



Brand Strategy
Spring 2026
Monday + Wednesday • 3:00-4:20pm
Room: TBA
Zoom link: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/4263388242>

Version I
October 15, 2025

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Course Introduction

Who says you can't get real-world branding experience in the classroom?

Taught by Professor Fran Gormley, a brand strategist with more than three decades of industry experience, this course gives you the unique opportunity to learn how powerful branding strategies are developed and applied to drive business success.

We will explore how leading companies approach the art and science of brand building. Drawing on Professor Gormley's work across financial services, consumer goods, healthcare, and the non-profit sector, the course examines how strategists, managers, and consultants build, nurture, revitalize, and lead brands in today's dynamic marketplace.

Key topics include naming, positioning, brand architecture, and identity. We will also tackle contemporary challenges: how brands fit within complex corporate portfolios, how global brands adapt across cultures, how legacy brands are revitalized or rebranded, and how individuals and organizations shape their personal and employer brands. In addition, we will explore how Generative AI is impacting branding practice.

Because branding requires both rigorous analysis and bold creativity, you will be challenged to blend strategic thinking with innovative concept development. Instead of traditional exams, you will engage in individual exercises and a semester-long team project that mirror the challenges faced by brand professionals.

To enrich classroom learning, you will meet senior executives and agency leaders from industries including automotive, entertainment, beauty, technology, and financial services, who will share their first-hand perspectives on the power of brands.

About Professor Gormley

Fran Gormley is a branding and innovation entrepreneur who has led strategic development for more than 50 brands across industries. She founded and sold a branding firm to an Interpublic Group venture before launching Greenwich Marketing Group. Her clients have included Citibank, J.P. Morgan Chase, Mastercard, PayPal, Johnson & Johnson Consumer Healthcare (now Kenvue), The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Bausch + Lomb, and Ford Motor Company. Fran created breakthrough brands such as Chase Freedom and Biotrue for Bausch + Lomb. Earlier in her career, she led Positioning and Advertising at Citibank Card Services and began at Young & Rubicam. She also founded the Branding + Innovation Consulting Lab at NYU Stern in partnership with leading global companies.

Course Material + Framework

All course lectures and materials will be available on Brightspace.

Guest speaker presentations, when permitted, will be posted after class. Please note that some speakers may choose not to share their slides or allow recordings.

In the opening sessions, Professor Gormley will introduce a framework for building and sustaining iconic brands: The Brand Blueprint. Developed from her extensive industry experience, this framework will serve as the foundation for your two core assignments:

Individual Project: Developing your personal brand.

Team Project: Revitalizing an existing brand.

Suggested Readings + Resources

STRATEGY

1. ***Aaker on Branding***, David Aaker, 2nd Edition, Morgan James Publishing, 2025
2. ***Brand New Name***, Jeremy Miller, PageTwo Books, 2019
3. ***Happy Customers Everywhere***, Bernd Schmitt, Palgrave Macmillan, 2012
4. ***Platform: The Art and Science of Personal Branding***, Cynthia Johnson, Lorena Jones Books, 2010
5. ***Positioning: The Battle for Your Mind***, Al Ries and Jack Trout, Warner Books, 1981 (Industry Classic)

DESIGN

1. ***A Smile In The Mind: Witty Thinking In Graphic Design***, Beryl McAlhone, David Stuart, Greg Quinton, and Nick Asbury, Phaidon, 2016
2. ***Designing***, Ivan Chermayeff, Tom Geismar, and Steff Geissbuhler, Graphis, Inc. 2003
3. ***Designing Brand Identity: An Essential Guide for the Whole Branding Team***, Alina Wheeler, 5th Edition, Wiley, 2018
4. ***Identity***: Chermayeff & Geismar & Haviv, Standards Manual, 2018
5. ***Logo Beginnings. Logo Modernism***, 45th Edition. Jens Müller and Julius Wiedemann (Eds.), Taschen GmbH, 2025.
6. ***How to use graphic design to sell things, explain things, make things look better, make people laugh, make people cry (and every once in a while) change the world: Expanded Edition***, Michael Bierut, Harper Design, 2021

Grading

The following outlines the components of your final grade for this course:

Individual

Personal Branding Project	20%
Participation	20%

Group Rebranding Project

Situational Assessment	20%
Visual Identity Strategy	15%
Final Presentation	25%

Teams for Group Rebranding Project

Students will be assigned to teams at the end of the first class. We have found that teams work best when they are diverse and balanced in terms of creative and analytical skills, as well as industry experience.

