

APPLIED INVESTMENT MANAGEMENT
MBA 779 & BUSI 583H
2025-2026
KENAN-FLAGLER BUSINESS SCHOOL
UNIVERSITY OF NORTH CAROLINA AT CHAPEL HILL

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Overview

The objective of the Applied Investment Management (AIM) course is to provide students with a thorough grounding in the process of investment management, from the broad asset allocation decision to individual security evaluation and selection, through the management of the KFBS Global Perspectives Fund (GPF).

The class offers a unique opportunity for students to apply the theories and tools they have learned in their other business classes to an actual investment portfolio, in real-time market conditions. Being an applied course, no formal instruction will be provided during class. Your learning will be through the iterative process of getting feedback on your work and improving it. When necessary, some specific instruction on equity valuation techniques and portfolio management will be provided.

The process of investment can be divided, both in theory and in practice, into two parts: security analysis and portfolio management. Security analysis is the attempt to determine whether individual securities are correctly valued in the marketplace, e.g., it is the search for mispriced financial assets. Portfolio management is the process of combining securities into a portfolio tailored to the investor's preferences and needs, monitoring that portfolio, and evaluating its performance. This course provides an opportunity to learn about both parts of the investment process.

The purpose of the GPF is to:

1. Enhance the educational and professional opportunities of students through experiential learning; and,
2. Provide a competitive risk-adjusted return that can be used to generate direct financial support to the Investment Management program at KFBS.

This experience will be invaluable for students embarking on careers in investment and wealth management. Those pursuing finance-related jobs (e.g. investment banking, corporate finance) or even in completely unrelated fields can benefit.

The class, including the instructors, will be critiquing ideas, logic, presentations, portfolio recommendations, etc. You are expected to track existing positions, contribute new ideas to the portfolio, as well as create research for ideas occasionally proposed by instructors or the portfolio management team. Most of the work will be done outside class hours. The class will be focused on students presenting the results of their work and getting feedback from others.

Although this is a serious course, we will also have fun; at least, as much fun as can be had with DCFs and WACCs.

Class Schedule

The class will follow the second year MBA calendar and will meet in person on Wednesdays from 15:30-18:20 in the Capital Markets Lab (CML, McColl 2550). Members of the management team should be prepared to stay late after class for portfolio management meetings (usually 30 minutes past the end of class). Occasionally, class discussions may take longer than expected, and we may go over our allotted time. On the flip side, we sometimes have students cancel their scheduled presentations at the last minute, resulting in an earlier than usual end to the class.

Students are required to meet outside of class to prepare for class presentations. Being in the same room and informally meeting is the best way to come up with new ideas and learn from each other. Ideas, however, are a dime a dozen, and it is analysis supported by data that creates value.

Class Discussions

Discussions in class and via email are to be candid but respectful. Occasionally, people will be highly critical of your work; we expect such criticism to be constructive and accepted with an open mind. Students come from different levels of experience and are expected to learn from feedback. In addition, all of you are encouraged to ask questions about topics with which you are not familiar. As instructors, we are not concerned as much about where you are, but that you progress to stronger analyses. You are expected to take the feedback, do the additional work required, and come back to class with the results.

The class will be largely student-led by the management team.

Required Reading Materials

Knowing the contents of the fund's Investment Policy Statement (IPS) is of paramount importance. You will not be able to actively participate in the management of the fund by voting on decisions until you pass the compliance exam. We strongly encourage you to re-read this document from time to time to ensure that the policies are being adhered to, and that you are following your duties described therein. Rules and procedures spelled out in the IPS should become second nature to you within a short period.

You are expected to keep abreast of relevant market and business developments. Some publications that are useful in this regard are *The Wall Street Journal*, *The New York Times*, *Barron's*, *The Economist*,

Financial Times, and *Bloomberg BusinessWeek*. You may also use online tools like Google alerts, Yahoo Finance, and Seeking Alpha. We may send or post additional relevant readings from the CFA Institute, and other materials we come across throughout the year.

There is no required textbook or course pack. Since there are no costs to bear, there should not be a financial burden associated with this course. Undergraduate students who need help paying for course material may apply to the [Melwani Belonging Fund](#).

It is recommended that students read the book “[Pitch the Perfect Investment](#)” by Paul D. Sonkin and Paul Johnson prior to starting the course. A [free online version](#) is available through the school library.

