ADV3920C: Preparing the Pitch Syllabus

Course Name: Preparing the Pitch
Listing: ADV3920C
Semester: Spring 2026

Meeting days and times: Tuesdays: 11:45 AM - 12:35 PM ET (Period 5)
Class location: Online (100%), via Zoom

Instructor: Sophia Donskoi
Email: sophia.donskoi@ufl.edu
Office Hours (via Zoom): By appointment

Credit Hours: 1 Credit
Grading Scheme: Letter Grade
Prerequisite: ADV 3008 with a minimum grade of C. Sophomore standing or higher.

Course Description

In advertising, bringing a creative idea to life begins with a strong pitch. In this course, you'll learn how to build a powerful, compelling pitch that communicates your ideas to peers and clients. We'll look at the fundamentals of what makes a pitch good, explore and learn from successful examples, and ultimately, workshop and present pitch decks. Guest speakers from the entertainment and communications industries will share their best practices, experiences, and insights around pitching throughout the semester. By the end of the course, you'll have the skills and frameworks you need to get the "green light" and turn your creative ideas into well-thought-out campaigns.

Course Objectives

The objective of this course is to help students truly understand what goes into making a great pitch and how to effectively communicate an idea in pitch form.

By the end of the course, students will:
- Understand the role of pitching in advertising and communications, including how pitches function as strategic, creative, and persuasive tools for campaigns.
- Analyze the core elements of successful pitches by studying real-world examples across advertising and communications, and identify what makes ideas clear, compelling, and actionable.
- Develop the ability to translate creative ideas into well-structured pitch decks that articulate insight, strategy, execution, and impact in a cohesive narrative.

• Demonstrate effective presentation and storytelling skills through in-class pitch presentations.
• Gain practical frameworks and confidence to pitch original creative campaigns, respond to critique, and move ideas from concept to reality.

Course Materials
There is no textbook for this class. This class will be taught using a combination of articles, pitch examples, speeches, videos, and discussions.

Attendance Requirements
Given that much of the learning will be taking place during the lectures, attendance will be critical to your success. If for some reason, you cannot attend class, you need to inform the instructor prior to class via email. Aside from circumstances clearly described at the link below, please notify me in advance for permission to miss class or assignments.

In general, late work is not accepted, with exceptions described in UF's attendance policies, which can be found at: https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx

Camera Requirements
All classes will be recorded. It's important to have your camera on during class to keep our communication and engagement strong. Additionally, please make sure that your name is visible at the bottom of your screen so others may address you by name. If you have privacy concerns, poor Wi-Fi, or another issue that might prevent you from having your camera on, please message me and we will try to work out an acceptable solution.

Attention and Participation
It's in everyone's best interest to eliminate / minimize distractions for the short period of time that we are together every week. There will be points throughout every class where you will be asked to share your thoughts, and experiences. Student participation will be vital to the learning (and grade) of everyone in the class, so please be ready and willing to participate.

Assignments and Deadlines
Assignments are expected to be completed and turned in by deadlines discussed in class. If you're having trouble with an assignment, communicate with me ahead of time and we'll discuss a solution such as an extension.

Students may make up work related to university-excused absences or with permission of the instructor at no penalty when explicit written permission is provided by the instructor. In the latter case, students must notify me in advance of the due date and explain the issue(s) you are facing. Under most circumstances, students should expect to submit assignments and posts on the dates listed in the syllabus.

On all assignments, a student's grade will drop 10% for each day overdue.

Course Professionalism

The College of Journalism and Communications is a professional school and professional decorum is expected at all times. Therefore, the students, and the professor, adhere to workplace norms for collegial and respectful interaction. Students are expected to conduct themselves in an honest, ethical, and courteous manner — with classmates and the professor.

Projects should not contain nudity, profanity, illegal activities, or situations that would endanger others.

Students are expected to show up on time and not leave early. Please note the significant impact of and active participation in your final grade and be sure to show up and speak up.

Honesty

Academic honesty and integrity are fundamental values of the University community. Students should be sure that they understand the UF code and consequences, which can be found here:
https://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honor-code .
Any violations of this code in this class will be reported to the Dean of Students.

A note on Artificial Intelligence (AI): While many industries and communicators utilize AI in their work, please be aware of the limitations and ethical concerns of artificial intelligence in pitching. Human creativity is a crucial aspect of building and presenting a strong pitch, and when a pitch loses its human angle, it becomes weaker and less personal.

Please note that the usage of AI, unless expressly permitted by the instructor, also constitutes cheating and plagiarism.

