USC Annenberg

DSM 596: Final Project Capstone
4 Units

Spring 2023 | Wednesday | 6:00 – 8:50 p.m.
Section: 21892D
Location: ANN L116

Instructor: Caroline Leach

Office Hours: Wednesday 3:30 – 4:30 p.m. or by appointment
https://calendly.com/carolineleach/usc-annenberg-office-hours

Contact Info: leachc@usc.edu

I. Course Description

To culminate your DSM experience, you will apply the skills and knowledge you acquired in the program to develop both a digital media project of your choice and a digital marketing campaign to promote it. You will also consult classmates on their projects as part of a peer-review group.

Either individually or as part of a team, depending on your preference, you will develop one of the following:

- a platform (website or app) for an organization or cause
- a topical content series (such as a podcast or vlog)
- a publication (white paper, research paper, or e-book)

The process includes conceptualizing, planning, launching, and refining the product, then implementing your campaign. Along the way you will also learn and practice the art of project management. Upon completion of the course, you will have launched a tangible, professional project to enhance your media profiles and portfolio.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

The capstone requires in-depth research, in-class presentations, and hands-on project development and marketing. The first half of each class session will consist of class instruction, discussion, exercises, and presentations. The second half will consist of peer-review group discussions or one-on-one advisory meetings with the instructor. In addition to weekly meetings, this course is web-enhanced, with discussions on Blackboard.

For each unit of in-class contact time, the university expects two hours of out-of-class student work; consequently, prepare to invest at least eight hours per week outside of class in developing your project and implementing your marketing campaign.

By the end of this course, you will acquire expertise and experience in the following:

- Applying skills and knowledge you acquired through the DSM program to develop a digital media project.
- Developing a concept, researching stakeholders, and evaluating media opportunities.
- Applying basic project management techniques to plan and complete a digital project.
- Fully developing the project with professional-level production quality.
- Planning and implementing an online marketing campaign and analyzing the results.
- Providing constructive feedback to other digital professionals within a peer-review group.

III. Instructor

Caroline Leach teaches digital media studies at USC Annenberg. She was a marketing and communications executive at Fortune 100 companies in tech and media. Her expertise includes corporate communications, marketing analytics, brand management, digital marketing, social media, corporate social responsibility, and diversity, equity, and inclusion. Now an entrepreneur, Leach founded The Carrelle Company to provide digital marketing, personal branding, and executive coaching services. She received her MA in communications management from USC and her BA in economics from UCLA.

IV. Required Media

In addition to the following readings, select articles may be assigned throughout the course.

- *eMarketing Textbook* (7th edition), Red & Yellow Creative School Of Business, 2022, https://www.redandyellow.co.za/textbook/ (free PDF at this site): this comprehensive textbook will serve as a primary resource for your project and beyond

- Alex Andrews, "Scrum of One: How to Bring Scrum Into Your One-Person Operation," Kodeco.com, 2 June 2017, https://www.kodeco.com/585-scrum-of-one-how-to-bring-scrum-into-your-one-person-operation

- Freddy Tran Nager, *Copyediting With An Attitude*, 2010 Atomic Tango (provided free in class)

- Garr Reynolds, *Presentation Zen*, 2nd Edition, 2011 New Riders (free via USC library)**:** This book provides tactics and techniques for designing modern business presentations. Browse through this at your own pace, and adapt your preferred tactics for the assigned PowerPoint presentations

The following are not required but are highly recommended (all are available in the USC Library):

- *Made to Stick* by Chip Heath & Dan Heath
- *UX Strategy* (Second Edition) by Jaime Levy

V. Assignments

Project Options

Choose one of the following digital projects to develop in the first half of the course. If you have an alternative idea, you are welcome to propose it.

- **Platform:** Create a website or web-based app prototype for an organization or cause (no personal, resumé, or portfolio sites). It should be built using a sophisticated CMS, such as WordPress, Joomla, or Drupal, and enable transactions or interactions, such as ecommerce, gaming, or socializing.

