USCAnnenberg

DSM 596: FINAL PROJECT CAPSTONE

SPRING 2025 | MONDAY | 2:00pm - 4:50pm & 6:00-8:50pm. Section & Location: 21877D, ANN L115 - 2PM 21878D, ANN 309 - 6PM

Instructors: Emily Kosko | Adjunct Professor Office Hours: Monday, 5pm-6pm or via zoom by appointment Contact: emilykos@usc.edu, 323-570-4380

I. Course Description

To culminate your DSM experience, you will develop and distribute a new digital-media project that showcases your expertise. It may consist of any of the following:

- an online platform, such as an e-commerce site
- a professional content series, such as a topical podcast or vlog
- a research publication (academic paper, white paper, or e-book)
- a digital marketing campaign for a real client (for profit or nonprofit)

Since DSM is a master of science program, your project must draw on extensive in-depth research and analysis, both quantitative and qualitative, along with market-based experimentation. In addition, you must apply your imagination and creativity to express your ideas and solve problems.

By the eleventh week of the course, your project will be developed to at least Minimum Viable Product (MVP) level, with professional production values. You will post your project online and promote it with digital marketing methods.

At the end of the semester, you will present a critical analysis of the performance in class. In addition to developing your project, you will participate in a peer-review group of classmates to evaluate each other's work and provide constructive consultation.

II. Student Learning Outcomes

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

- Developing a concept from ideation to Minimum Viable Project with professional production values.
- Conducting primary and secondary research and analysis, both quantitative and qualitative.
- Planning and implementing an online marketing campaign and analyzing the results.
- Providing constructive consultations within a peer-review group.

III. Course Notes

The Capstone is not a casual side project. It requires extensive research and analysis, regular in-class presentations, real-world project development and marketing, and peer-review group consultations. Class sessions will consist of

instruction, presentations, peer-review discussions, or guest speakers, and attendance is mandatory. In addition, this course is web-enhanced, with work-in-progress and discussions on Brightspace.

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 research, development, and marketing.

IV. Instructor

Founder of multiple ventures, including *Globu Media* and *VentureX*, Emily Kosko has shaped industries through visionary leadership and transformative strategies. She has helped businesses secure millions in venture capital funding and position brands for global success, earning recognition in outlets like TechCrunch and Shark Tank.

She has collaborated with renowned clients such as Grubhub, Univision, and Keystone Partners to deliver impactful business strategies and innovative solutions. As President of *Global Business Consulting, LLC*, she has guided international startups in establishing strong US footholds and driving market innovation.

A keynote speaker at the United Nations Climate Week and Web Summit, Kosko is recognized for her expertise in market expansion and developing innovative digital solutions.

Kosko holds an MBA from UCLA Anderson School of Management, a Master of Public Diplomacy from USC Annenberg School of Communication, and a Bachelor of Arts in Film from the University of California, Los Angeles.

V. Readings

Required (shared on Brightspace):

• Brereton, Jake. The Ultimate Guide to Minimum Viable Products. Launch Notes.

Recommended (available online via USC Libraries):

•Ries, E. (2011). *The lean startup: How today's entrepreneurs use continuous innovation to create radically successful businesses*. Crown Business.

• Presentation Zen, Garr Reynolds: Tactics and techniques for designing modern business presentations. Also applicable to designing web-based media.

• Made to Stick, Chip Heath & Dan Heath: How to make your work memorable, with critical tips on writing specifically and concretely.

• UX Strategy (Second Edition), Jaime Levy: Essential for developing any website or app.

VI. Assignments

Assessment Tool (assignments)	Dates	% of Grade
Plan	March 3	30
Product	April 11	30
Final Presentation	April 28	25
Participation		15
TOTAL		100%

Project Options

Choose one of the following digital projects to develop. **NOTE: a white paper will be the default project for students who do not make a selection by the end of the second class.** Alternative ideas are acceptable with instructor approval. In all cases, projects should be NEW, not modifications of existing digital media.

You may work individually or as part of a team, but requirements will be increased for team projects (e.g., the minimum amount of research will be higher than for individual projects).

