from brand strategy and positioning through to a unifying big idea, media plan, creative executions. Along the way, students will build the strategic discipline, critical thinking, and creative confidence required to develop, evaluate, and champion great marketing communications in today's rapidly changing environment.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this course, students will be able to:

- Explain and apply the core principles of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) and demonstrate how communications can support broader brand and business objectives.

- Identify and articulate strategic growth opportunities for a brand by analyzing the consumer, category, competition, and broader marketplace.
- Develop a clear brand strategy and positioning, including the core elements of brand identity, target audience, consumer insight, value proposition, reasons to believe, and distinctive brand assets.
- Translate business and marketing objectives into effective communications strategies, establishing clear communications objectives, target audiences, desired consumer responses, and measures of success.
- Develop effective creative and media briefs that provide clear strategic direction for the development and execution of marketing communications.
- Develop and evaluate persuasive creative ideas, applying consumer insight, communications strategy, and established principles of creative effectiveness across different media and consumer touchpoints.
- Design an integrated media strategy, selecting and justifying the appropriate mix of paid, owned, and earned channels to reach target audiences and achieve campaign objectives.
- Establish appropriate OKRs and KPIs to measure marketing communications effectiveness and evaluate campaign performance against defined objectives.
- Understand how marketers, agencies, media partners, and other stakeholders work together to develop and execute effective marketing communications, including the practices that enable productive client-agency relationships.
- Evaluate emerging changes in the marketing communications landscape, including technology and AI, evolving consumer behaviour, new media platforms, and changes in the retail and commerce environment.
- Communicate and defend marketing recommendations with clarity and persuasive impact, using evidence, strategic reasoning, and effective presentation skills.

REQUIRED COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS

These items are an integral part of the lesson plan for the course, and not having these materials could have a negative impact on a student's learning outcomes for the course.

Required:

***Beloved Brands: The playbook for how to
build a brand your consumers will love***

Author: Graham Robertson (2022)

Amazon.ca (\$49.99 – Paperback)

➤ *Second-hand options are allowed*

\$ 49.99

OPTIONAL COURSE MATERIALS AND READINGS

Under the Influence with Terry O'Reilly – a CBC podcast:
<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/undertheinfluence>

The Smart Advertising Book: How to deliver advertising that grows your brand
Author: Dan White (2024)
Amazon.ca (\$17.95 – Paperback)

\$17.95

EVALUATION

	GRADE ITEM	WEIGHT	DESCRIPTION
INDIVIDUAL	Class Engagement	20%	Preparation, active participation in discussions and group activities, peer feedback, and demonstrated leadership
	Critical Reflection Videos	20%	Students submit four short video reflections across the term. Reflections are graded on the authenticity and depth of the experience described.
	Brand Positioning Assignment	10%	Develop a positioning statement for a chosen brand using class frameworks
GROUP	Group IMC Presentation (#1)	20%	Teams of 4-5 analyze a case to deliver a Strategic Brand Assessment, including target segmentation, key insights, growth opportunities and a creative brief
	Group IMC Presentation (#2)	30%	Teams build a full Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC) plan, including a Big Idea, campaign objectives, sample creative, and channel/media strategy with budget allocation

All work is evaluated individually except where group work is expected. In these cases, group members will share the same grade. If a team requests a peer evaluation, each group member will be asked to rate their peers after all components have been submitted.

It is essential to ensure all group members are contributing fully and appropriately to all parts of the assignment. Your instructor reserves the right to modify individual grades in group projects based on feedback provided by all parties.

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+	77-79	9
B	73-76	8
B-	70-72	7
F	00-69	0

Course Deliverables

Individual Components – 50% of final grade

Class Engagement – 20%

Active participation is essential to creating a strong learning environment. Students are evaluated on the quality of their contributions to class cases and discussion. Assigned material, including podcasts and articles should be reviewed in advance. Students may be asked to deliver short (1-minute) summaries of materials as part of their class participation grade.



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.

Critical Reflection Videos – 20%

Over the course of the term, each student will submit four short video reflections (3–5 minutes each) responding to specific prompts tied to course content, discussions, and their own experience. Recording reflections as video, rather than written submissions, helps ensure the entries reflect the student's own thinking and voice in the moment.

Each reflection should reference a specific class session, case discussion, guest speaker, or team experience and not a general summary of course material. Submissions should focus on what changed in the student's thinking. Reflections will be assigned from a rotating set of prompts, which may include:

- *A moment in class (a case, discussion, or guest speaker) that challenged or shifted your thinking about a brand or strategy, and why*
- *A moment where a classmate's perspective changed or challenged your own view on a brand or campaign*
- *A specific decision or disagreement from your team project work, and what you learned from navigating it*
- *Your use of generative AI in developing your marketing communications work this term. For instance, where you used it, what you had to verify, revise, or discard, and what the experience taught you about where AI is and isn't useful in marketing strategy*

Reflections will be evaluated on the specificity and authenticity of the experience described, the depth of analysis (moving beyond description to what it changed about your thinking), and evidence of self-critique.

Brand Positioning Assignment – 10%

Each student will select a brand and develop a positioning statement using the tools discussed in class (i.e. product ladder, functional and emotional benefits, competitive differentiation). As part of this exercise, students will deliver a short (3-minute) in-class oral defense of their positioning, responding to questions from the instructor and/or peers. Students should be prepared to explain, justify, and defend every element of their submission, including the reasoning behind their chosen differentiation and why alternative positioning options were set aside.



Group Components – 50% of final grade

Strategic Brand Assessment – 20%

Working in teams, students will analyze a provided case study to identify brand challenges, key issues and opportunities, target consumers, and key insights. Findings will be synthesized into a strategic brand recommendation, delivered in power point format.

