

***Disclaimer:** This is a sample course outline and is subject to change. Official course outlines will vary depending on delivery format and instructor*

Territory Acknowledgement

We acknowledge and respect the lək̓ʷəŋən peoples on whose traditional territory the university stands and the Songhees, Esquimalt and W̱SÁNEĆ peoples whose historical relationships with the land continue to this day.

DIGM420: Search Engine Optimization

Course Description

This course provides an in-depth exploration of the theory and practical application of Search Engine Optimization (SEO) to enhance website visibility and ranking on search engines. Participants will learn how to implement effective strategies to drive organic traffic and improve online presence, apply ethical SEO practices, and use SEO tools to track performance and refine strategies.

Throughout the course, you will also engage with AI-assisted technologies, examining how artificial intelligence is increasingly shaping keyword research, content optimization, and data analysis, while developing a critical understanding of the strategic and ethical considerations involved. The course culminates in the development of comprehensive, data-informed SEO strategies aligned with current industry practices.

Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand the fundamental principles and theories of Search Engine Optimization (SEO), including factors that influence search engine ranking and visibility.
- Apply SEO techniques, including keyword research, on-page optimization, and link-building strategies, to improve website visibility and organic traffic.
- Analyze SEO performance using relevant tools (e.g., Google Analytics, SEMrush) to track website traffic, identify trends, and measure the effectiveness of SEO strategies.
- Create comprehensive SEO strategies that align with business objectives, incorporating both technical and content-based approaches for long-term online success.
- Evaluate the ethical considerations of SEO practices, ensuring strategies adhere to industry standards and best practices while avoiding tactics that may harm the site's reputation.
- Apply and evaluate AI-assisted tools in SEO, demonstrating an understanding of their strategic and ethical use in optimization, analysis, and content development.

Resources

The learning materials for this course include a curated selection of open educational resources (OER), along with relevant blogs, articles, and instructional videos.

Weekly Schedule

| Week | Content | Readings and Assignments |
|---------------------------------------|--|---|
| Phase 0: Pre- Introduction | | |
| | Pre-Introduction | This unit is optional and may be skipped if you already have the foundational knowledge needed to begin the course. |
| Phase 1: Theory | | |
| Week 1 | Introduction to SEO & Search Ecosystems | Activity 1: Discussion Forum Activity 2: Select a website Mini Lab 1: SERP analysis exercise Mini Lab 2: Set up Google Search Console & Analytics |
| Week 2 | Search Intent & Keyword Research Fundamentals | Assignment 1 - Part 1: Keyword Research |
| Week 3 | Advanced Keyword Strategy & Competitive Analysis | Assignment 1 - Part 2: Competitor Keyword Analysis |
| Phase 2: Implementation | | |
| Week 4 | On-Page Optimization | Mini Lab 3: On-Page Optimization |
| Week 5 | Content Strategy & E-E-A-T | Mini-Lab 4: Content Optimization Lab |
| Week 6 | Technical SEO Foundations | Assignment 2: Technical SEO Audit |
| Week 7 | Core Web Vitals & Site Performance | Mini Lab 5: Applied SEO Analysis |
| Phase 3: Expansion | | |
| Week 8 | Off-Page SEO & Link Building | Mini Lab 6: Link Analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 1: Backlink profile evaluation • Part 2: Competitor link comparison |
| Week 9 | Local SEO & Mobile Search | Mini Lab 7: local search visibility analysis |
| Week 10 | SEO Analytics & Performance Metrics | Assignment 3: SEO Performance Analytics Report |
| Week 11 | Algorithm Updates & Ethical SEO | Mini Lab 8: Case Study |
| Phase 4: Strategic Integration | | |
| Week 12 | Strategic SEO Planning & Integration | Assignment 4: SEO Strategy Framework |
| Week 13 | Emerging Trends & Final Presentations | Assignment 4: Final Comprehensive SEO Strategy + Presentation |

Assignments & Evaluation

| Assignment | Description of Assignment | Weight |
|--|---|--------|
| Assignment 1: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Part 1- Keyword Research • Part 2- Competitor Keyword Analysis | This assignment requires you to conduct structured keyword research and develop a strategic keyword framework for an organization of their choice. Working in the role of an SEO strategist, you will analyze business objectives, target audience, and the competitive landscape to inform their approach. The assignment moves beyond basic keyword identification by emphasizing the relationship between search intent, content strategy, and organizational goals. | 20% |