• Academic Paper, Business White Paper, or E-book: Write a research-based manuscript on the digitalmedia topic of your choice (minimum 20 single-spaced pages). Academic papers should adhere to graduate-level research and citation requirements. White papers must be creatively formatted and written for a business audience. E-books should be published on Amazon or another platform of your choice.

Online Platform: Create a website for a business, organization, or cause (no personal resume sites). It should be built using a sophisticated CMS, such as WordPress, Joomla, Drupal, or Magento — NOT Wix — and enable transactions or interactions, such as ecommerce and discussions. Apps are acceptable, but they typically require too much funding and development time for a one-semester course.

• **Content Series:** Create a topical video (vlog) or audio series (podcast) with at least 5 episodes, minimum 5 minutes each, and post the series on the public online platform of your choice. You may produce these in any language and post them on non-American platforms, but must provide the content and translations to your instructor and peer-review group. The series should be focused on a professional or academic topic; creator-lifestyle content (such as food, modeling, or vacation videos) are not acceptable.

• **Digital Marketing Campaign:** Develop and implement an online campaign for a real client, either for profit or nonprofit. The campaign must be completed within the semester, and you (not the client) need to develop the SMART goals, KPIs, budget, calendar, creative directions, and fully produced and implemented deliverables. The campaign should feature at least two types of media on two different channels. A plan alone will not suffice.

Assignments

The following are brief summaries; complete assignment prompts will be shared in class.

1. Plan: In 20 pages or less, plan your project based on research. Write it for an audience of investors and other external stakeholders. This plan should include:

- A brief description of key features and content.
- Quantitative and qualitative analysis of the target audience(s), including the reasons you selected them. You may have more than one audience. Do not target stereotypes, such as "Gen Z."

• Analysis of three competitors, including their strengths, weaknesses, and other characteristics that might shape your product. While you might emulate some of their practices, strive to differentiate from them.

• Analysis of other key stakeholders (investors, partners, etc.) and external factors that could influence the outcome of your project (algorithms, the economy, laws, etc.)

- An estimate of the time and resources required for product development, along with a calendar of product development due dates and deliverables.
- Marketing SMART goal(s) and KPIs to assess progress.
- Analysis of the platforms and people (influencers, journalists) you will use to promote your product, along with your reasons for selecting them.
- Description of the marketing content, including creative ideas and key messages.

- Calendar of marketing activities.
- A bibliography of all sources used to substantiate this plan. You should have at least 20 authoritative sources, both primary and secondary, with expert interviews strongly encouraged.

2. Product: Your digital-media project should be a minimum viable product (MVP) produced with professionalcaliber production values, and meticulously proofread and bug-checked. After launching it online for your target audience, you will have one week to revise it before it is graded.

3. Presentation: You will market your product online, and comparing the results with your SMART goal(s) and KPIs. You will then summarize your capstone experience in a 10-minute presentation about what went well, what didn't, and what you will do in the future to address those issues and enhance your product. Your market performance will not affect your grade; rather, you will be assessed on how well you critically analyzed that performance.

4. Participation: Class participation is based on 2 different activities throughout the term:

• In-class and Brightspace discussions: Quality matters as much as quantity.

- o Is your contribution relevant to the discussion and respectful of others?
- o Does it address ideas offered by the readings, lectures, guests, or classmates?
- o Does it increase everyone's understanding or merely repeat facts?
- o Does it support views with data, third-party theories, and research?
- o Does it test new ideas and challenge assumptions, or just "play it safe"?

• Peer group contributions: You will be assigned to a peer-review group in which members will review each other's progress, plans, and projects throughout the course, both in-class and on Brightspace. At the end of the semester, you will confidentially rate each of your peers on a scale of 1-5 based on the value of their feedback throughout the term. Each member will receive an average of their ratings as part of their final grade.

VII. Grading

The instructor will provide written evaluations of your assignments within one week of submission. Should you wish to dispute a grade, you must contact your instructor within one week of receiving it.