You may use databases like Bloomberg, FactSet and CapIQ. but it is not required. Your instructors cannot help you with access to any information sources. From our experience, students who rely on these tend to make more mistakes than those who don’t. You are required to cross-check any information you get from a database against a primary source like a company earnings release or regulatory filing. All you need for this course is a laptop computer (with Microsoft Office and access to the Internet).

Evaluation

This is a 6-credit course taught over two semesters. You may take the course for one semester or both and receive proportional credit. The course cannot be taken for part of a semester e.g. one mod.

Grade distributions will be as per (generous) University guidelines. Course grades will be based on (approximately):

Required Investment Recommendations and Research Reports	40%
Execution of Assigned Duties (Existing Portfolio, Management Team)	30%
Attendance / Class Participation / Assisting other Students	20%
Peer Evaluation (Considering all of the above elements)	10%

Course grades will be determined by your preparation and contribution. Class participation credit will be assigned based on the quality of your in-class contribution to the course. It is expected that all students will come to class prepared (e.g. having examined pitches for that session, completed readings, followed news on sector covered, etc.). The more thorough and accurate your work is, the higher your grade will be. We may ask you to drop or withdraw from the course if your participation and contribution to class is below expectations or disruptive.

If you are taking the course for only the first semester, you must complete the course requirements of pitching a new investment idea and submitting a written research report by the end of the semester. New for this year: students who do both of these will receive a grade at the end of the semester, even if they are continuing with the course for the rest of the year.

For students participating for two semesters, grades will be “marked-to-market”, that is overall performance will be the basis of your grade for both semesters. In order to expand the range of grades awarded while remaining consistent with University guidelines for grade distribution in each semester,

you may receive different grades in each semester. This does not necessarily mean that your absolute or relative performance was different across semesters.

The course does not have a traditional final exam in keeping with its objective of giving you a real-world experience of learning and doing simultaneously. We will, however, have class during exam weeks, following the second year MBA calendar. You will effectively be evaluated constantly, with feedback provided. Your grade will reflect our subjective assessment of your knowledge, contribution and judgement, and could be different from your own self-assessment. We cannot guarantee any particular grade in advance or change it after submission. In order to be fair to everyone in the class, we cannot entertain requests for specific grades for whatever reason you may have. On the positive side, you can be assured that your grade will not be comparatively devalued because one or more of your peers got unjustifiably upgraded.

Any questions you have on grading will have to be asked publicly in class. Any attempt to discuss grades privately will be looked upon unfavorably as an attempt to influence the process.

In the past few years, most MBA students have garnered P's, with a few H's and the occasional L. Most undergrad students have been awarded A- and B+, with a few A's and the occasional B. As they say in the investment industry, past performance may not be indicative of future results, but it would be fair to expect this distribution for students who complete the course requirements satisfactorily.

Attendance

Attendance is mandatory for all sessions, although skipping one class a semester is perfectly acceptable.

As stated in the University's [Class Attendance Policy](#), no right or privilege exists that permits a student to be absent from any class meetings, except for these University Approved Absences:

1. Authorized University activities
2. Disability/religious observance/pregnancy, as required by law and approved by [Accessibility Resources and Service](#) and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC)
3. Significant health condition and/or personal/family emergency as approved by the [Office of the Dean of Students](#), [Gender Violence Service Coordinators](#), and/or the [Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office](#) (EOC).

You may skip a class if you have a job interview or exam at that time. However, taking time off to prepare for an interview or exam is not a valid reason to miss a class. We expect to hear from you in advance if you anticipate missing or being late for class. We adhere to this policy to stress the importance to the class of your presence and active engagement each week. Based on the judgment of the instructors, a pattern of missed classes will result in your being asked to drop the course. We do not have the capacity to facilitate attendance via Zoom (so don't ask!). If you miss a class, please get an update from one of your colleagues and review any material that may be emailed or posted on Canvas. The classes will also be recorded on Panopto, and these will be available the next day on Canvas.

We treat students as adults and do not require a doctor's note, etc. if you need to skip a class. We will take your word for any absences that are not statistically improbable! We have found that students who

skip a lot of classes tend to learn less, make avoidable mistakes, and have less favorable grade outcomes than those who make it a point to attend almost every class.

Course Calendar

After the course begins, we will develop and share a Google sheet with the calendar for the rest of the semester. It is critical that you sign up for pitch slots when required and regularly check the sheet to keep abreast of what is in store.

