INFO 7375: Branding and AI
Course Syllabus

Course Information

Professor: Nik Bear Brown
 Email: ni.brown@neu.edu
 Creative: Nina Harris (Brand Director & Creative Director)
 AI: Nik Bear Brown (AI Engineering Professor)
 Office: 505A Dana Hall
 Office hours: Through Zoom by Appointment

All classes will be held online.

Course website: Canvas

Course Prerequisites

- Familiarity with branding and design concepts
- Basic knowledge of AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Adobe Express, Canva)
- Familiarity with some programming language
- No prior experience with the n8n tool is required as it will be covered in class

Course Description

This course explores the evolving intersection of branding and artificial intelligence, focusing on how brand and creative departments operate in corporations and agencies. In the first half of the semester, students will learn about the Madison framework (informally known as "Mads and Madison") - an open-source, agent-based AI marketing intelligence framework - and design an extension or improvement to one of its components. In the second half, students will develop a personal brand and professional portfolio, using advanced AI tools to craft storytelling assets, visuals, and online presence. By the end, each student will have both a contribution to the Madison framework and a strong personal brand strategy, preparing them for leading-edge roles in branding and creative technology.

Learning Objectives

Upon completing this course, students will be able to:

- Understand how corporate and agency brand teams structure and govern creative work.
- Master the Madison framework and its agent-based architecture for AI-powered marketing and branding.
- Design and implement an extension or improvement to the Madison framework that addresses a real-world branding challenge.
- Develop a personal brand identity supported by storytelling, visual systems, and digital strategy.

● Create a comprehensive, career-ready portfolio that demonstrates both technical and strategic capabilities.

Course Modules

Module 1: Introduction to Branding & AI

Learning Objectives

● Grasp foundational branding principles and organizational frameworks.
● Explore the strategic role of AI in modern branding and creative workflows.
● Understand the Madison framework's architecture and core components.

Content Outline

● Brand architecture, governance, and consistency
● Corporate vs. agency brand team structures
● AI's expanding role in branding
● Introduction to AI tool possibilities and industry examples
● **Madison Framework Overview**: Introduction to the agent-based architecture and its five layers

Module 2: Madison Framework Deep Dive

Learning Objectives

● Gain a thorough understanding of the Madison framework's components and agent layers.
● Identify potential areas for enhancement or extension within the framework.
● Begin ideating on your contribution to the Madison ecosystem.

Content Outline

● Intelligence Agent Projects: Reputation monitoring, market dynamics analysis, MarketMind research
● Content Agent Projects: Brand voice personalization, multi-channel content creation, visual generation
● Research Agent Projects: Survey analysis, synthetic personas, segmentation
● Experience Agent Projects: AI concierge systems, interaction facilitation, journey transformation
● Performance Agent Projects: Multi-armed bandit optimization, neolocalism
● The Madison Orchestration Layer: Coordination, resource allocation, conflict resolution
● Introduction to n8n for workflow automation

Module 3: Ideating Your Madison Framework Contribution

Learning Objectives

● Identify a meaningful branding challenge to solve by extending the Madison framework.
● Design initial concepts and define features for your contribution.
● Understand integration points with the existing framework.

Content Outline

- Review of current Madison components:
  - Synthetic Personas: Realistic, personality-driven respondent simulations
  - MarketMind: AI-powered competitive and trend analysis
  - SurveyMind: Pretesting and optimizing surveys with synthetic responses
  - BrandEcho: Auditing brand representation in AI-generated content
  - BrandGuardianAI: Automated brand compliance and creative review
- Identifying gaps and enhancement opportunities in the framework
- Problem scoping and user needs analysis
- Early wireframes and technical architecture planning
- n8n workflow design for Madison components

Module 4: Prototyping Your Madison Extension

Learning Objectives

- Develop a working prototype that integrates with the Madison framework.
- Apply appropriate technical approaches based on the framework's architecture.
- Create documentation for your contribution.

Content Outline

- Designing agent-compatible components
- Prototyping interfaces and agent communication flows
- Creating technical documentation for your extension
- Testing integration with existing Madison components
- Implementing appropriate evaluation metrics
- Building automation workflows with n8n

Module 5: Refining and Documenting Your Madison Contribution

Learning Objectives

- Craft a compelling technical narrative for your Madison framework contribution.
- Iterate design and implementation based on critique and feedback.
- Create comprehensive documentation for future developers.

Content Outline

- Building a professional technical presentation
- Peer and instructor feedback cycles
- Refining features and implementation
- Creating developer documentation and usage examples
- Preparing for open-source contribution
- Advanced n8n integration for your Madison component

Module 6: Personal Brand Strategy

Learning Objectives

- Define and articulate a strong personal brand.
- Craft your professional story and positioning.
- Integrate your Madison framework contribution into your professional narrative.