- **Research Paper/White Paper:** Write a minimum 30-page analytical research paper on digital social media for an audience of professionals or professors, then use the digital platform of your choice to distribute it.

- **E-book:** Write an e-book on any topic (including fiction) of at least 50 pages (book pages are smaller than paper pages). You will then self-publish it on Amazon or another retail platform of your choice.

- **Content Series:** Create a video or audio series with at least 5 episodes, minimum 5 minutes each, and post the series on the platform of your choice.

The near-finished project will be due at the midpoint of the course, and after you receive feedback from your peers and instructor, you will have two weeks to refine it.

Marketing

In the second half the course, you will plan and implement a minimum 4-week digital marketing campaign to promote your project. This campaign should include a schedule, budget (if applicable), media plan, and goals.

At the end of the course, you will present the results of your project and campaign. Note that your grade will not be impacted by the ultimate success or failure of your project and its marketing, but you will be responsible for any issues that could have contributed to their success or failure, such as production quality.

Deliverables

The following are brief summaries; complete instructions and learning objectives will be shared in class.

1. Project Ideas (10 points): Pitch 3 digital media project ideas to an audience of "investors" (your instructor and classmates). In 3 slides that you will share on Blackboard, describe each idea, why you selected it, and why you think the investors should support it. A few students will be randomly selected to pitch their ideas in class.

2. Project Plan (20 points): Select 1 of your ideas and write a detailed project plan based on in-depth research. This plan should include:
- a description of the project, with an outline of key features and contents
- a quantitative and qualitative analysis of the target audience/users, including the reasons you selected them; you may have more than one type of audience/users
- analyses of three competitors (similarities, differences, strengths, weaknesses)
- analyses of other stakeholders as applicable (collaborators, regulators, real investors, etc.) and other factors that could influence the outcome of your project (algorithms, the economy, laws, etc.)
- an educated estimate of the time and resources required to complete it by mid-semester
- a project schedule based on "Scrum Of One"
- a bibliography of all sources used to produce this plan (you should have at least 20 authoritative sources, both primary and secondary, with expert interviews strongly encouraged)

Do not include marketing in this plan, since that will be a separate deliverable. You will share this plan with your peer group for their feedback, then revise your plan before submitting it for a grade.

3. MVP — Minimally Viable Product (30 points): Your MVP should be produced with professional caliber production values, and meticulously proofread and bug-checked. After you receive feedback from your instructor, you will have two weeks to revise and finesse your project before launching it online. In addition, you have the option of presenting your project to a panel of invited professors and industry professionals. The feedback you receive could prove valuable if you continue developing your project after the course ends.

4. Marketing Plan (20 points): Your digital campaign to promote your project should include the following:
- SMART goal(s), KPIs to assess progress, and the type of metrics you will use
- target audience – the ones you specified in your project plan, but also including journalists and other media influencers
- digital marketing media and your reasons for selecting them
- description of the marketing content
- marketing schedule
- bibliography

Once approved by your peer group, you will implement the plan.

5. Final Presentation (10 points): You will summarize your Capstone experience in a 5-slide PowerPoint presentation that emphasizes your challenge, your solution, and your results. This should include what you learned and how it relates to the skills and knowledge you have acquired through the DSM program, what went well and what didn't, what you will do in the future to enhance and promote your project.

6. Peer Review (10 points): The class will be divided into groups of peers who will review each other's progress, plans, and projects throughout the course, both in-class and on Blackboard. At the end of the semester, you will confidentially rate each of your group members on a scale of 1-10 based on the value of their feedback throughout the term. Students will receive an average of their ratings as 10% of their final grade.

VI. Grading

Every attempt will be made to grade assignments within two weeks of receipt. If you think a score is missing or inaccurate, you must notify the instructors within one week of the posting.

