

## Ad Creative Strategy

STRM 4221-M50

Spring 2026

Online

### Prof. Joel M. Nichols

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## COURSE REQUIREMENTS

### Catalog description

Introduction to advertising creative strategy. Students learn the creative process, copywriting, and design. Students learn how to create print advertising, banner advertising, radio advertising, TV advertising, outdoor advertising and social media advertising.

### Prerequisites

JRSM 3900 or 3905

### Textbooks, Software and Required Materials

Altstiel, T., & Grow, J. (2019). Advertising creative: Strategy, copy, and design. Los Angeles, CA: Sage Publications.

Canva, Adobe Express, Adobe Photoshop CC, Adobe InDesign CC, Adobe Illustrator CC

*Note: You may purchase the Adobe Creative Cloud on a month-to-month basis from Adobe.com.*

### Classroom format

This course is designed to teach the fundamentals of a creative campaign. Students will learn techniques and the principles behind them to execute creative work for print, video, Web, and digital media. Further, students will build a portfolio of work to show potential employers. A typical class session will consist of a lecture, discussion, and assignment/lab time. Students are required to complete multiple writing and design activities and projects throughout the semester, as well as a final project. The final project should invoke all skills learned in the course.

### Accessing the course website

1. Go to the University of Memphis online learning home page:  
<http://memphis.instructure.com>
2. Log in using your University of Memphis username and password.
3. In the Term Year course list available to you, click on the link for STRM-4221-001 Ad Creative Strategy Spring Term 2025 to enter your course and read the instructions on the welcoming page

### Additional information

This course will help you express your creativity in the form of effective advertising communication. Both sides of your brain will be exercised as creativity and strategy meet in the development of advertising and promotional ideas that are compelling, persuasive and strategically sound.

Students will work together, in rotating teams of two or three, to produce a high volume of rough creative ideas. You will be encouraged to value points of view, other than your own, in this process. The resulting ideas, in rough form, will be critiqued and possibly refined. The students will then take the best ideas to finished layouts for presentation to the class. Some of the creative assignments will emanate from “real world” creative briefs.

Advertising is a business. It’s about finding ways to get people to pay attention to your message and buy your product or service instead of someone else. But advertising is also about a passion for life and the joys of learning and living it to the fullest. Great creative emanates from curious committed people having fun. The hope is that you will leave this class with a better understanding of the advertising creative process and an impressive creative portfolio.

### Addressed terms

- **Thumbs:** thumbnails, small proportionate drawings, ranging in size from 2 x 3.5 inches to 3 x 5 inches. Used to place your concept ideas on paper
- **Roughs:** chosen from your best thumbnail ideas
- **Comps:** super comprehensives, generated from roughs on the computer as a finished

### Grading

Assignment categories and points or percentage weights.

#### Grading Scale:

A: 90% or above

B: 80% - 89%

C: 70% - 79%

D: 60% - 69%

F: < 60%

#### Grading Philosophy:

A = Professional quality work that could be use with little or no modification

B = Good to excellent work and exceeds requirement, but would require revision to be used professionally

C = Satisfactory work and adequately meets requirement, but would need significant revision

D = Barely satisfies minimum requirement and below average quality

F = Unsatisfactory work and does not meet minimum requirement.

### Attendance & class conduct

Attendance is mandatory and will be taken at the beginning of each class session. Students are allowed three unexcused absences; after three, additional unexcused absences will drop the

student's final grade by one letter grade for each absence. Missing a total of seven classes will result in the student failing the course. University policy for excused absences apply to this course. Tardiness will not be tolerated. After two tardiness, one percentage point will be deducted from the student's final grade for each additional tardy. Attendance will be determined by signing the daily sign-in sheet for the course.

### **Mobile and electronic devices**

The use of electronic devices is permitted, as this class focuses on design and technology. Mobile telephones must be turned to vibrate during class and should be used only for emergencies. Excessive text messaging will not be tolerated.

### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. This is journalism and mass communications. Late work is not accepted. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to or on the due date. Work will be collected at the beginning of class, and must be printed and mounted or prepared for presentation before class.

### **Computer usage**

Students are expected to use a computer in this course. Students will use Apple computers running the Macintosh operating system in class, but may use Windows computers at their own discretion. Students will work with the design software standard in the professional world.

### **Writing style**

Students will be required to write a substantial amount as part of their study. In these cases, students are expected to adhere to the Associated Press style guide. Additionally, in design projects, students will use text as part of their projects. Within creative reason, the text used in these projects must also follow the AP guidelines.

### **AI/ChatGPT**

ChatGPT and similar AI tools, though useful in many contexts, are inappropriate for use in this course. An important outcome of this course is to strengthen your own abilities as a thinker and writer. That is only possible when you do your own work. You may not submit work that is written wholly or partially by an AI tool. Assignment submissions may be run through AI detection software. If your submission appears to have been written using AI, you may either receive a failing grade or be asked to resubmit the assignment.

### **Assignment format**

All assignments are to be submitted electronically via Canvas. Generally, each assignment will come with unique formatting guidelines. Be sure to follow these guidelines exactly. Work that does not comply to these guidelines, as well as the production specifications indicated for the assignment, will receive a grade of 0.

All major projects (except the final) can be resubmitted with corrections and revisions one week after it is returned to you. Work will be critiqued in the classroom and must be suitable for presentation. Students are encouraged to work ahead on assignments to develop their creative processes for the work.

## Assignments

### *Creative Activities*

1. Ad Observation
2. Brand research
3. Creative Brief
4. Names and Taglines
5. Ad Critique

### *Creative Projects*

1. Brand Logo
2. Magazine ads and newspaper ads
3. Brochure
4. Audio Ad
5. Video Ad
6. Outdoor Ad
7. Social Media Post

### *Class Projects*

#### *Topic-Related Projects:*

1. Three magazine ads
2. One newspaper ad
3. One audio ad
4. One video ad
5. Two outdoor ads
6. One IC plan
7. Seven days of social media posts
8. Website landing page (\*\* honor's students only)

#### *Real-World Project:*

Local Non-Profit Organization Project consisting of client meetings, creative brief formation, concept developments, and creative executions.

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### *Week 1, Creative Business*

Purpose of advertising. Developing creativity. Creativity for selling messages. What is a brand?

Readings: Chapter 1-2

### *Week 2, Branding*

Connecting messages to audiences.

Readings: Chapter 2

### *Week 3, Audience*

Diversity. Inclusivity. Global brands.

Readings: Chapter 4-5

*Week 4, Copywriting*

Headlines. Bridges. Copy blocks. Calls to action. Closings. Tagline connectivity.  
Readings: Chapter 8

*Week 5, Campaign*

Layout for print and web. Campaign development. Advertising across media.  
Readings: Chapter 6-7

*Week 6, Print*

Newspapers. Magazine. Direct Mail. Catalog. Brochures.  
Readings: Chapter 9, 14-15

*Week 7, Websites*

Websites. Mobile. App.  
Readings: Chapter 11-12

*Week 8, Spring Break*

NO CLASS

*Week 9, Audio*

Radio. Electronic audio.  
Readings: Chapter 10.

*Week 10, Video*

Television. Electronic video.  
*Readings: Chapter 10.*

*Week 11, Outdoor*

Billboards. Transit.  
Readings: Online.

*Week 12, Promotions*

Direct marketing. Events. Integrated communication.  
Readings: Online.

*Week 13, Mobile*

Design for social media.  
Readings: Chapter 12-13.

*Week 14, Work Week*

Law and Ethics  
Readings: Chapter 3.

*Week 15, Finals Week*

Final Project Presentation.

