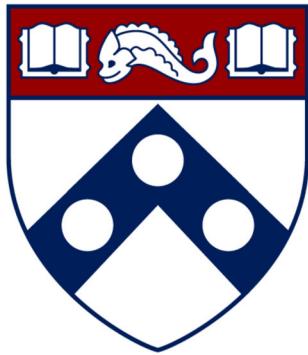


NPLD 5610-001 202530 Nonprofit Branding

[Jump to Today](#)



Penn Social Policy & Practice UNIVERSITY *of* PENNSYLVANIA

MS Nonprofit Leadership Program

NPLD 5610: Nonprofit Branding

Fall 2025

September 11 - December 4, 2025

Thursday Class Meetings, 3:30-6:30 PM

(9/11, 9/25, 10/16, 10/30, 11/13, 12/4)

Classroom: Caster 309

Instructor: David Rhode

- Email: david@dotdotorg.com (<mailto:david@dotdotorg.com>)

Co-Instructor and Course Assistant: Scott Harkey

- Email: harkeys@upenn.edu (<mailto:harkeys@upenn.edu>)

Course Description/Purpose

This course creates a shared understanding of the key concepts that help define branding and the classic elements of marketing that will serve as a foundation for discussion and analysis throughout the semester. We will highlight the fundamental differences that nonprofit organizations face in building their

brands and how those challenges differ from traditional for-profit brand building. The course utilizes analytical frameworks and guest speakers to illustrate and amplify the core concepts of this course.

Educational Objectives

At the completion of this course, students will be able to bring a branding lens to their nonprofit work and will have command of relevant tools and frameworks for helping to understand the role that marketing and brand building can play in the nonprofit sector.

Course Requirements and Expectations

Grading:

There is a maximum of 315 points available during this class:

- 30 points for class participation: 30 points for students who provide frequent and relevant class participation. 15 points for students who provide infrequent but relevant class participation and 0 points for students who provide little or no class participation.

***Please note your final grade will be one of these three scores based on your participation level during the semester. Check with David and Scott if you have any questions.**

- 75 points (up to 15 points each) for 5 online submissions: (Questions submitted prior to session 1 and paragraph submissions due at the start of various sessions). All submissions to Canvas are due at midnight prior to each class session.
- 90 points for the longer written assignments (maximum 30 points each)
- 60 points for the group presentation
- 60 points for attendance. Each class counts 10 points.

Typical grade assessments are as follows

A 94% and above

A- 90-93.9%

B+ 87-89.9%

B 84-86.9%

B- 80-83.9%

C+ 77-79.9%

C 74-76.9%

Class Conduct and Culture

- 1) Critical Thinking: There are few “right” answers in marketing. What works for one organization/situation may not work for another. It is important to think strategically and demonstrate critical thinking that describes “why” and “how”, not just “what”.
- 2) Attendance: You are expected to attend all sessions—to be on time and to stay until the end.
- 3) Respect: Instructors and guest speakers will treat you with respect and expect the same. Accord your classmates the same courtesy.
- 4) Professionalism: Professionalism for this class means giving every project and assignment your best possible effort.
- 5) Original thinking: AI tools are readily accessible. They should not be used to complete your class assignments. It is normally very easy for your instructors to identify when AI has played a hand in creating your written submissions.

Academic Integrity

Students are expected to adhere to the University’s Code of Academic Integrity, available at

<https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>

(<https://catalog.upenn.edu/pennbook/code-of-academic-integrity/>). Care should be taken to avoid academic integrity violations, including plagiarism, fabrication of information, and multiple submissions (see descriptions below).** Students who engage in any of these actions will be referred to the Office of Student Conduct, which investigates and decides on sanctions in cases of academic dishonesty.

1. Plagiarism: using the ideas, data, or language of another person or source without specific or proper acknowledgment. Example: copying, in part or in its entirety, another person’s paper, article, or web-based material and submitting it for an assignment; using someone else’s ideas without attribution; not using quotation marks where appropriate; etc.

2. Fabrication: submitting contrived or altered information in any academic exercise. Example: making up data or statistics, citing nonexistent articles, contriving sources, etc.
3. Multiple submissions: submitting, without prior permission, any work submitted to fulfill another academic requirement.

**It is students' responsibility to consult the instructor if they are unsure about whether something constitutes a violation of the Code of Academic Integrity.

AI Policy

- No AI Assistance: You may not use generative AI for your work in this class. Your submissions must be entirely your own work without any AI assistance.
- Academic Integrity and Plagiarism: Submitting AI-generated content is a violation of Penn's Code of Academic Integrity and will be referred to the Center for Community Standards & Accountability (CSA).
- AI as a Reference: AI is not considered a "scholarly source" for assignments requiring specific types of references.