Breakdown

Assignment	% of Grade
Project Ideas	10
Project Plan	20
MVP	30
Marketing Plan	20
Final Presentation	10
Peer Review	10
TOTAL	**100%**

Assignment Grading Rubric

Assignments will be graded on the following criteria without a fixed percentage, since unacceptable quality in any one area (writing, research, etc.) can undermine an entire project. Conversely, exceptional quality in one area may contribute to an overall positive evaluation.

- **Critical Thinking:** In communication there are few right answers: so-called "best practices" for one entity might fail for another — or even for the same entity at another time. Consequently, you should not just answer the questions, you should also question the answers, including methods and data. (Academic journal articles are not immune from critical analysis.) Assignments are not just reports or ideas: they must describe "why" and "how," not just "what," and will be evaluated on the quality of the reasoning.

- **Creativity:** Your work should feature original ideas, not just "best practices," and should NEVER consist of copied or AI-generated work (see "Academic Integrity" in this syllabus). Creativity is expected for both content ideas and business strategies. You may certainly be "inspired" by others, as long as you properly credit the sources, but most of the thinking and execution should be originally yours, and extra points will be awarded to work that is innovative and imaginative. The goal is to differentiate and distinguish yourself — in order to be outstanding, you must stand out.

- **Production Quality:** Since this is a graduate program in communication, your work should feature professional caliber production values in terms of writing, presentation design, and (as applicable) video and audio content. Treat your work as submissions to a media company, client, supervisor, or investor. Eliminate all errrors by proofreading meticulously, using Microsoft editing tools and/or Grammarly.com (strongly recommended). For help with fluency or simply polishing your writing, contact Annenberg's Graduate Writing Coach (http://cmgtwriting.uscannenberg.org/). For design tips, read *Presentation Zen*, 3rd Edition (available via USC library).

- **Research Quantity and Quality:** Support your work with research from multiple authoritative sources, including academic journals, major news publications, and credible experts — no guessing, generalizations, or stereotypes (such as "Gen Z").
    - Start with the USC online library and our librarians, who have prepared Research Guidelines for CMGT (https://libguides.usc.edu/cmgt) and DSM (https://libguides.usc.edu/digitalsocialmedia), as well as all other departments throughout the university (https://libguides.usc.edu).
    - Search Google Scholar (https://scholar.google.com/) before searching regular Google.
    - Never cite Wikipedia; rather, refer to the sources listed in the Wikipedia article.
    - Avoid company blogs (unless they are companies you are researching) and superficial news sites like the 3F's (*Forbes*, *Fortune*, and *Fast Company* are not authoritative).
    - Go beyond third-party sources and conduct direct research, such as focus groups, surveys, and interviews, particularly of subject-matter experts like professionals and professors.
    - Within the body of papers, include reference notes, either parenthetical, such as (Lee 2017), or in the form of footnotes or endnotes.
    - Bibliography entries must include COMPLETE source information, not just a URL. You may use any format that includes ALL the following: COMPLETE author names (we respect creators in this course, so a first name initial alone is not enough — a fatal flaw with APA style), article/chapter titles, the name of the publication, dates of publication, original URLs (not USC library), and the dates a particular website was accessed.

Course Grade Scale

94% to 100%: A	80% to 83%: B-	67% to 69%: D+
90% to 93%: A-	77% to 79%: C+	64% to 66%: D
87% to 89%: B+	74% to 76%: C	60% to 63%: D-
84% to 86%: B	70% to 73%: C-	0% to 59%: F

Standards

Grade	Description
A	Excellent: A's and A-minuses must be earned by "going the extra mile" to produce professional-caliber work that could be presented to a client, supervisor, employer, or investor. A-level work features high production quality with no mistakes, draws on in-depth research of authoritative sources, and meets or exceeds expectations for creativity and critical thinking. Your work demonstrates comprehensive understanding of the subject matter. Recommendations will be provided on request **only** to students who earn a solid A in the course.
B	Good: B's are awarded for graduate-school caliber work featuring in-depth research of authoritative sources and critical thinking, and only minor substantive shortcomings. The ideas and production quality would need to be stronger to succeed in a professional context. Your work in this course demonstrates solid if not thorough understanding.