Late Assignment Policy

Late assignments will be downgraded.

Guest Speakers

Due to their demanding schedules, guest speakers may change over the course of the semester. Updated speaker information will be posted on Brightspace.

Submitting Assignments

All assignments should be submitted as PDFs to Brightspace. PDFs should be labeled with your name (last name_first name) or group name.

Final Presentations

You will present your recommendations for revitalizing your declining brand to your peers at the end of the semester. You will have 15 minutes to present, followed by 5 minutes of feedback. All team members must present. Please divide up the presentation to play to each team member's strengths. No team member should read from notes or cards unless approval is obtained in advance from the professor.

Team Ratings

At the end of the semester, team members will have the opportunity to provide confidential feedback on each other's contributions. These peer evaluations are intended to encourage accountability and recognize strong collaboration. While individual ratings do not typically affect grades, consistently low feedback across multiple dimensions may be taken into consideration.

Attendance

Discussion is integral to this course and attendance is expected. Repeated absences without prior notice to the Teaching Fellow may result in a lower participation grade.

Generative AI

Many companies and branding firms are actively experimenting with how Generative AI can accelerate brand development and streamline content creation. When used alongside human creativity, Gen AI offers several benefits, including helping with brainstorming, identifying social media trends, uncovering consumer insights, and refining concepts and messaging. If you decide to incorporate Gen AI into your work, be sure to specify how it assisted in creating your personal brand or contributed to your group's rebranding project (e.g., idea generation, message refinement).

Branding Firms

It's helpful to research branding firms to gain an understanding of the type of work they do and their philosophy and approach. Some notable firms are:

Alex Hunting Studio	Frost*Collective	Landor	Supple Studio
Athletics NUC	GBH	Manual Creative	Turner Duckworth
BankerWessel	Gretel NY	Pentagram	Wolff Olins
Chermayeff & Geismar & Haviv	Interbrand	Red Antler	2x4
Collins	Johnson Banks	Siegel + Gale	
Doyle Partners	Koto Studio	St Urbain	

Course Outline

Module 1: Introduction to Branding

January 26 + 28

Topics

What is branding?
Frameworks for building iconic brands
Core branding concepts

Readings

- *The 5Bs of Modern Branding*, David Aaker, MBR, Winter 2025, Volume 05, Issue 1
- *Quantum Marketing*, Chapter 1: Marketing's Journey From Antiquity to Algorithms (pgs. 29-48), Raja Rajamannar, HarperCollins Leadership, 2021

Group Assignment Due Before Module 2

Each team should email the professor the brand they've selected for their group project by 5PM on February 1. All team members should be copied on email.

Module 2: Naming and Positioning

February 2, 4 + 9

Topics

Importance of and types of brand names
Nomenclature strategy
Brand positioning
Positioning principles
Brand selling idea

Reading

- *Brand New Name* (pgs. 131-157), Jeremy Miller, PageTwo Books, 2019

Guest Speaker – February 9

Joe Tripodi, American Marketing Association Hall of Fame inductee, is a renowned marketing leader who has held CMO roles at Coca-Cola, Subway, Allstate, Mastercard, and more.

Module 3: Brand Strategy Journey

February 11 + 18

(no class February 16)

Topics

Situational assessment
Discovery and insights
AI, branding and creativity

Reading

- "The CEO of Levi Strauss on Leading an Iconic Brand Back to Growth," *HBR*, Chip Bergh, July-August 2018
- "What 9 Superstar Designers Actually Want From AI," *Fast Company*, Zachary Petit, October 1, 2025

Guest Speaker – February 18

Teemu Suviala, Global Chief Creative Officer, Landor
Former Global Head of Brand Design, Reality Labs Meta

Module 4: Brand Revitalization and Rebranding

February 23 + 25

Topics

Session 1: We will examine the distinction between a brand revitalization and a rebrand, followed by an in-depth review and discussion of Professor Gormley's *Bausch + Lomb* case history. Please note that no slides are posted from this session due to client confidentiality.