## ASSESSMENT AND OUTCOMES

### Professional Values and Competencies in STRM 4221

- Apply the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, in a global context, and in the United States.
- Demonstrate an understanding of the multicultural history and role of professionals and institutions in shaping communications.
- Demonstrate culturally proficient communication that empowers those traditionally disenfranchised in society, especially as grounded in race, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation and ability, domestically and globally, across communication and media contexts.
- Present images and information effectively and creatively, using appropriate tools and technologies.
- Write correctly and clearly in forms and styles appropriate for the communications professions, audiences and purposes they serve.
- Demonstrate an understanding of professional ethical principles and work ethically in pursuit of truth, accuracy, fairness and diversity.
- Critically evaluate their own work and that of others for accuracy and fairness, clarity, appropriate style and grammatical correctness.
- Apply tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which they work.

### How professional values and competencies will be met

#### *Cognitive objectives to be mastered (ability to explain, analyze, understand, think critically)*

- Students will think critically about the needs of a diverse audience.
- Students will understand strategic brand messaging skills.
- Students will be able to explain creative strategy.
- Students will understand the culture of the creative group and its role in the advertising agency.

#### *Performance standards to be met (demonstrable skills, abilities, techniques, applied competencies)*

- Students will create advertising copy, layouts, and presentations for print, broadcast, digital, and display media.
- Students will analyze existing creative work for its merits and strategy.
- Students will write creative briefs for multiple clients.
- Students will execute creative concepts.

### How assessment of student learning will be met

#### *Awareness*

- Becoming aware of the relationship between the creative staff and the rest of the agency.
- Through a combination of lectures and creative assignments, the course will cover the many facets of advertising copy writing, creative strategy, and creative execution.

#### *Understanding*

- Understand the strategy needed to produce creative advertising.

### Application

- Produce advertisements for multiple media platforms using industry-standard software; understanding different approaches to design based upon the audience and message of a particular media.

## JOURNALISM AND STRATEGIC MEDIA POLICIES

### Portfolio requirement

As an undergraduate student in the Department of Journalism and Strategic Media, you are required to develop and maintain an active portfolio of your work. Portfolios begin in JRSM 3900/3905. The portfolio should contain samples of coursework and/or professional experiences and should develop as you build skills. Portfolios will undergo a final, external review while you are enrolled in your capstone course.

You may use any type of web hosting for your portfolio, but it must have an independent and professional URL. You may use any content management system, but you are encouraged to use WordPress, Wix, or SquareSpace. It is also encouraged to purchase a URL if you plan to use the portfolio long term. You must keep the portfolio active for six months following graduation from the University of Memphis.

You should have a professional email address you plan to use throughout your professional life, via a common email service, such as Gmail.

All portfolios must contain the following items:

- Samples of work from courses and/or professional activities. (Example: Broadcasting students must include a video reel)
- A current résumé
- A personal profile
- Contact information/means of contact
- Professional social media links (minimum LinkedIn)

You may wish to include a blog, video reels, photograph galleries, presentations, design PDFs, audio files or writing pieces as examples of professional work. The professional work should ultimately be tailored to the career you seek after graduation. Your portfolio should show a unique blend of work.

### Email

You must have your UofM email account activated. If you are using another provider, such as Google, you are required to have all UofM emails forwarded to that account. Go to the [account management website](#) for information about implementing email forwarding. You are required to check your email daily.

### Electronic devices

Some classes require a tablet, laptop or a smartphone. Others do not. Instructors will set the policy for their specific classes.

### AI/Chat GPT

The use of artificial intelligence software, such as Chat GPT, is prohibited in some courses and required in others in Journalism & Strategic Media. Please refer to specific guidelines for this course in the course-

specific part of the syllabus.

### Attendance

Class attendance is mandatory in Journalism & Strategic Media. You may be assigned a failing grade for the semester for nonattendance or habitual tardiness.

### Course repetition

Majors and minors who fail to earn the minimum passing grade (C-) in a class required by your program of study in Journalism & Strategic Media after three attempts will be dropped from the program.

