

Commerce 4MA3
Advertising and Integrated Marketing Communications
Winter 2026 Course Outline

Marketing, DeGroote School of Business
McMaster University

INSTRUCTOR AND CONTACT INFORMATION

Christina DeVries
Instructor
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Office Hours: after class

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TA
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Office Hours: By Appointment

COURSE ELEMENTS

Credit Value:	3	Leadership:	Yes	IT skills:	Yes	Global view:	Yes
A2L:	Yes	Ethics:	Yes	Numeracy:	Yes	Written skills:	Yes
Participation:	Yes	Innovation:	Yes	Group work:	Yes	Oral skills:	Yes
Evidence-based:	Yes	Experiential:	Yes	Final Exam:	No	Guest speaker(s):	No

COURSE INFORMATION

This course explores the strategic and creative principles of advertising and Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC). Students will examine how brands develop insight-driven strategies, creative BIG IDEAS, and integrated media plans across digital and offline channels.

Through applied exercises, case-based learning, and portfolio development, students will build the skills required to think critically, communicate persuasively, and make strategic decisions in contemporary advertising environments. Emphasis is placed on originality, ethical decision-making, and professional-level thinking in an AI-enabled marketing landscape.

IMPORTANT LINKS

COURSE LEARNING OUTCOMES

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

1. Analyze consumer and market insights using research tools and segmentation frameworks to identify target audiences and strategic opportunities for advertising and IMC campaigns.
2. Develop, evaluate, and defend original BIG IDEAS and creative strategies designed to persuade a specific target audience across digital and offline contexts.
3. Design integrated marketing campaigns by selecting and justifying appropriate combinations of paid, earned, shared, and owned media to achieve campaign objectives.
4. Create and present professional digital content in multiple formats (e.g., visual concepts, platform-native content, storytelling assets, strategic rationale) suitable for real audiences such as clients, managers, or consumers.
5. Collaborate effectively in teams to develop, refine, and pitch integrated campaign solutions, demonstrating strategic alignment, clear decision-making, and professional communication skills.

COURSE LEARNING GOALS

To reach these learning outcomes, students will learn how to:

Think strategically and analytically, moving from research and observation to insight, decision-making, and justification.

- Approach advertising problems creatively, generating multiple ideas, evaluating alternatives, and refining concepts based on insight, feedback, and constraints.
- Integrate strategy, creativity, and media thinking, understanding how BIG IDEAS, storytelling, and channel choices must work together in effective IMC campaigns.
- Adapt ideas and content for digital platforms, learning how audience behaviour, platform dynamics, and format influence communication effectiveness.
- Work productively in collaborative environments, contributing ideas, building on others' work, managing disagreement, and aligning around shared decisions.
- Develop confidence as professional communicators, learning to pitch ideas persuasively, defend strategic choices, and communicate under time or competitive pressure.
- Apply ethical judgment and critical thinking, particularly when using AI tools, data, and targeting strategies in advertising contexts.

REQUIRED MATERIALS AND TEXTS

There is no required textbook for this course.

Optional Learning Materials:

Under the Influence with Terry O'Reilly – a CBC podcast:

<https://www.cbc.ca/radio/undertheinfluence>

Weekly preparation materials will be provided through Avenue to Learn.

Students who use textbooks to support their learning are encouraged to use any current (last 5 years) Advertising textbook. Feel free to ask for recommendations or reviews before purchasing.

CLASS FORMAT

This course is delivered in a three-hour, in-person format and is designed to be highly interactive and application-focused.

Class time is structured around:

- short lectures and guided discussion
- small-group problem-solving and case-based activities
- applied exercises that require students to analyze, evaluate, and defend ideas

The emphasis is on critical thinking, strategic decision-making, and creative application, rather than passive note-taking. Students are expected to actively contribute to discussions, collaborate with peers, and engage in applied learning activities during each class.

Preparation Expectations

Students are required to prepare for class by engaging with posted materials on Avenue to Learn. Preparation materials may include:

- podcasts
- short videos
- articles and case summaries
- curated digital and industry content

Preparation is essential. Class activities assume familiarity with assigned content and are designed to build on, challenge, and apply that material. Preparation directly supports your Class Engagement grade and your ability to contribute meaningfully to in-class exercises.

COURSE EVALUATION

WEIGHT	DESCRIPTION
Class Engagement & Participation	20% Preparation, discussion, group activities, peer evaluation, Avenue Progress, team leadership
Critical Thinking & Strategy Portfolio	30% Create content to demonstrate your learning and critical thinking skills
Podcast Assignment (PAIRS)	20% Partner up and create an original podcast for an existing brand
Final IMC Case Pitch	30% Pitch your idea and build a team to prepare a complete IMC Plan for an existing brand

All work is evaluated individually except where group work is expected. In these cases, group members will share the same grade. Your instructor reserves the right to modify individual grades in group projects based on feedback provided by all parties.

COURSE DELIVERABLES

Individual Components – 50% of final grade

Class Engagement & Participation – 20%

Class engagement is a significant component of this course and reflects the importance of preparation, participation, and professional conduct in advertising and IMC practice.

Engagement is evaluated based on:

- evidence of preparation for class
- active participation in discussions and group exercises
- contribution to group problem-solving and idea development
- professional behaviour and collaboration

Class engagement is tracked throughout the term using a structured participation system that reflects preparation, contribution to group work, and professional engagement. Details will be provided in class and on Avenue to Learn.