Grading

Participating in class will be key to your learning and will be part of your grade.

Grading will be weighted as outlined below:
- Class participation and attendance – 35%
- Assignments (in-class and outside-of-class) – 20%
- Response memos – 20%

> Because this course emphasizes discussion, critique, and active pitching practice, you are expected to engage closely with assigned readings, case studies, and pitch examples before each class. These materials form the basis for in-class workshops, peer feedback, and presentations.

Over the course of the term, you will complete short response memos, each consisting of two paragraphs. These briefs should surface questions or insights, and draw connections to successful or unsuccessful pitches. Reflect on how the ideas could inform your own pitching work. Response briefs should not summarize the materials; instead, they should demonstrate critical thinking and creative application.

Each response memo will be evaluated based on depth of engagement and clarity.

- Final project– 25%

For more information, please see the university's policy on grades and grading.

The instructor reserves the right to change any part or aspect of this document/syllabus at any point in time during the semester.

Week-by-Week Assignment and Reading Schedule

Please do all the required readings prior to class.

Date + Topic	Reading (done before class)	Assignment
Date: 1/13 Expectations for The Course	1) Watch "[Timothee_Chalamet_internal_brand_marketing_meeting_MartySupreme_11.08.2025.mp4](#)" by A24 & Timothee Chalamet (18 mins 24 seconds) 2) Read the syllabus 3) Read "[Advertising - on Pitch Strategies](#)" by G O Shivakumar	
Date: 1/20 What is Pitching?	1) Read "[The Levitan Pitch (Chapter 2)](#)," by Peter Levitan 2) Read "Agencies split on flashy client pitches—how review theatrics are evolving and whether they can still win over brands" by Andrew Gall	

	3) Watch "The Secret to Successfully Pitching an Idea | The Way We Work, a TED series" (4 min 46 sec)	
Date: 1/27 Elements of Successful Pitches	1) Watch "The Pitch Deck that Shaped All Pitch Decks" (11 mins 26 seconds) 2) Read "I reviewed 1,000+ pitch decks. These are the most common mistakes" by Haje Jean Kamps 3) Watch "How to Pitch to Investors" (32 seconds) 4) Watch "The Sharks Are SHOCKED At Blueland's Asking Share" by Shark Tank (9 mins 31 seconds)	*First Response Memo Due* 01/29/2025
Date: 2/3 Establishing Trust & Leadership	1) Read "Small Actions Make Great Leaders," by Hitendra Wadhwa 2) Read "The Critical Difference Between Credibility & Trust," by Tom McMakin 3) "Rick Rubin on the Creative Act" By 60 minutes (4 min 38 sec)	
Date: 2/10 Make People Care	1) Read "The Science of What Makes People Care" By Ann Christiano & Annie Neimand 2) Watch "Ask Better Questions to Build Better Connections," By Amber L. Wright (14 min 27 sec) 3) Read "The Art of Asking Great Questions," by Tijs Bisieux	
Date: 2/17 Unconventional Pitches and Everyday Pitching	1) Read "The Pitch is Dead. Long Live the Conversation." by Kevin Starr 2) Watch "Fran Lebowitz on the Process of Great Writing" by the Morgan Library and Museum (5 min 12 sec)	*Assignment #1 Due* 2/19/25 Evaluating Pitches Select a publicly available pitch deck for a product or

		technology you use and write a one page, single spaced APA style paper evaluating what makes the deck effective, what could be improved, and what they would do differently, using course concepts to support their analysis. The paper should also compare the deck to competitors' pitches and include properly cited outside sources.
Date: 2/24 Understand Your Audience	1) Read "Tailoring Your Pitch for Multiple Audiences" 2) Watch "Writing with Your Audience in Mind" by Tony DeFilippo (3 mins 6 sec) 3) Read "How to pitch like a human in an AI-driven world" by Andrew Gall	
Date: 3/3 Organize Your Thoughts	1) Watch "Stanford Webinar - The Power of Storytelling: Making Brands Come to Life" by Stanford Online (43 min 16 sec, feel free to begin at 10:42) 2) Read "The Science Behind the Art of Storytelling," by Lani Peterson	
Date: 3/10 The Power of Persuasion	1) Read "Persuasion in a 'Post-Truth' World," by Troy Campbell, Lauren Griffin, & Annie Neimand 2) Read "Harness the Power of 'The Ben Franklin Effect' To Get Someone to Like You," by Shana Lebowitz	*Second Response Memo Due 3/12/25*
Date 3/17 BREAK		
Date: 3/24 Become a Strong Presenter	1) "10 tangible ways to pitch yourself for your dream projects 🌱" by Daisy Morris 2) Read "Stoicism for Toughening" by Franklin Annis	*Assignment #2 Due 4/09/25* Written reflection (in-class, details provided via slides):