C	Fair: C's are given to undergraduate-caliber work, reflecting insufficient critical thinking, superficial research, and/or flawed production quality. Your work demonstrates only basic understanding.
D	Marginal: D's and lower are given to amateurish work featuring insufficient research, many errors, incomplete sections, and/or superficial analysis. Your work demonstrates only the most rudimentary understanding.
F	Failing: F's are meted out to work that's incomplete, plagiarized, poorly researched, and/or amateurishly executed. Your work demonstrates little to no understanding. Note that plagiarism may also be subject to disciplinary measures.

VII. Policies and Procedures

Add/Drop Dates for Session 001
(15 weeks: 1/9/2023 – 4/28/2023; Final Exam Period: 5/3-10/2023)
Link: https://classes.usc.edu/term-20231/calendar/
Last day to add: Friday, January 27, 2023
Last day to drop without a mark of "W" and receive a refund: Friday, January 27, 2023
Last day to change enrollment option to Pass/No Pass or Audit: Saturday, January 28, 2023 [All major and minor courses must be taken for a letter grade.]
Last day to add/drop a Monday-only class without a mark of "W" and receive a refund or change to Audit: Tuesday, January 31, 2023
Last day to withdraw without a "W" on transcript or change pass/no pass to letter grade: Friday, February 24, 2023 [Mark of "W" will still appear on student record and STARS report and tuition charges still apply.
*Please drop any course by the end of week three for session 001 (or the 20 percent mark of the session in which the course is offered) to avoid tuition charges.]
Last day to drop with a mark of "W": Friday, April 7, 2023

- **Attendance:** You should attend all classes, arrive on time, and stay for the entire class. Although no points are awarded for attendance, more than two unexcused absences can open the risk of failing. If you need to miss a future class for a valid reason — e.g., religious observances or medical procedures — you must attain approval from the instructor in advance (except, of course, in emergencies). Student athletes should provide approved Travel Request Letters. For any missed class sessions, you will receive a make-up assignment, and you will need to obtain lecture notes from classmates.

- **Illness:** If you are feeling ill, please protect the health of your classmates, your instructors, and yourself by staying home. You will be excused, and will receive make-up assignments.

- **Electronics:** All students must have a computer for accessing course materials from home; ***however, phones and computers may NOT be used during class meetings without the instructor's permission.*** They should be put away before class begins. Tablets may be used for note-taking only; any unauthorized use will be treated as an "absence" for that class.

- **Respect and Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access:** An inclusive, welcoming, and accessible environment as well as intellectual freedom are priorities in this class and in class discussions Treat classmates, the instructor, and speakers with courtesy and respect. You may certainly question and criticize ideas — that is encouraged in the learning environment — and never criticize the person. We are a community, so respect the opinions of others; instead of saying that you "disagree" or even "respectfully disagree," offer a "different perspective."

- **Zoom:** This class will meet in person on campus, with no hybrid option. However, should we need to use Zoom for class meetings, the following rules apply. Although you are not obligated to turn your camera on, you are encouraged to do so to make yourself an active participant and enhance your networking. Wear appropriate clothing and use appropriate backgrounds. Keep your microphone off except for discussion or questions. Also, be present: all phones must be turned off and put away in class and team meetings. Try to avoid interactions with housemates on camera; if such interactions are unavoidable, step away to avoid distracting your instructors and classmates. Zoom sessions may be recorded and shared on Blackboard (including transcriptions). Please remember that USC policy prohibits sharing any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside the learning environment. You are responsible for the appropriate use and handling of these recordings under existing SCampus policies regarding class notes (https://policy.usc.edu/scampus-part-c/).