Gadget Policy

We encourage the use of laptops for course-related activities during the class. This means using your laptop to take notes, follow along with an Excel spreadsheet, or fact-check what is being presented. You are encouraged to verify in real-time whether the facts and figures being presented in class are accurate, and speak up if you believe otherwise. We will also be taking votes electronically on investment recommendations. It is inappropriate to use your electronic devices in class for non-course related activities. The use of phones for messaging or texting during class is discouraged, with the exception of an occasional quick check for something urgent. Students found consistently violating this rule may be asked to deposit their phones on the presenter's desk at the beginning of class.

We primarily communicate via email, and sometimes your response will be required. Our expectation is that you check your email at least once a day and respond as necessary.

AI Usage Policy

You are welcome to use AI to aid your work, but not to produce any final output. For example, you may use AI to find out who a company's competitors are. Or you may use it to provide a summary of an earnings call. Keep in mind that the results from AI may not be as good as doing the actual reading and research yourself. For instance, AI may not give you a comprehensive list of competitors, or may skip something critical in a summary. If you read every word in a company's 10-K, for instance, you can confidently state in response to a question that the requested information does not exist in the public domain. If you relied on a summary, you cannot. You will see that our process involves pitching followed by grilling, so while AI may help in the former, it will impede your performance in the latter. To state the obvious: you are responsible for your final work product, and no blaming hallucinating AIs!

AI was not used in preparing this document, nor will it be used to evaluate any of your work.

Pre-requisites

This course is meant for final year undergraduate and MBA students. The more courses you have taken, the more knowledge you will have to apply in doing the work and making decisions in this course. For undergraduates, the pre-requisite courses are 407 (Financial Accounting) and 408 (Corporate Finance).

In addition, 580 (Investments), 581/584 (Financial Modeling) and 577 (PRIME) are recommended. For MBAs, the pre-requisite courses are Investments 1 and 2 and PRIME is recommended.

Students in this course should be comfortable with numbers and using Excel. A fundamental understanding of and ability to analyze company financial statements is required. You should have the ability to pull up a company's 10-K filing and locate the income statement, balance sheet and cash flow statement, and know what most of the terms mean.

Registration

Applications for the course will open in mid-February and will be due by end-February, with decisions made by mid-March. The application link can be found at <https://www.kenan-flagler.unc.edu/investment-management/aim-program-and-funds/>.

You will be asked to confirm your interest, if selected. You do not need to do anything to register for the course after this. If you decide to drop the course, please let us know. All registrations will be processed by the second week of classes. We send the list to the MBA Registrar and UBP Office, who manually register students for the class in the system. We do not have the ability to expedite this process.

Instructor Roles

Ranjit Thomas will be the primary instructor for the course, attending all classes, critiquing your work, keeping the course on track, and executing trades that the class decides on. You may send him your Excel model via email for feedback prior to your pitch presentation. All one-on-one emails will be responded to within a few hours (max 12), including weekends and holidays. In order to provide this level of service to all his correspondents, he does not do calls (or Meet, Signal, Slack, Teams, Telegram, Zoom). You may request an in-person meeting (via email) prior to class time on Wednesdays.

Pramita Saha will be the external-facing faculty member, interfacing with KFBS alumni to elevate your experience by bringing in guest speakers and organizing the AIM Board meetings. She will work with you to communicate with the Board members and posting any relevant material to the Investment Management Center website. She will attend class a few times per semester to provide updates and will otherwise be available outside class hours to support students as requested, including answering career-related questions.

Pitches and Research Reports

A pitch may consist of any proposal that results in a specific investment recommendation. It would usually be a recommendation to buy or short a stock or bond. Pitches must be properly conceived and presented, and should include the following elements:

- What are you recommending? You must be as specific as possible and include a target price.
- Why are you making this recommendation? What is the basis for it? Why will it work? Why should the fund make the change you propose?

- You may include detail on how your recommendation will alter the portfolio's structure (asset/sector weights, income, risk characteristics, etc.)
- Make a recommendation that, if approved, can be immediately implemented with no additional effort other than trade entry.

A clear argument should be made as to why you think the currently observed market valuation is not appropriate. You must demonstrate that your view is different from the implied market view and how it provides an opportunity for excess risk-adjusted returns.