The assessment should include:

- Consumer and market research, consumer and target market segmentation, and the articulation of key insights
- Critical analysis of brand growth opportunities, inclusive of strategic statements
- Creative brief

Integrated Marketing Communications Plan – 30%

Building on the Strategic Brand Assessment, teams will deliver a comprehensive IMC plan.

The project must include:

- Clear campaign objectives (OKRs & KPIs)
- A unifying big idea
- An integrated communications plan that details channel strategy, creative tactics, and budget allocation.

Teams will present their plans in class, with an emphasis on persuasive pitching and storytelling. After the presentations, there will be an opportunity for peer voting & feedback where students will ‘invest’ in the campaigns they would back if they were a CMO.

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.degroote.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 behaviour 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 behaviour 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 behaviour that is honest and ethical in their academic work. Such behaviour 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 the 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 ONLINE ELEMENT

All courses use some online elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn (A2L), LearnLink, web pages, capa, Moodle, ThinkingCap, 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, user names for the McMaster e-mail accounts, and program affiliation may become apparent to all other students in the same course.

Students may be required to use the Respondus LockDown Browser and Respondus Monitor. The Respondus LockDown Browser is a downloadable program that allows a student to take an Avenue to Learn quiz in a secure environment. Quizzes can be set to use LockDown Browser or LockDown Browser.

For more details about McMaster's use of Respondus Lockdown Browser please go to <https://avenuehelp.mcmaster.ca/exec/respondus-lockdown-browser-and-respondus-monitor/>

The available information is dependent on the technology used. Continuation in a course that uses online 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.

ONLINE 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 behaviours that interfere with university functions on online platforms (e.g. use of Avenue 2 Learn, WebEx, Teams, 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.

Instructors may use Top Hat in their course in a variety of ways, including to capture attendance in their classes. Attendance is recorded by submitting a unique 4-digit code displayed in your physical classroom using your personal device.

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 [DSB Student Services – Academic Office](#) (DSSAO (DSB Student Services Academic Office)), 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 DSSAO (DSB Student Services Academic Office) **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.degroote.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 DSSAO ([DSB Student Services Academic Office](#)) to write a deferred examination by submitting an [Application for Deferring a Final Exam](#) with supporting documentation. The application must be made **within five days** of the scheduled exam.

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.degroote.mcmaster.ca)

Deferred examination privileges, if granted, are normally satisfied during the deferred examination period as set by the [Office of the Registrar](#).

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



ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Student Accessibility Services (SAS) offers various support services for students with disabilities. Students must activate their accommodation(s) (e.g., extra-time, alone room, etc.) via [mySAS](#) portal at the beginning of each term, normally, within the first three (3) weeks of classes. 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

- Student Accessibility Services (SAS) now uses the online [mySAS](#) Portal for graduate students to share accommodation letters with their instructors and Faculty/Program. Students are responsible for activating their accommodations each term through the [mySAS](#) Portal. Once activated, an approved accommodation letter will be automatically sent to the instructors associated with the student's enrolled courses for that term.
- Students must engage the DSSAO (DSB Student Services Academic Office) to implement their accommodation(s) (e.g., extra-time, alone room, etc.) for each upcoming test, midterm, or exam, at **least two weeks in advance**. Students can do this by emailing DeGroote MBA SAS scheduling office at DSBSAS@mcmaster.ca or completing the [Accommodation Implementation form](#). If a student cannot meet this deadline, they should contact DSBSAS@mcmaster.ca to discuss alternative arrangements. The program is committed to exploring flexibilities where 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, alone room, etc.), in a designated testing room. Rooms will be booked according to the student's 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 implement 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 honoured 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 the DSSAO (DSB Student Services Academic Office) **normally within 10 working days** of the beginning of term in which they anticipate a need for accommodation. 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 are in compliance with 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.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COURSE POLICIES

Your registration and continuous participation (e.g. on A2L, in the classroom, etc.) to the various learning activities of MBA Business M727 will be considered to 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.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Students may use generative AI in this course in accordance with the guidelines outlined for each assessment, and so long as the use of generative AI is referenced and cited following citation instructions given in the syllabus. Use of generative AI outside assessment guidelines or without citation will constitute academic dishonesty. It is the student's responsibility to be clear on the limitations for use for each assessment and to be clear on the expectations for citation and reference and to do so appropriately.

COURSE SCHEDULE

MBA 727 E Marketing Communications Fall 2026 Course Schedule

WEEK	DATE	TOPICS	ASSESSMENT DUE DATES
1	Mon. Sept. 14	Course & Assignment Details Intro to IMC, Ethics in Advertising	
2	Mon. Sept. 21	Critical Brand Assessment	Critical Reflection Video #1 Due Friday at 10:00am
3	Mon. Sept. 28	Consumers & Target Markets	
4	Mon. Oct 5	Brand Identity & Positioning	Critical Reflection Video #2 Due Friday at 10:00am
5	Mon. Oct. 12	Thanksgiving Monday	No Class
6	Mon. Oct. 19	Big Ideas	Strategic Brand Assessment Due Friday @ 9am
7	Mon. Oct. 26	Creative Strategy	Critical Reflection Video #3 Due Friday at 10:00am
8	Mon. Nov. 2	Communications Strategy & Media Planning	Brand Positioning Assignment Due Friday @ 9am
9	Mon. Nov. 9	Digital Media	
10	Mon. Nov. 16	Traditional Media, Direct Marketing, Sales Promotions, Experiential Marketing & PR	Critical Reflection Video #4 Due Friday at 10:00am
11	Mon. Nov. 23	The future of advertising	IMC Presentation Due Friday @ 9am
12	Mon. Nov. 30	Presentations	
13	Mon. Dec. 7	Presentations	IMC Team Peer Evaluation Due End of Class