Session 2: We will explore the revitalization of *Barbie*, featuring guest speaker Tania Balderrama Missad, one of the lead brand strategists behind the initiative.

Reading

- *Barbie: Reviving a Cultural Icon at Mattel*, Harvard Business School, September 3, 2024.

Guest Speaker – February 25

Tania Balderrama Missad, Executive Vice President, Insights, Strategy & Analytics, Sony Pictures Entertainment. Ex Warner Bros, Mattel, J&J and P&G.

Module 5: Brand Architecture

March 2 + 4

Topics

Discussion of brand architecture concepts, spectrum, and models

Reading

– *Brand Portfolio Strategy*, Chapter 2: The Brand Relationship Spectrum, David Aaker, Free Press, 2004.

Guest Speaker: March 4

Markus Hutchins, Global Brand Strategy Director, Ford Motor Company. Ex IBM and Meta

Situational Assessments – due March 11

Examples and guidelines can be found on Brightspace.

Module 6: Measuring Brands

March 9 + 11

Topics

Difference between brand value and brand equity
Approaches for measuring brand value and brand equity

Reading

– Best Global Brands 2025, Interbrand
– *Brand Portfolio Strategy*, Chapter 5: Energizing and Differentiating the Brand, David Aaker, Free Press, 2004.

Guest Speaker – March 11

Elizabeth Nolan, SVP, Global Creative Director, Clinique, Estee Lauder Companies.
Ex Equinox

Spring Break: Week of March 15

Module 7: Brand Visual Identity

March 23 + 25

Topics

What is a brand identity system?

Review and discussion of professor's case history: Creating a brand identity system for Axogen Biotechnology

While an identity system can be multi-sensory, our focus will be on visual identity, which is typically the most critical element. Since strategists learn how to shepherd strong identities through experience, a renowned designer will share their philosophies and case histories.

Guest Speaker – March 25

Andrea Trabucco-Campos, Partner, Pentagram

Reading

– Identity: Chermayeff & Geismar & Haviv, "It's Never Love At First Sight," Alexandra Lange, Standards Manual, 2018

– "Barnes & Noble Sets Itself Free," Maureen O'Connor, New York Times, October 17, 2023

Group Assignment: Visual Identity Strategy – due March 30

A short presentation that highlights the principles for evolving the brand identity. The presentation can feature images that convey your brand's current and desired visual world. An example of a brand visual strategy can be found on Brightspace.

Module 8: Employer Branding

March 30

Topics

This module focuses on how to build and evaluate an employer brand.

Reading

– *Employer Branding: What It Is and Why It Matters*, UVA, Darden, UVA-M-1003, Rev. October 16, 2020

Guest Speaker – March 30

Eliana Holm Yamshon, Global Head of Employer Brand, BlackRock

Module 9: Global Branding

April 1 + 6

Topics

Fundamentals of global branding
Discussion of Mastercard and Gillette global branding
Global branding best practices

Reading

– *Branding Diversity: New Advertising and Cultural Strategies*, "Chapter 3: Gillette – The Best a Man Can Be" (pgs. 81-119), Susie Khamis, Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group, 2020

Guest Speaker – April 6

Frédéric Fekkai, a pioneering entrepreneur who transformed the beauty industry by introducing the first luxury hair care line in high-end department stores. After selling the Fekkai brand, he later reacquired it with Cornell Capital to reinvent it with a focus on clean, sustainable beauty. Frédéric recently announced his retirement.

Module 10: Personal Branding

April 8 + 13

Topics

This module focuses on how to apply branding tools to your personal brand. Your personal brand must focus on your career aspiration.

Reading

– *Platform: The Art and Science of Personal Branding*, "The Case for Personal Branding" (pgs. 18-59), Cynthia Johnson, Lorena Jones Books, 2010

Guest Speaker – April 8

Mark Strong is the CEO of Strong Professional. Before founding his firm in 2004, he spent 25 years at leading agencies including Fallon and McCann, serving in senior roles across business development, account management, and learning.