Students are required to make at least one pitch per semester. Once you sign up or are assigned a date, please make every effort to deliver on this date. Last-minute cancellations are disruptive to the schedule. In addition, you are also responsible for tracking an existing position that you are assigned – following and giving updates on relevant news, updating the model shortly after earnings releases, and recommending position size changes, if necessary.

You are required to build an Excel model with historical and projected financials for the stocks you cover and pitch. Assumptions used must be reasonable and justifiable. One of the biggest drawbacks we have found is that students focus too much on qualitative opinions rather than quantitative analysis. It is easy to have an opinion on where something is headed, but harder to express it in a way to convince others. When we buy a security, we are paying upfront for the cash we can extract from it over time. That is by its nature, a quantitative exercise, and where you can differentiate yourself from the investing masses. A template model will be provided on Canvas, but it is your responsibility to make sure you are comfortable with your end-product.

You are also required to prepare an individual written research report on a security in Word format (5-10 pages) at the end of the year (or semester if you are not taking the course for the whole year) demonstrating what you have learned in the course. Put it in your calendar! You can recycle (with updates) any prior work for this assignment, as long as it is your own exclusive effort. Using generative AI applications or copy-pasting others' work is not permitted.

Historically, almost all pitches have tended to be long stock recommendations accompanied by optimistic projections. You are encouraged to demonstrate a healthy degree of skepticism in your analysis. Coming up with short ideas is useful in seeing the other side of the coin. Remember that it is rare for a company to sustain high growth rates long into the future. Margins are as likely to come down as they are to go up.

Assigned Duties

Detailed job descriptions are provided below. Each student is responsible for appropriate updates corresponding to their assigned duties at the beginning of every class. The updates should include a description of developments and current events affecting the portfolio or assets assigned to each duty, as well as any recommended status of specific assets in the portfolio (e.g., buy, hold, sell). Every student is first and foremost a sector analyst. Any responsibilities on the management team are in addition to, not instead of, monitoring your sector.

Students are appointed to the management team by the instructors for a semester and serve at their pleasure. Having a position on the management team does not confer any additional privileges in deciding what the class does or contravening the processes in place. Those with an expectation of having things done their way are better off not being on the team, since they risk being dismissed.

Investment decisions are first put to an advisory vote to the whole class. The management team then votes on a decision, which may be different from what the class voted for. However, we may put in place processes to ensure that the class vote carries some weight if the decisions are consistently different. All management team decisions should be made in the meeting after class, except that in case of something that is time-sensitive, votes can be taken via email outside class hours. This process has to be strictly adhered to and we cannot have an informal meeting of a subset of the management team making a decision, however strongly they feel about it.

Job Descriptions

The management team comprises the portfolio managers, the market strategist, the risk managers, the traders and the investor relations managers. All decisions are made by the management team, taking into account the opinion of the whole class. Faculty advisors do not have voting rights, but will express their opinions and pressure-check yours. However, they have veto rights, particularly if the decision is in violation of the fund's IPS or not the result of adequate analysis.

Portfolio Managers (PMs):

The PMs are responsible for coordinating the efforts of the management team. The responsibilities include oversight of all fund operations including analysis, execution, performance, communication and compliance. There will be certain administrative duties as well e.g. helping with scheduling and management of the class.

Market Strategist/Economist:

The market strategist is primarily responsible for overseeing the asset allocation among securities and sectors. Through economic forecasts and development of a market outlook, the market strategist should keep the managers and analysts abreast of economic and political developments and their potential effect upon the portfolio.

Risk and Performance Managers:

The risk managers are responsible for monitoring fund performance and risk. They are responsible for maintaining and improving the fund's risk management and performance analysis. Methods include comparisons to benchmarks, VaR, attribution analysis, peer comparisons etc. They may also offer opinions on how a potential position would affect the fund's risk metrics or what an appropriate position size should be.

Investor Relations Managers:

The investor relations managers are responsible for the coordinating of fund external contacts and communications. The duties include fund reporting and preparing presentations to the fund's Board.

Traders:

The traders are responsible for trade execution and control. Duties include sending out class votes, tabulating the results, and translating the decisions of the management team into the quantity of securities to be bought or sold. The traders must keep track of all positions pitched, decisions made and trades executed.