Required Texts

Course Materials (articles available on Canvas):

Passion Isn't Enough: A Practical Guide for Nonprofit Leaders by David Rhode (bookstore)

Breakthrough Nonprofit Branding by Dow and Cone (bookstore)

Good to Great and the Social Sectors--Jim Collins (bookstore)

The Role of Brand in the Non-Profit Sector—Stanford Social Innovation Review 
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/the_role_of_brand_in_the_nonprofit_sector

Donations Within Limits--Case Study Stanford Social Innovation Review 
https://ssir.org/articles/entry/donations_within_limits

Assignments

Individual Brief Written Assignments:

- Prior to class session 1, please upload to Canvas 2-3 questions that you would like to see addressed during the course. Questions will be answered over the course of the term. In addition, please describe your nonprofit experience. Have you served as a founder, board member, staff member or volunteer? What has been the focus on branding within the organizations where you have been most closely involved?
- Prior to class session 2, suggest one nonprofit organization that you feel is doing a particularly effective job of branding and why. The answers should be in paragraph form and uploaded to Canvas. Submissions may not exceed 200 words.
- Prior to class session 3, suggest one nonprofit organization that is doing a particularly good job of utilizing partnerships to help fuel their growth. The answer should be in paragraph form and uploaded to Canvas. Submissions may not exceed 200 words.
- Prior to class session 4, suggest one nonprofit organization that you feel is in need of a rebrand based on their mission, brand positioning, or other marketing related factors. The answer should be in paragraph form and uploaded to Canvas. Submissions may not exceed 200 words.
- Prior to class session 5, suggest an organization that you feel may be at risk due to changes in societal trends, technology, or some other external factor. Submissions may not exceed 200 words.

Individual Longer Writing Assignments:

There will be 3 longer written assignments due during this semester. These are individual assignments and the prompts for the assignment as well as any other constraints will be discussed in the class session before the work is due.

Assignment 1 due by the 2nd class meeting (9/25): Write a positioning statement for the Philadelphia Zoo. Explain what strategic choices you made to arrive at your final statement. 500 word limit.

Assignment 2 due by the 4rd class meeting (10/30): Students will develop a persuasive argument as to whether a selected organization has a strong or does not have a strong brand. Students will be provided with a short list of nonprofit organizations to choose from 500 word limit.

Assignment 3 due by the 5th class meeting (11/13): Identify an AI tool or AI app other than the mainstream generative AI tools like ChatGPT that you believe would be valuable in terms of supporting a nonprofit's branding. Indicate how this tool could be implemented and why you feel it would be valuable. 500 word limit.

Group Presentation:

- Teams of up to 4 students will identify two nonprofit organizations that they would like to analyze. Students will put together a short power point presentation that uses either the SWOT analysis the Hedgehog concept, or perceptual mapping to analyze the current state of the brand and recommendations for how the brand could grow.
- Student teams will have 20 minutes to present their work during session 6. This will consist of 20 minutes of formal presentation and 5 minutes of Q&A. The composition of each team and the organizations you intend to study must be approved by the instructor prior to the end of session 5. Teams will choose one local nonprofit organization and one national/global organization to analyze.

Make Up and Missed Assignments

Missed Assignments

If you miss an assignment deadline due to a valid reason (such as illness, family emergency, or other extenuating circumstances), you must notify David and Scott as soon as possible, preferably before the assignment deadline.

Make-Up Assignments

1. Missed Assignments

If you miss an assignment deadline due to a valid reason (such as illness, family emergency, or other extenuating circumstances), you must notify David and Scott as soon as possible, preferably before the assignment deadline.

Make-Up Assignments

1. Notification and Approval:

- Contact David and Scott via email to explain your situation and request approval for a make-up assignment.
 1. Approval will be granted at our discretion.

2. Submission Timeline:

- Once approved, the make-up assignment must be completed and submitted within one week of the original due date, unless otherwise specified by David or Scott.
 1. Extensions beyond this period will be considered only in exceptional circumstances and must be requested in writing.

3. Alternative Assignments:

- David and Scott reserve the right to assign an alternative make-up assignment that is equivalent in content and effort to the missed assignment.

4. Late Notifications:

- Requests for make-up assignments made after the due date without prior notification may not be granted, and the missed assignment may be subject to late penalties.

Late Assignments

- Assignments submitted after the deadline without prior approval will be subject to a penalty of 2 points per the number of days it is late.
- After 5 days, late assignments will not be accepted, and a grade of zero will be recorded.

Exceptions

- Exceptions to this policy will be made on a case-by-case basis at David and Scott's discretion.

Note: It is your responsibility to be aware of assignment deadlines and to communicate promptly with David and Scott regarding any issues that may affect your ability to meet these deadlines.