Lecture + Student Presentations - April 13

Personal Branding

Assignment for Class Discussion on April 13

Before class, please upload to Brightspace a succinct presentation that defines your personal brand. Guidelines for this assignment and examples can be found on Brightspace. Students will present their personal brands on April 13.

Module 11: Rebranding a Startup

April 15

Topics

How to successfully rebrand a company with limited resources

Guest Speaker – April 15

Ali Taylor, Founder, Blueprint Strategy Advisors.

Adjunct Associate Professor, NYU Stern, Branding + Innovation Consulting Lab (2022-2025)

Ali Taylor and Professor Gormley are long-term collaborators.

Module 12: Brand Transformation Agency Visit

April 20

Location: COLLINS, 457 Grand St, Ground Fl, Brooklyn, NY 11211

Time: 3:30-5:00pm

COLLINS, recognized by *Ad Age* as a Business Transformation Agency of the Year and Design + Brand Agency of the Year 2025, by *D&AD* as Design Firm of the Year, and by *Fast Company* as Best in Design.

Guest Speaker:

Brian Collins, Co-Founder of COLLINS and President of The Art Directors Club.

Module 13: Group Rebranding Project Workshops

April 22 + 27

The professor and a strategy consultant specializing in AI will meet individually with each team to discuss their rebranding project. When teams are not meeting with the professor or the consultant, they will meet together and advance their work.

April 22:**Meetings with Professor**

3:00-3:20PM Aqua, 3:20-3:40PM Indigo, 3:40-4:00PM Midnight, 4:00-4:20PM Slate

Meetings with AI Strategy Consultant

3:00-3:20PM Cobalt, 3:20-3:40PM Teal, 3:40-4:00PM Navy, 4:00-4:20PM Denim

April 27:**Meetings with Professor**

3:00-3:20PM Teal, 3:20-3:40PM Navy 3:40-4:00PM Denim, 4:00-4:20PM Cobalt

Meetings with AI Strategy Consultant

3:00-3:20PM Midnight, 3:20-3:40PM Slate, 3:40-4:00PM Indigo, 4:00-4:20PM Aqua

Consultant – April 22 + 27

Anna Blender is an AI advisor and strategist who helps organizations navigate AI adoption. She previously served as SVP at Raptive and at BAV Group (WPP), where she built brand strategies for companies including American Express, Target, and Capital One. Her insights have been featured in *The Wall Street Journal* and *Adweek*, and she has spoken at SXSW and the United Nations.

Module 14: Final Presentations

April 29 + May 4

All students are required to come to both classes. Upload your final document to Brightspace in advance of class.

April 29:

Presenters

3:00-3:20PM Slate, 3:20-3:40PM Midnight, 3:40-4:00PM Indigo, 4:00-4:20PM Aqua

Judges

Denim: Feedback To Slate

Navy: Feedback to Midnight

Teal: Feedback to Indigo

Cobalt: Feedback to Aqua

May 4:

Presenters

3:00-3:20PM Denim, 3:20-3:40PM Navy, 3:40-4:00PM Teal, 4:00-4:20PM Cobalt

Judges

Slate: Feedback To Denim

Midnight: Feedback to Navy

Indigo: Feedback to Teal

Aqua: Feedback to Cobalt

The Group Rebranding Project

Your job will be to pick a legacy brand and to act as brand strategists, providing recommendations for a rebrand.

The brand can be a consumer or product brand. Please note fashion brands (e.g., Michael Kors) and those associated with politicians (e.g., Trump Hotels) cannot be selected for this project. Corporate brands (e.g., Avon, P&G) are not recommended due to their complexity and our time constraints.

The brand must be facing challenges that would necessitate a rebrand or brand refresh – meaning it's struggling to attract younger generations (Gen Z and Millennials), under competitive pressure from Indie brands, losing market share, and/or suffering from poor management decisions and/or neglect.

Brands selected for the project must be approved by the professor. Teams should email the professor their proposed brand with data highlighting its decline before 5PM on February 1.

It is important that all students in the team work together to create a cohesive recommendation. The professor is available throughout the course to help teams develop work plans.

There are three parts to the project.