Content Outline

- Establishing personal vision, mission, and values
- Crafting a clear value proposition and narrative
- Audience segmentation and platform strategies
- Aligning personal brand with future career goals
- Positioning your Madison framework contribution in your professional story

Module 7: Visual Identity and Design Systems

Learning Objectives

- Create a cohesive personal visual identity using AI and design tools.
- Develop branded assets for consistent presentation.
- Visualize technical concepts from your Madison framework contribution.

Content Outline

- Using AI tools for logo, palette, and typography creation
- Developing a personal style guide
- Designing social media and website visuals
- Creating templates for resumes, presentations, and proposals
- Visualizing technical concepts through diagrams and illustrations

Module 8: Content Creation and Online Presence

Learning Objectives

- Build and execute a content strategy that supports your personal brand.
- Optimize LinkedIn and personal website presence.
- Create technical content showcasing your Madison framework expertise.

Content Outline

- Content planning and editorial calendars
- Writing strong LinkedIn profiles and feature pieces
- Using AI to draft articles, posts, and creative copy
- Creating technical blog posts about your Madison framework contribution
- Monitoring audience engagement and refining content

Module 9: Portfolio Assembly and Madison Showcase

Learning Objectives

- Compile a comprehensive portfolio that highlights your Madison framework contribution and personal brand assets.
- Prepare for real-world presentation and job applications.
- Create a compelling case study about your framework extension.

Content Outline

- Assembling case studies and visual narratives
- Designing a digital portfolio (e.g., Vercel v0, FramerAI, Wix)
- Documenting the Madison framework contribution journey
- Creating a detailed technical case study
- Final presentations to peers and invited industry guests

Module 10: From Contribution to Venture — Building Your AI Business

Learning Objectives

- Translate your Madison framework contribution into a comprehensive startup strategy.
- Develop a business model around your technical innovation.
- Create a compelling pitch for potential investors or employers.

Content Outline

- Map your Madison extension to a Lean Canvas
- Conduct competitive analysis to identify market gaps
- Validate customer needs through interviews and research
- Develop a compelling narrative using classic storytelling archetypes
- Design your business model, including revenue streams and cost structure
- Create a focused MVP plan and testing strategy
- Build a go-to-market strategy
- Deliver a startup strategy pitch deck as a final capstone presentation

Final Project Requirements

Each student will complete a final project consisting of two key components:

1. **Madison Framework Contribution**:
   - An extension, enhancement, or new component for the Madison framework
   - Technical documentation and integration examples
   - A detailed case study describing the problem, solution approach, and implementation
   - Working code or prototype demonstrating functionality
2. **Personal Brand and Portfolio**:
   - A defined personal brand strategy and identity system
   - A professional portfolio featuring your Madison framework contribution
   - Supporting content (articles, case studies, presentations)
   - Online presence optimization (LinkedIn, website, etc.)

Recommended Tools

- **Framework Development**: GitHub, VS Code, Jupyter Notebooks, n8n
- **Visual Identity**: Adobe Express, Adobe Suite, MidJourney, Runway, Canva
- **Content Creation**: ChatGPT, Claude, Perplexity, Jasper.ai, Grammarly
- **Analytics & Strategy**: Madison components (MarketMind, BrandEcho, Synthetic Personas), Brand24, Sprout Social
- **Portfolio & Web Presence**: Vercel v0, FramerAI, Wix, Adobe Portfolio, Webflow
- **Collaboration**: Figma, Miro, Notion AI

Instructor Credentials

Nina Harris
Award-winning brand and creative director with 25+ years leading global campaigns for Sony, Nike, and Charles Schwab. Expertise in storytelling, brand identity systems, and multi-platform design. Deep commitment to mentoring future brand leaders.

Nik Bear Brown
AI engineering professor and creative technologist specializing in applied AI for design and branding. Creator of the Madison framework. Nik brings hands-on technical expertise and research insights to help students stay at the forefront of AI-driven creative work.

Course GitHub

The course GitHub (for all lectures, assignments and projects):
https://github.com/nikbearbrown/INFO-7375-Branding-and-AI

Humanitarians AI YouTube

Over the course of the semester, videos will be posted on the Humanitarians AI YouTube channel:
https://www.youtube.com/@humanitariansai

Videos on the YouTube channel will provide additional advanced content as well as supplemental content to provide additional coverage of the material in the course. Suggestions for topics for additional videos are always welcome.

Teaching assistants

The Teaching assistants are: TBA

Programming questions should first go to the TA's. If they can't answer them then the TA's will forward the questions to the Professor.