Letter grade and corresponding numerical point range			
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	

Course Grading Scale

Grading Standards

Grades will be assigned as follows for the type and quality of work that is submitted by the student in order to earn each letter grade:

Letter Grade	Description
A/A-	Excellent, outstanding, thoughtful, and enthusiastic work that "goes the extra mile" to create professional-level assignments that could be presented to a CEO, C-Suite leader, or client. Demonstrates extraordinarily high achievement and critical thinking; comprehensive knowledge and understanding of subject matter; all expectations met and exceeded
В+/В	Good, graduate-school caliber and above-average work, demonstrating moderately broad knowledge and understanding of subject matter; explicitly or implicitly demonstrates good, if not thorough understanding; stronger critical thinking and expression would be needed for success in a professional setting; most expectations met
B-/C+	Fair, with only a basic level of knowledge and understanding of the subject matter; improvement needed on critical thinking, creativity, ideas, arguments, and follow through; some expectations met
C and below	Fulfilling the bare minimum, reflecting little critical thinking, marked by many errors, and/or showing little understanding of the material

Rubric

Assignments will be graded on the following criteria without fixed percentages, 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: 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 market strategies. You may certainly be "inspired" by others, including AI, as long as you properly credit the sources, but most of the thinking and execution should be yours, and higher grades are awarded to work that is innovative and imaginative. The goal is to distinguish yourself after all, "outstanding" literally means "to stand out."
- **Production Quality:** Your work should feature professional production values in terms of writing, design, and (as applicable) video and audio content. Treat your work as a submission to a client, supervisor, or investor. Eliminate all errors by proofreading meticulously, using Microsoft editing tools, AI apps, 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 (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").

o Start with the USC online library and our librarians, who have prepared Research Guidelines for DSM (https://libguides.usc.edu/digitalsocialmedia), as well as all other departments throughout the university (https://libguides.usc.edu).

o Search Google Scholar (https://scholar.google.com/) before searching regular Google. o Never cite Wikipedia; rather, refer to the sources listed in the Wikipedia article. o Cite every use of AI tools (please see <u>https://libguides.usc.edu/generative-AI/citing-generative-ai</u>).

o 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).

o Conduct direct primary research, such as focus groups, surveys, and interviews, particularly of subjectmatter experts like professionals and professors.

o Within the body of papers, include reference notes, either parenthetical, such as (Lee 2017), or in the form of footnotes or endnotes.

o Bibliography entries must include COMPLETE source information, not just a URL. You may use any format that includes ALL the following: FULL FIRST NAMES AND LAST NAMES of authors (we respect creators in this course, so a first-name initial alone is not enough — a critical 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.

• **Timeliness:** As in the professional world, meeting deadlines is critical, since missed deadlines can result in penalties, lost business, or legal actions. Without an exceptional circumstance and the instructor's permission, late assignments will be penalized one grade level (e.g., A to B) per day of lateness.

VIII. Policies & Procedures

Attendance

Participation from each student is critical to the success of this course; therefore, class attendance is mandatory. You must attend all classes, arrive on time, and stay for the entire session. Note that attendance alone won't earn participation points. Whether online, in class, or with your peer group, you must come prepared, converse, ask and respond to questions, and debate respectfully. Staying silent is unacceptable, since it conveys disengagement. You might be in class, but not "present."

- Excused absences: If you need to miss a class for a valid reason, such as religious observances or medical procedures, you must attain written approval from the instructor in advance (except, of course, in emergencies). Student athletes should provide approved Travel Request Letters. Note that work-related absences, such as job interviews, are not excused; please plan them around your academic commitments.
- **Illness:** If you are feeling ill, particularly with COVID symptoms, stay home to protect the health of your classmates, your instructors, and yourself. If you show up to class with an illness, you will be asked to leave and will be recorded as absent.
- Unexcused absences: Although no points are awarded for attendance, an unexcused absence will result in the loss of 5 grade points (half a grade); 3 or more unexcused absences will result in a D or lower for the course. In addition, arriving late or leaving early without instructor permission may result in a 1 participation point deduction.
- Electronics: You must have a computer for accessing course materials from home; however, phones, tablets, and computers may NOT be used during class meetings without permission of the instructor, and should be completely hidden away before class begins. Any unauthorized use of electronics will result in the loss of 1 participation point, and you might be asked to leave the session and recorded as absent.

Classroom Norms

• **Zoom etiquette**: Class meetings will take place in person on campus, but occasional meetings might take place on Zoom. Without a valid reason (connectivity issues or privacy concerns), you should turn your camera on and contribute actively to the class. Keep your microphone off except for discussion or

questions. Also, be present: except for Zoom use, your phone must be turned off and put away, and avoid interactions with housemates during class; if such interactions are unavoidable, step away from your camera (or turn it off) to avoid distracting your instructor and classmates.