Critical Thinking & Strategy Portfolio – 30%

Students will develop a curated portfolio of individual artifacts that demonstrate strategic thinking, creative risk-taking, and application of course concepts across multiple contexts.

The portfolio is skills-based and artifacts are developed throughout the term, with structured feedback provided early to support improvement.

Final evaluation considers originality, application of course concepts, professional polish, and evidence of learning over time.

Group Components – 50% of final grade

Podcast Assignment – 20%

Students will research, script, and produce a branded podcast episode that demonstrates persuasive communication, storytelling, and audience awareness. The assignment emphasizes clarity of message, strategic intent, and originality over production polish.

Final IMC Case Study & Pitch – 30%

Students will work in groups to develop a comprehensive IMC strategy for a single brand and business challenge. The case requires integration of insight, creative strategy, and media planning using a structured, professional framework.

The case culminates in a live internal pitch experience designed to mirror competitive case environments.

LATE ASSIGNMENTS

Late assignments are generally not accepted in this course.

Students seeking an extension should contact their Instructor/TA before the due date to discuss available accommodation.

All assignments must be submitted electronically via the Assignment Dropbox in Avenue by the due date.

In-class work cannot be submitted after the class is over. Ensure you upload/hand-in any papers, worksheets, and so on before leaving the classroom.

COMMUNICATION AND FEEDBACK

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.

All students must receive feedback regarding their progress prior to the final date by which a student may cancel the course without failure by default.

For Level 3 courses and above, this feedback must equal a minimum of 10% of the final grade.
Instructors may solicit feedback via an informal course review with students by Week #4 to allow time for modifications in curriculum delivery.

Students who have concerns about the course content, evaluation methods, or delivery should first reach out to the course instructor. If your concern remains unresolved after speaking with the instructor, you may then reach out to the relevant Area Chair for further consideration.

REQUESTING RELIEF FOR MISSED ACADEMIC WORK

In the event of an absence for medical or other reasons, students should review and follow the Academic Regulation in the Undergraduate Calendar [“Requests for Relief for Missed Academic Term Work”](#) and the link below*;

<http://ug.degrote.mcmaster.ca/forms-and-resources/missed-course-work-policy/>

* Non-Commerce students must follow the Missed Course Work protocols outlined by their home faculty and Program Office.

COURSE MODIFICATION

From time to time there may be a need to remove/add topics or to change the schedule or the delivery format. If these are necessary, you will be given as much advance notice as possible.

GENERATIVE AI

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.

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. **It is your responsibility to understand what constitutes academic dishonesty.**

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. For information on the various types of academic dishonesty please refer to the [Academic Integrity Policy](#).

The following illustrates only three forms of academic dishonesty:

- plagiarism, e.g. the submission of work that is not one's own or for which other credit has been obtained.
- improper collaboration in group work.
- copying or using unauthorized aids in tests and examinations.

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. Avenue to Learn, 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 ON-LINE ELEMENT

Some courses may use on-line elements (e.g. e-mail, Avenue to Learn, 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. 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.

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 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.

ACADEMIC ACCOMMODATION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Students with disabilities who require academic accommodation must contact [Student Accessibility Services](#) (SAS) at 905-525-9140 ext. 28652 or sas@mcmaster.ca to make arrangements with a Program Coordinator. For further information, consult McMaster University’s [Academic Accommodation of Students with Disabilities](#) policy.

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.

EXTREME CIRCUMSTANCES

The University reserves the right to change the dates and deadlines for any or all courses in extreme circumstances (e.g., severe weather, labour disruptions, etc.). Changes will be communicated through regular McMaster communication channels, such as McMaster Daily News, Avenue to Learn and/or McMaster email.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COURSE POLICIES

Your enrolment in Commerce 4MA3 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.

COURSE SCHEDULE

Winter 2026 - Commerce 4MA3 Advertising and Integrated Marketing Communications

DATE		TOPICS	ASSESSMENTS & DUE DATES
1	Fri. Jan. 9	Course Foundations, IMC Thinking & Ethics in Advertising	
2	Fri. Jan. 16	NO CLASS	At-Home PRIZM exercise
3	Fri. Jan. 23	Consumers & Target Markets	
4	Fri. Jan. 30	Brand Identity & Positioning	Portfolio Artifact 1 due Jan. 29
5	Fri. Feb. 6	BIG IDEAS & Creative Strategy	
6	Fri. Feb. 13	Persuasive Communication	Portfolio Artifact 2 due Feb. 12 ***TA feedback on Artifacts 1 & 2
7	Fri. Feb. 20	READING WEEK	
8	Fri. Feb. 27	Media Strategy & PESO	Podcast Due Feb. 23
9	Fri. Mar. 6	Digital Media	Portfolio Artifact 3 due Mar. 6
10	Fri. Mar. 13	Offline Media	Portfolio Artifact 4 due Mar. 12
11	Fri. Mar. 20	The Future of Advertising & IMC Final IMC Case Introduced	Portfolio Artifact 5 due Mar. 19
12	Fri. Mar. 27	IMC Case Pitch Round	Live Pitches & Groups are formed
13	Fri. Apr. 3	NO CLASS – Good Friday	Video Case Submission (Group) Thurs. Apr. 2
14	Fri. Apr. 10	NO-FINAL	Final Portfolio Due Sunday April. 5