Learning Assessment

Achievement of learning outcomes will be assessed and graded through:

- Quizzes
- Exams
- Completion of assignments

- Completion of term projects
- Participation (Counts as a 100 point assignment) the TAs will keep track of meaningful contributions to the class and give a score between 0-100 at the end of finals.
- ATTENDANCE (Counts as a 100 point assignment) the TAs will keep track of whether you are in class. Zoom attendance does not count as attendance.

Grading Breakdown

Grades will be based on:

- Madison Framework Contribution Project (30%)
- Personal Brand and Portfolio Project (20%)
- Assignments and exercises (20%)
- Participation and attendance (15%)
- Quizzes and exams (15%)

Madison Framework Contribution Grading Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (80-89%)	Satisfactory (70-79%)	Needs Improvement (<70%)
Technical Implementation	Fully functional extension with clean code and robust documentation	Working implementation with minor issues and good documentation	Basic implementation with some bugs and limited documentation	Incomplete implementation with major issues
Integration	Seamless integration with existing Madison components	Mostly compatible with the framework with minor integration issues	Basic integration with some compatibility issues	Poor integration with the framework
Innovation	Highly original contribution that addresses a clear need	Good extension that provides valuable functionality	Reasonable extension with limited originality	Minimal innovation or value addition
Documentation	Comprehensive, clear documentation with examples	Adequate documentation covering major aspects	Basic documentation with some gaps	Insufficient or unclear documentation

Presentation	Compelling, professional presentation of the contribution	Good presentation that explains the contribution well	Basic presentation with adequate explanation	Poor presentation lacking clarity

Personal Brand and Portfolio Grading Rubric

Criteria	Excellent (90-100%)	Good (80-89%)	Satisfactory (70-79%)	Needs Improvement (<70%)
Brand Strategy	Clear, cohesive brand strategy with strong positioning	Good brand strategy with defined positioning	Basic brand strategy with some inconsistencies	Undeveloped or incoherent brand strategy
Visual Identity	Exceptional visual system with consistent application	Good visual identity with mostly consistent application	Basic visual identity with some inconsistencies	Weak or inconsistent visual identity
Content Quality	Compelling, polished content that strongly supports brand	Good content that supports the brand position	Adequate content with some alignment to brand	Poor quality content with weak brand alignment
Portfolio Structure	Exceptionally organized portfolio with clear narrative	Well-structured portfolio with good organization	Adequately structured portfolio with basic organization	Poorly organized portfolio lacking clear structure
Technical Showcase	Outstanding presentation of Madison contribution	Good presentation of Madison contribution	Adequate presentation of Madison contribution	Poor presentation of Madison contribution

Reaching out for help

A student can always reach out for help to the Professor, Nik Bear Brown ni.brown@neu.edu. In an online course, it's important that a student reaches out early should he/she run into any issues.

Grading Policies

A point system is used. Everything that you are expected to turn in has points. Points can range from 1 point to 1000 points. Assignments get a 10% deduction for each day they are late rounded up. Exams cannot be made up unless arrangements are made before the exam.

I expect to use the following as a rough grading scale at the end of the semester. You should not expect a curve to be applied; but I reserve the right to use one. The curve may go up or down. That is it is possible for a 95 to be an A-.

Score	Grade
93 – 100	A
90 – 92	A-
88 – 89	B+
83 – 87	B
80 – 82	B-
78 – 79	C+
73 – 77	C
70 – 72	C-
60 – 69	D
<60	F

Scores in-between grades. For example, 82.5 or 92.3 will be decided based on the exams.

Note the score is calculated using the grading rubric and IS NOT the average of the assignments that is displayed by Canvas.

Canvas

You will submit your assignments via Canvas and Github. Click the title of assignment (Canvas -> assignment -> <Title of Assignment>), to go to the submission page. You will know your score on an assignment, project or test via Canvas. Canvas only represents only the raw scores. Not normalized or curved grades. A jupyter notebook file ALONG with either a .DOC or .PDF rendering of that jupyter notebook file must be submitted with each assignment.

Your name MUST be part of your submission, for example Sanchez_Rick_Assignment_1.zip

Multiple files must be zipped. No .RAR, .bz, .7z or other extensions.

Assignment file names MUST start with students last name then first name OR the groups name and include the class number and assignment number.

Assignment MUST estimate the percentage of code written by the student and that which came from external sources.

Assignment MUST specify a license at the bottom of each notebook turned in.

All code must adhere to a style guide and state which guide was used.

Due dates

Due dates for assignments at midnight on due date of the assignment.

Five percent (i.e. 5%) is deducted for each day an assignment is late. Solutions will be posted the following Monday. Assignments will receive NO CREDIT if submitted after the solutions are posted. Any extensions MUST be granted via e-mail and with a specific new due date.