Part 1 – Situational Assessment (due March 11)

Teams submit a brief presentation describing why the rebrand is necessary, the target audience for the revitalization, and three to five insights that the new brand positioning will leverage.

Part 2 – Visual Identity Strategy (due March 30)

A concise strategic document that highlights the principles for evolving the brand's visual identity. Please do not redesign the brand identity or use AI to do so. A strategy is the principles and framework for a visual identity evolution, not execution (design).

Part 3 – Final Presentation (due April 29 + May 4)

Teams will present recommendations (15 minutes) followed by feedback from the team judging their work (5 minutes). Final presentations should include:

1. An overview of the challenge the brand is facing
2. A definition of the target audience for the revitalization
3. Insights or human truths that inspired your new positioning platform
4. Positioning recommendation (statement)
5. Visual identity strategy

It is recommended that the design of your final presentation is consistent with how you want the brand's visual identity system to be modernized.

Examples of final presentations can be found on Brightspace.

Stern Policies

We take pride in our well-rounded education and approach our academics with honesty and integrity. Indeed, integrity is critical to all that we do here at NYU Stern. As members of our community, all students agree to abide by the NYU Academic Integrity Policies as well as the NYU Stern Student Code of Conduct, which includes a commitment to:

- Exercise integrity in all aspects of one's academic work including, but not limited to, the preparation and completion of presentations and all other course requirements by not engaging in any method or means that provides an unfair advantage.
- Clearly acknowledge the work and efforts of others when submitting written work as one's own. Ideas, data, direct quotations (which should be designated with quotation marks), paraphrasing, creative expression, or any other incorporation of the work of others should be fully referenced.
- Refrain from behaving in ways that knowingly support, assist, or in any way attempt to enable another person to engage in any violation of the Code of Conduct. Our support also includes reporting any observed violations of this Code of Conduct or other School and University policies that are deemed to adversely affect the NYU Stern community.

Stern Code of Conduct

The [Stern Code of Conduct and Judiciary Process](#) applies to all students enrolled in Stern courses.

General Conduct & Behavior

Students are also expected to maintain and abide by the highest standards of professional conduct and behavior. Please familiarize yourself with Stern's Policy regarding in-class behavior and expectations for graduate students.

Student Accessibility

If you will require academic accommodation of any kind during this course, you must notify me at the beginning of the course and provide a letter from the Moses Center for Student Accessibility verifying your registration and outlining the accommodations they recommend.

Student Wellness

Our aim is for students to be as successful academically as they can, and to help them overcome any impediments to that. Any student who may be struggling and believes this may affect their performance in this course is urged to contact the Moses Center for Student Accessibility to discuss academic accommodations. If mental health assistance is needed, call the NYU's 24/7 Wellness Exchange hotline 212-443-9999. Furthermore, please approach me if you feel comfortable doing so. This will enable me to provide relevant resources or referrals. Find out more [here](#).

Academic Advising

Students can reach out to the Academic Advising team at academicaffairs@stern.nyu.edu for more information or further support.

Name Pronunciation + Pronouns

You can include pronouns and name pronunciation in Albert. Please utilize this link for additional information:

[Pronouns & Name Pronunciation](#)

Religious Observances + Other Absences

NYU's [Calendar Policy on Religious Holidays](#) states that members of any religious group may, without penalty, absent themselves from classes when required in compliance with their religious obligations. Please notify the TF in advance of religious holidays or observances that might coincide with class times to see if a class recording will be available. Students may also contact religiousaccommodations@nyu.edu for assistance.

Except for religious observances or other absences that may be required in compliance with nondiscrimination law, this class otherwise requires attendance and participation and cannot accommodate conflicts. Please review all class dates at the start of the semester and review all course requirements to identify any foreseeable conflicts with assignments, projects, or other items required for participation and attendance. If you are aware of a potential conflict, it is strongly recommended that you do not take this class.

Devices

The use of laptops or tablets for notetaking only is permitted. No phones are permitted during client briefings or presentations.

Diversity

This course strives to support and cultivate diversity of thought, perspectives, and experiences. The intent is to present materials and activities that will challenge your current perspectives with a goal of understanding how others might see situations differently. All students are expected to commit to making this an inclusive learning environment for all.