You may not use or submit work from a previous course, even if it is the same course being repeated, to fulfill requirements for assignments in another course. Substantially reworking the original submission, or working with the same general idea, may be permissible upon discussion and with written approval from the professor of the current course.

### Academic integrity

The University of Memphis expects all students to behave honestly and follow the policies stated in the Student Code of Rights and Responsibilities. If you need more information about the University policy on academic integrity visit the [Office of Student Accountability's website](#).

In addition to University-wide policies, the Department of Journalism & Strategic Media considers making up quotes from sources, turning in substantially the same assignment for credit in two different courses or receiving any assistance from others for work assigned to be done on your own, as acts of cheating and punishable to the degree determined appropriate by the course instructor and department chair. Punishment may include grade reductions or seeking dismissal of the student from the University.

Further, you are expected to comply with copyright and intellectual property laws and must have sufficient permission to use any copyrighted materials used in creative projects, unless otherwise informed in cases of exercises or reproduction.

Your written work may be submitted to Turnitin.com, or a similar electronic detection method, for rating originality of your ideas and to evaluate proper use and assignment of sources. All creative work may be checked for policy adherence by the professor. The only exception to this policy is your online portfolio and its attendant pieces (for example, the résumé and logo). By taking this course, you agree that all assignments may undergo this review process. The assignment may be included as a source document in Turnitin.com's restricted access database. It is solely for the purpose of detecting plagiarism in such documents. Assignments not submitted according to the instructor's procedures may be penalized or may not be accepted at all.

### Online SETEs

You are encouraged to complete the SETEs evaluation of this course. If completed, once the instructor has posted final grades, you can immediately see that grade. To access evaluation forms, log in to MyMemphis; click the "Student Pages" dropdown menu and select "My Resources" and find the SETE evaluation forms; complete an evaluation for each course listed and hit the "Submit" button at the bottom of the form. Completing the SETE will only take a few minutes. Faculty take the evaluations seriously and use them to improve courses and instructional quality. Your feedback is essential and is appreciated.



### **Deadlines**

All deadlines are firm. Because Journalism & Strategic Media is a professional program, students are expected to understand and comply with deadlines. Students needing an extension on an assignment must receive approval from the instructor. Exceptions will be made for reasonable circumstances if the student notifies the instructor prior to the due date.

You may be permitted to make up missing work if it is for an absence because of illness or other catastrophic emergency, such as a death in the family that can be documented.

### **AP Style and grammar**

All written work in this class must follow the AP Stylebook and accepted rules of grammar and punctuation. You are responsible for learning these rules and checking your work for errors.

### **Disability and accommodations**

If you need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability, contact Disability Resources for Students at 901-678-2880 in 110 Wilder Tower Hall to coordinate reasonable accommodations.

### **Diversity and inclusivity**

The Department of Journalism & Strategic Media values diversity in all its forms. Some of these forms include ability, age, appearance, ethnicity, gender identity, immigration status, language, nationality, race, religion/spirituality, sex, sexuality, socio-economic status, and other personal identities and experiences. As such, students are expected to participate in fostering an inclusive environment that respects the differences of others.

Students are expected to approach their work through a diverse lens. Creating messages that resonate with diverse audiences requires an understanding of a variety of perspectives, which are carried out through multiple platforms, such as digital and traditional media outlets.

The department seeks to foster healthy and positive classroom discussions and experiences. As such, faculty and students are expected to remain respectful and professional at all times.

### **Weather policy**

Always check with local media, the University of Memphis website and the LiveSafe App regarding inclement weather.

### **Student support**

If you are experiencing personal or academic challenges including, but not limited to food or housing issues, family needs, or other stressors, visit the Student Outreach & Support page to learn about resources that can help: <https://www.memphis.edu/deanofstudents/crisis/index.php> or contact the Dean of Students Office at 901-678-2187, or in person in Suite 359 in the University Center for assistance. You may also talk with course instructors about the challenges you are experiencing. Instructors may be able to assist in connecting you with campus or community support.