Only ONE extension will be granted per semester.

Course Materials

Textbook: "Research Methods in Artificial Intelligence" by Nik Bear Brown (Free Online) Additional readings: Academic papers, AI research reports, and articles related to AI research methods and techniques Course Book: "Branding and AI" - Available on the course GitHub

Participation Policy

Participation in discussions is an important aspect on the class. It is important that both students and instructional staff help foster an environment in which students feel safe asking questions, posing their opinions, and sharing their work for critique. If at any time you feel this environment is being threatened—by other students, the TA, or the professor—speak up and make your concerns heard. If you feel uncomfortable broaching this topic with the professor, you should feel free to voice your concerns to the Dean's office.

Collaboration Policies

Students are strongly encouraged to collaborate through discussing strategies for completing assignments, talking about the readings before class, and studying for the exams. However, all work that you turn in to me with your name on it must be in your own words or coded in your own style. Directly copied code or text from any other source MUST be cited. In any case, you must write up your solutions, in your own words. Furthermore, if you did collaborate on any problem, you must clearly list all of the collaborators in your submission. Handing in the same work for more than one course without explicit permission is forbidden.

Feel free to discuss general strategies, but any written work or code should be your own, in your own words/style. If you have collaborated on ideas leading up to the final solution, give each other credit on what you turn in, clearly labeling who contributed what ideas. Individuals should be able to explain the function of every aspect of group-produced work. Not understanding what plagiarism is does not constitute an excuse for committing it. You should familiarize yourself with the University's policies on academic dishonesty at the beginning of the semester. If you have any doubts whatsoever about whether you are breaking the rules – ask!

Any submitted work violating the collaboration policies WILL BE GIVEN A ZERO even if "by mistake." Multiple mistakes will be sent to OSCCR for disciplinary review.

To reiterate: plagiarism and cheating are strictly forbidden. No excuses, no exceptions. All incidents of plagiarism and cheating will be sent to OSCCR for disciplinary review.

Assignment Late Policy

Assignments are due by 11:59pm on the due date marked on the schedule. It is your responsibility to determine whether or not it is worth spending the extra time on an assignment vs. turning in incomplete work for partial credit without penalty. Any exceptions to this policy (e.g. long-term illness or family emergencies) must be approved by the professor.

Assignments will receive NO CREDIT if submitted after the solutions are posted. Any extensions MUST be granted via e-mail and with a specific new due date.

Only ONE extension will be granted per semester.

Student Resources

Special Accommodations/ADA: In accordance with the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA 1990), Northeastern University seeks to provide equal access to its programs, services, and activities. If you will need accommodations in this class, please contact the Disability Resource Center (www.northeastern.edu/drc/) as soon as possible to make appropriate arrangements, and please provide the course instructors with any necessary documentation. The University requires that you provide documentation of your disabilities to the DRC so that they may identify what accommodations are required, and arrange with the instructor to provide those on your behalf, as needed.

Academic Integrity: All students must adhere to the university's Academic Integrity Policy, which can be found on the website of the Office of Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution (OSCCR), at http://www.northeastern.edu/osccr/academicintegrity/index.html. Please be particularly aware of the policy regarding plagiarism. As you probably know, plagiarism involves representing anyone else's words or ideas as your own. It doesn't matter where you got these ideas—from a book, on the web, from a fellow-student, from your mother. It doesn't matter whether you quote the source directly or paraphrase it; if you are not the originator of the words or ideas, you must state clearly and specifically where they came from. Please consult an instructor if you have any confusion or concerns when preparing any of the assignments so that together. You can also consult the guide "Avoiding Plagiarism" on the NU Library Website at http://www.lib.neu.edu/online_research/help/avoiding_plagiarism/. If an academic integrity concern arises, one of the instructors will speak with you about it; if the discussion does not resolve the concern, we will refer the matter to OSCCR.

Writing Center: The Northeastern University Writing Center, housed in the Department of English within the College of Social Sciences and Humanities, is open to any member of the Northeastern community and exists to help any level writer, from any academic discipline, become a better writer. You can book face-to-face, online, or same day appointments in two locations: 412 Holmes Hall and 136 Snell Library (behind Argo Tea). For more information or to book an appointment, please visit http://www.northeastern.edu/writingcenter/.

Course Takeaways

Students leave the course with a meaningful contribution to the open-source Madison framework, a strong personal brand, and a polished portfolio. This dual focus positions them to confidently enter the competitive creative and branding job market — combining strategic thinking, technical know-how, and compelling storytelling. Their Madison framework contributions will serve as tangible demonstrations of their ability to work with cutting-edge AI marketing technology.