	3) Read "How to Give a Killer Presentation," by Chris Anderson	What's your dream project?
Date: 3/31 Pitch Deck Design	1) Read "How to design a better pitch deck" by Kevin Hale 2) Watch "The First Secret to Great Design," by Tony Fadell (16 mins and 41 sec)	
Date: 4/7 Packaging a Pitch	1) Watch "What the Best Pitch Decks Have in Common with Mike Vernal" by NFX (1 min 19 seconds) 2) Read "The Only Pitch Guyde You'll Ever Need" by Guy Kawasaki	
Date: 4/14 Running a Pitch Process	1) Watch "What investors ACTUALLY want to see in your PITCH DECK" by Matt Smith (13 mins 17 seconds)	*Submit Final Pitch Project by 4/20/25*
Date: 4/21 Discussion Topic: Final Presentations and Review	No readings- prepare for pitch presentations!	*Present Final Pitch Project* (in class, details provided)

University Policies and Resources

Attendance policy
Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:
https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx.

Students requiring accommodation
Students who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester. UF course evaluation process Students are expected to provide professional and

respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online. Students can complete evaluations in three ways:

1. The email they receive from GatorEvals

2. Their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals 3. The central portal at https://my-ufl.bluera.com

Guidance on how to provide constructive feedback is available at https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students/. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at https://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/.

University Honesty Policy

University of Florida students are bound by the Honor Pledge. On all work submitted for credit by a student, the following pledge is required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Student Honor Code and Conduct Code (Regulation 4.040) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code, as well as the process for reported allegations and sanctions that may be implemented. All potential violations of the code will be reported to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. If a student is found responsible for an Honor Code violation in this course, the instructor will enter a Grade Adjustment sanction which may be up to or including failure of the course. For additional information, see https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/. In-class recording Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited.

Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor. A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session. Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party-note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040 Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Procedure for conflict resolution

Any classroom issues, disagreements or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Dr. Ben Smith (bbsmith@ufl.edu, 352-273-2345). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will be referred to the University Ombuds Office (http://www.ombuds.ufl.edu; 352-392-1308) or the Dean of Students Office (http://www.dso.ufl.edu; 352-392-1261).

Resources available to students

Health and Wellness

U Matter, We Care: If you or someone you know is in distress, please contact umatter@ufl.edu, 352-392-1575, or visit U Matter, We Care website to refer or report a concern and a team member will reach out to the student in distress.

Counseling and Wellness Center: Visit the Counseling and Wellness Center website or call 352-392-1575 for information on crisis services as well as non-crisis services.

 Student Health Care Center: Call 352-392-1161 for 24/7 information to help you find the care you need, or visit the Student Health Care Center website.

University Police Department: Visit UF Police Department website or call 352-392-1111 (or 9-1-1 for emergencies).

UF Health Shands Emergency Room / Trauma Center: For immediate medical care call 352-733-0111 or go to the emergency room at 1515 SW Archer Road, Gainesville, FL 32608; Visit the UF Health Emergency Room and Trauma Center website.

GatorWell Health Promotion Services:For prevention services focused on optimal wellbeing, including Wellness Coaching for Academic Success, visit the GatorWell website or call 352-273-4450.

Academic Resources

E-learning technical support: Contact the UF Computing Help Desk at 352-392-4357 or via e-mail at helpdesk@ufl.edu.

 Career Connections Center: Reitz Union Suite 1300, 352-392-1601. Career assistance and counseling services.

Library Support: Various ways to receive assistance with respect to using the libraries or finding resources. Call 866-281-6309 or email ask@ufl.libanswers.com for more information.

Teaching Center: 1317 Turlington Hall, Call 352-392-2010, or to make a private appointment: 352-392-6420.

Email contact: teaching-center@ufl.edu. General study skills and tutoring.

Writing Studio: Daytime (9:30am-3:30pm): 2215 Turlington Hall, 352-846-1138 | Evening (5:00pm-7:00pm): 1545 W University Avenue (Library West, Rm. 339). Help brainstorming, formatting, and writing papers.

Academic Complaints: Office of the Ombuds; Visit the Complaint Portal webpage for more information.

Enrollment Management Complaints (Registrar, Financial Aid, Admissions): View the Student Complaint Procedure webpage for more information.