- **Appointments:** If you have questions or concerns, whether academic, career, or personal, contact the instructor to arrange a meeting (please see email address on the first page of this syllabus). Please allow one business day (Monday through Friday) for a response. In emergencies, see the support systems below.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:
The University of Southern California is a learning community committed to developing successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the dissemination of ideas. Academic misconduct, which includes any act of dishonesty in the production or submission of academic work, compromises the integrity of the person who commits the act and can impugn the perceived integrity of the entire university community. It stands in opposition to the university's mission to research, educate, and contribute productively to our community and the world.

All students are expected to submit assignments that represent their own original work, and that have been prepared specifically for the course or section for which they have been submitted. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s).

Other violations of academic integrity include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), collusion, knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university. All incidences of academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the student handbook or the Office of Academic Integrity's website, and university policies on Research and Scholarship Misconduct.

Annenberg Statement

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new, shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call
Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086
Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298
Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response
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The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776
OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411
Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101
Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

USC Emergency - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call
Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

USC Department of Public Safety - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call
Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)
A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or otfp@med.usc.edu
Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Annenberg Student Success Fund
https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards
The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund
https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards
Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

USC American Language Institute
ali.usc.edu
English language instruction, assessment, and resources to support the academic and professional success of non-native speakers of English pursuing degrees at USC.

Annenberg Graduate Writing Support
sites.usc.edu/graduate-writing-coach/
In addition to being the place to make one-on-one appointments with the writing coach, this website will host resources, videos, and news about upcoming programs.

Annenberg Digital Lounge
annenbergdl.org
Free lessons and certifications on a range of digital media.

VIII. Class Schedule

Class meetings include instructional time for the whole class (generally the first half of class) and scheduled one-on-one advisory meetings with the instructor (generally the second half of class). This syllabus is subject to change based on the progress of the class, events, and guest speaker availability.

Class 1, January 11: Introductions
- Self introductions and personal goals
- Project options and expectations
- Notes on writing
- Assignments before next class, January 18:
    - skim *Presentation Zen*
    - post Project Ideas to Blackboard
    - post self-intro video on Blackboard
    - read and acknowledge syllabus on Blackboard

Class 2, January 18: Ideation
- Peer group reviews of ideas
- Agile vs Waterfall methods
- Stakeholders research
- Assignments:
    - read *Copyediting with an Attitude*
    - read "Scrum of One"
    - complete Project Plan and submit to Blackboard on February 1

Class 3, January 25: Media
- Media and messaging strategies
- Notes on pitching
- Peer group discussions

Class 4, February 1: Plan Reviews
- Peer group reviews of plans
- Notes on Goals, KPIs, and Metrics
- Assignment: MVP due March 1

Class 5, February 8: Project Development
- Peer group reviews
- Individual meetings

Class 6, February 15: Project Development
- Peer group reviews
- Individual meetings

Class 7, February 22: Project Development
- Peer group reviews
- Individual meetings

Class 8, March 1: MVP Presentations
- Assignment:
    - Refined MVP due April 5
    - Marketing Plan due March 22

Class 9, March 8: MVP Presentations

March 15: Spring Break — No Class Meeting

Class 10, March 22: Marketing Plan Review
- Peer group reviews of marketing plans in progress
- Individual meetings

Class 11, March 29: Progress Updates
- Peer group reviews of project and marketing updates
- Individual meetings

Class 12, April 5: MVP and Marketing Launch
- Launch MVPs
- Assignment: Final Presentation due in-class May 3

Class 13, April 12: Progress Updates
- Peer group reviews of project and marketing updates
- Individual meetings

Class 14, April 19: Progress Updates
- Peer group reviews of project and marketing updates
- Individual meetings

Class 15, April 26: Progress Updates
- Peer group reviews of project and marketing updates
- Individual meetings

Exam Week, May 3: Final Presentation
- Roundtable discussion of what worked, what didn't, and what's next