Course Schedule:

Session 1: September 11

Required reading prior to class session 1:

- Chapters 1&2 of Breakthrough Nonprofit Branding
- Introduction and chapter 1 of Passion Isn't Enough

Class structure:

- Discuss the backgrounds of the instructors and students related to the nonprofit sector.
- Review the key theme of the student submitted questions for the semester
- Branding 101: What is a brand---overview of classic elements of marketing/branding that will serve as the foundation for future discussions.
- Review of Chapters 1 & 2 from Breakthrough Nonprofit Branding. Discuss the UNICEF case.
- Discuss your main takeaways from Chapter 1 of Passion Isn't Enough

- Discuss the upcoming first longer written assignment

Session 2: September 25

Deliverables:

- 1st longer written assignment (Philadelphia Zoo positioning statement) due by the start of class
- 2nd shorter written submission (Effectively branded nonprofit) due by September 24 at midnight

Required reading prior to class

- Chapter 3 of Breakthrough Nonprofit Branding
- Chapters 7, 8, 9 of Passion Isn't Enough
- Donations Within Limits article

Class structure:

- Discuss 2nd short submission—Effectively Branded nonprofit organizations and comment
- Discuss the differences between branding in the for-profit sector vs the nonprofit sector.
- Review and discussion of Chapter 3 from Breakthrough Nonprofit Branding
- Discuss your main takeaways from Chapters 7, 8, and 9 of Passion Isn't Enough
- Discussion groups: Students will break out during the class to discuss the Donations Within Limits article and report back to the larger group for a more extensive discussion.

Session 3: October 16

Deliverables:

- 3rd shorter written submission (Organization effectively utilizing partnerships) due by October 15 at midnight

Required reading prior to class:

- Chapter 7 of Breakthrough Nonprofit Branding
- Chapters 3, 4, 14 of Passion Isn't Enough

Class structure:

- Discussion 3rd shorter written submission—Partnerships
- Review of Chapter 7 from Breakthrough Nonprofit Branding
- Key takeaways from chapters 3, 4, and 14 of Passion Isn't Enough
- Class lecture on partnership
- Class lecture on crisis response guidelines and best practices
- Class lecture on the connection between branding and fundraising

- Guest Speaker: Roger Lee to discuss media relations and crisis communications

Session 4: October 30

Deliverables:

- 2nd longer written assignment (persuasive argument as to whether a select nonprofit does or does not have a strong brand) due by the start of class
- 4th shorter written submission (Organizations in need of a rebrand) due by October 29 at midnight

Required reading prior to class:

- Role of Brand in the Non-Profit Sector Article—(Stanford Social Innovation Review).
- Good to Great and the Social Sectors (read entire monograph)

Class structure:

- Discuss 4th submission—Organizations in need of a rebrand
- Lecture on the Role of Social Media in Building your Brand Community
- Review of Good to Great and the Social Sector including the Hedgehog Concept
- Discuss The Role of Brand in the Non-Profit Sector
- Guest Speaker: Tom White, Executive Director of Development, The Fund for Penn Medicine will discuss how to use digital and social media to achieve business objectives

Session 5: November 13

Deliverables:

- 3rd longer written assignment (Identifying an AI tool) due by the start of class
- 5th shorter written submission (Organizations at risk) due by November 12 at midnight
- The 2 nonprofit organizations each group intends to study in its group presentation due by the end of class

Class structure:

- Discuss 5th shorter submission—Organizations that may be at risk due to an external factor
- Lecture on The SWOT Analysis and Perceptual Mapping frameworks
- Discussion of upcoming group presentation assignment and selection of organizations to be analyzed
- Presentation groups will have time to meet and divide work assignments in class
- **Guest Speaker: Beth Brodovsky from Iris Creative will discuss rebranding and hitting your target audience

Session 6: December 4

Required reading prior to class:

- Chapter 16 Passion Isn't Enough
- Group presentations and wrap up of the semester

Course Summary:

Date	Details	Due
Wed Sep 10, 2025	 Brief written assignment #1 (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498625)	due by 11:59pm
Wed Sep 24, 2025	 Brief written assignment #2 (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498626)	due by 11:59pm
Thu Sep 25, 2025	 Longer written assignment #1 (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498632)	due by 3:30pm
Wed Oct 15, 2025	 Brief written assignment #3 (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498627)	due by 11:59pm
Wed Oct 29, 2025	 Brief written assignment #4 (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498628)	due by 11:59pm
Thu Oct 30, 2025	 Longer written assignment #2 (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498633)	due by 3:30pm
Wed Nov 12, 2025	 Brief written assignment #5 (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498629)	due by 11:59pm
Thu Nov 13, 2025	 Longer written assignment #3 (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498634)	due by 3:30pm
Fri Dec 5, 2025	 Group presentation (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498631)	due by 11:59am
	 Attendance (https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498624)	due by 11:59pm

Date	Details	Due
	 <u>Class participation</u> <u>(https://canvas.upenn.edu/courses/1853323/assignments/13498630)</u>	due by 11:59pm