- **Respect**: Treat classmates, the instructor, and speakers with courtesy. You may certainly question and criticize ideas that is encouraged in the learning environment but 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."
- Appointments: If you have questions or concerns, whether academic, career, or personal, contact the instructor to arrange a meeting (please see email addresses on the first page of this syllabus). In emergencies, see the support systems below.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the <u>USC Student Handbook</u>. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

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

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

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

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

AI Generators Policy

Using AI is a valuable skill, particularly for DSM students and graduates; consequently, you are encouraged to use tools such as ChatGPT and Claude, but you must adhere to the following guidelines.

You must acknowledge using any AI tools, just as you would any other reference source.

- In each assignment, include a paragraph explaining which AI tools you used and how you used them, including specific prompts. Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies.
- Al is useful for helping start an assignment even overcome writer's block but the final submission must reflect your ideas and revisions. Treat Al as a personal assistant: someone who can help you, but who has shortcomings and is prone to mistakes.

- Don't trust what AI tools claim as facts. Not only are their databases limited, AI tools might draw from fiction and misinformation. In some cases, they might fabricate sources. Assume the answers are incorrect, and doublecheck them. You will be held responsible for any errors.
- Provide detailed prompts to get the best results. You might have to try multiple variations.
- Your work might become part of the Al's database, so do not include any sensitive information.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation, is prohibited. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonestly and is strictly prohibited. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. <u>The Office of Student</u> <u>Accessibility Services</u> (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 <u>osas.usc.edu</u>. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at <u>osasfrontdesk@usc.edu</u>.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:

To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the <u>Financial Aid Office webpage</u> for <u>undergraduate</u>- and <u>graduate-level</u> SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

Support Systems:

Annenberg Student Success Fund

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

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.

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.

<u>988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline</u> - 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 consists 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) 740-2500

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.

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.

<u>USC Emergency</u> - 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.

<u>USC Department of Public Safety</u> - 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.

IX. Class Schedule

Week 1 January, 13	 Capstone Introduction Overview of project options and expectations, including production quality standards. Introduction to Lean Methodology and its practical applications. Crafting a compelling value proposition Assignments: *Share value proposition statement to Brightspace before next class. *Read syllabus & The Guide To Minimum Viable Products posted on Brightspace. 		
Week 2 January, 20	No Class - Martin Luther King Day: Monday, January 20		
Week 3 January, 27 Week 4	 Ideation & Validation Overview and discussion of the assignment planning process. Techniques for identifying opportunities, conducting research, and validating concepts. How to pitch your idea. Assignments: Share 3 product ideas to Brightspace before next class. Research Methods		
February 3	 Practical analysis frameworks. Standards for qualitative and quantitative research. Students will present three concise project ideas in a pitch format. Project must be selected by the end of class.		
Week 5 February 10	 Determining Market Fit Competitive analysis and preliminary research. Peer group discussions & instructor meetings. 		
Week 6 February 17	No-Class Presidents' Day: Monday, February 17		
Week 7 February 24	 Investor Pitch Deck Identifying KPI's. How to present a compelling project and demonstrate traction. Peer group discussions & instructor meetings. 		
Week 8 March 3	 Peer group discussions & instructor meetings. **Plan Due** 		

	by 12pm (before class)
Week 9 March 10	 Evaluate and Reiterate Reiterate and modify project direction based on learnings. Peer group discussions & instructor meetings.
SPRING BREAK March 17	No Class: SPRING BREAK Dates: 3/17-3/21
Week 10 March 24	Peer group discussions & instructor meetings.
Week 11 March 31	Peer group discussions & instructor meetings.
Week 12 Dates: April 7	Peer group discussions & instructor meetings.
	** Product Due** Friday, April 11, at 11:59pm
Week 13 Dates: April 14	Peer group discussions & instructor meetings.
Week 14 April 21	Peer group discussions & instructor meetings.
Week 15 April 28	Final Presentations
5/3-5/6	Study Days
FINAL EXAM PERIOD May 7	Presentation Report Due Wednesday, May 7 at 11:59pm