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| | <p>You will use industry-standard tools (such as Google Keyword Planner or SEMrush) to identify and evaluate relevant keywords, assess search intent, and analyze competitor performance within search engine results pages (SERPs). The final deliverable includes a structured report or presentation supported by a keyword dataset, demonstrating the ability to translate data into actionable SEO strategy. Emphasis is placed on critical thinking, strategic alignment, and professional communication.</p> | |
| <p>Assignment 2: Technical SEO Audit</p> | <p>For this assignment, you will work with the same organization selected in Assignment 1. Where applicable, connect technical SEO findings to your earlier keyword strategy and search intent analysis to support integrated SEO evaluation.</p> <p>The Technical SEO Audit Lab introduces you to the foundational infrastructure that supports search engine visibility. While previous assignments focus on keywords and content, this lab shifts attention to the technical elements that determine whether a website can be properly crawled, indexed, and ranked. You will take on the role of SEO consultants and conduct a structured audit of a website. Using industry-standard tools, they diagnose issues related to crawlability, site architecture, performance, and technical configuration. The assignment culminates in a professional audit report that prioritizes issues and recommends strategic improvements based on impact and effort.</p> | 10% |
| <p>Assignment 3: SEO Performance Analytics Report</p> | <p>The SEO Performance Analytics Report Assignment focuses on measuring the effectiveness of SEO efforts using provided performance data. This assignment builds on foundational SEO concepts and shifts the focus from implementation to performance analysis using structured SEO data.</p> <p>You will use provided analytics data to interpret and visualize key SEO metrics and later translate these insights into a professional performance dashboard and strategic recommendations. The assignment emphasizes data literacy, critical thinking, and the ability to communicate insights clearly to interest-holders.</p> | 10% |
| <p>Assignment 4: Final Comprehensive SEO Strategy + Presentation</p> | <p>The SEO Strategy Framework Assignment is the capstone project of the course, where you will synthesize key SEO concepts from across the course into a comprehensive, client-ready SEO strategy. This assignment shifts us from executing individual SEO tactics to developing a cohesive, long-term strategy that aligns with business objectives and performance goals.</p> <p>You will be assigned a simulated business scenario that includes background information, organizational context, target audience, and a structured dataset. Acting as SEO consultants, you will evaluate the provided information and synthesize their findings into a comprehensive SEO strategy framework. This framework will integrate key components including keyword strategy, technical optimization, content development, authority building, and performance measurement, demonstrating alignment with business objectives and data-driven decision-making. The final deliverables are designed to reflect professional industry standards, including both a detailed written strategy and an executive-level presentation.</p> | 20% |

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| Weekly Labs & Participation | <p>The Mini Labs are a series of weekly, hands-on activities designed to reinforce key SEO concepts through applied practice. Each lab aligns with the current unit and provides you with the opportunity to work directly with industry tools and real or simulated data. Activities are scaffolded across the course, progressing from foundational tasks such as SERP analysis and keyword research to more advanced applications including on-page optimization, technical auditing, content strategy, and performance analysis.</p> | <p>40% (8 labs x 5% each)</p> |
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Usage of GenAI

Please be advised that in this course you are **not authorized** to use any form of generative AI. In order to successfully complete course activities, **generative AI is not required nor welcomed**. Students should not make any use of generative AI tools such as ChatGPT, Grammarly, among others that use AI for content generation and editing. As the University of Victoria states in its Academic Integrity Policy “Academic integrity requires commitment to the values of honesty, trust, fairness, respect, and responsibility.”. Therefore, I expect you to comply with the course syllabus and I encourage you to enhance your academic experience in this course by refraining from using generative AI.

Attendance Requirements

The course emphasizes **active engagement, collaborative teamwork, and hands-on learning**. Attendance is crucial and considered mandatory for all participants for all sessions (full 3 hours) of the course. Please inform your instructor in advance if you’re unable to attend any class sessions. Please note that missing more than one session (3 hours) requires a valid and sufficient reason for absence with verifiable circumstances that substantially prevent your attendance. Your commitment to active participation significantly contributes to your learning experience in this course.

Participation Expectations

- Instructors will track attendance and participation throughout the term. Students who do not attend class may be assigned an “N” grade for the course. Attendance will be taken within the first 15 minutes of class and may be taken later as a second check.
- **If you arrive later than 15 minutes, the door will be closed. Please wait until breaktime to enter the class.**
- Instructors can assign a **final grade of N or refuse** a student to **write a final exam, final assignment, or any assignment that follows multiple absences** or misconduct **if a learner has failed to meet the course's minimum attendance requirements** as identified above. They may also refuse admission to a lecture, learning activity, assignment, or exam because of lateness, misconduct, inattention, or failure to meet the responsibilities of the course noted in this outline.
- The instructor reserves the right to not grade assignments submitted by students who have not maintained regular attendance and participation, and a zero grade being assessed for non-submission.
- Missing **more than one session (3 hours)** requires a valid and sufficient reason for absence.
- Arrive on time and remain for the full session; leaving without permission will be marked **absent**. Please note that work schedule conflicts as well as car, bus, carpooling, or ferry delays are generally not accepted as sufficient reasons for absence beyond the one-session limit.

- Students are expected to actively interact with **course materials, peers, and instructors**, including contributing to discussions and teamwork.
- Students are expected to complete assignments and assessments on time and submit work by the due date.
- **Technology use** (cell phones, tablets, laptops, smart glasses/ watches) must be limited to course-related activities only.
- Participation includes respectful active listening, not just talking.
- This course is delivered in a collaborative, discussion-based learning environment. Students are expected to demonstrate respectful and attentive behaviour at all times.
- University policy allows an instructor to refuse a student admission to class because of lateness, misconduct, disruptive behaviour, inattention, or failure to meet the responsibilities of the course.
- It is students' responsibility to be familiar with the criteria in which they are being assessed for this course. Please refer to the specific information under each assessment.

Group Participation Expectations

- Active participation in group work and meetings is required. Students who fail to attend or contribute to group work may be removed from their group, at the instructor's discretion, and deemed ineligible to participate in or receive marks for the group project, including the group presentation.