Analysts:

Analysts are responsible for research, analysis, as well as the identification of risks and opportunities in their respective areas of focus. They are expected to present timely and well-supported ideas to add new positions and remove existing ones. Analysts must monitor all positions in their sector, make recommendations for opening/closing/rebalancing positions, and have a view on the relative merits of the sector versus other sectors. It is critical for analysts to track the news flow around positions in their sector, particularly timely analysis of earnings reports from companies.

Analyst sectors include (subject to change):

- Information Technology and Telecommunications
- Consumer (Discretionary and Staples)
- Energy and Utilities
- Financials and Real Estate
- Industrials and Materials
- Healthcare

External Contacts and Reports

You will have a variety of opportunities throughout the year to represent the fund to outside constituents, either in person or in written communication. You will be required to present to the AIM Advisory Board twice each year, once at the end of each semester. In addition, you should produce a one-page performance report on a monthly basis. To have value, this should be done within a few days (not weeks) of the end of a month. You may also produce a quarterly report with written commentary on your views and explanation of performance. Focus on accuracy and timeliness, rather than big goals.

This year's Board meetings are planned for the following dates (subject to change):

December 3, 2025 at 4.30 p.m.

April 29, 2026 at 4.30 p.m.

Feedback

Accountability is crucial to any business undertaking, particularly in portfolio management. You will be given a survey at the end of the semester or year that will require your honest and confidential assessment of your peers' efforts. Failure to provide feedback will result in a peer evaluation score of zero.

Instructors will provide feedback on your work sent in advance (Excel models) and your presentation in class. In the interest of efficiency, the feedback will be direct and devoid of any complimentary platitudes.

Honor Code

Integrity is one of UNC Kenan-Flagler Business School's core values. According to our statement of core values "we hold ourselves to the highest ethical standards." Violations of the honor code are totally inconsistent with this core value and are simply unacceptable in any form. Any violation of the honor code will result in an F in the course.

In this class, an honor code violation would occur if you plagiarized or misrepresented your work. According to the university honor code, plagiarism is defined as "the intentional representation of another person's words, thoughts, or ideas as one's own." To avoid plagiarism, make sure you put in quotes and reference any direct copying of another individual's work. Also give credit and references for any "words, thoughts or ideas" that you paraphrase in your assignments. Each assignment should contain all relevant footnotes and a bibliography of all sources used in the assignment. Finally, for group projects, "unauthorized collaboration" is defined as getting help from someone outside your group (be sure to note any exceptions) or using prior work without acknowledgement. If in doubt, ask your instructors for clarifications. You may get more information at <https://studentconduct.unc.edu/>

Since this is an applied course with continuous work following real-time events and no exam, your ability to not follow the code will be limited and quickly evident.

Title IX Resources

Any student who is impacted by discrimination, harassment, interpersonal (relationship) violence, sexual violence, sexual exploitation, or stalking is encouraged to seek resources on campus or in the community. Reports can be made online to the EOC at <https://eoc.unc.edu/report-an-incident/>. Please contact the University's Title IX Coordinator (titleixcoordinator@unc.edu), Report and Response Coordinators in the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office (reportandresponse@unc.edu), Counseling and Psychological Services (confidential), or the Gender Violence Services Coordinators (gvsc@unc.edu; confidential) to discuss your specific needs. Additional resources are available at safe.unc.edu.

Counseling and Psychological Services

UNC-Chapel Hill is strongly committed to addressing the mental health needs of a diverse student body. The [Heels Care Network](https://heelscarenetwork.org/) website is a place to access the many mental health resources at Carolina. CAPS is the primary mental health provider for students, offering timely access to consultation and connection to clinically appropriate services. Go to their website <https://caps.unc.edu/> or visit their

facilities on the third floor of the Campus Health building for an initial evaluation to learn more. Students can also call CAPS 24/7 at 919-966-3658 for immediate assistance.

Accessibility Resources and Services

The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill implements reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability, or pregnancy complications resulting in barriers to fully accessing University courses, programs and activities.

Accommodations are determined through the Office of Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) for individuals with documented qualifying disabilities in accordance with applicable state and federal laws. See the ARS Website for contact information: <https://ars.unc.edu> or email ars@unc.edu.

UBP Wellness Coaching Services

In the UBP, Wellness Coaches work with students to co-create action-oriented goals based on the habits they'd like to change, and provide accountability and support as students work towards these goals. Wellness Coaching typically lasts for between 3 to 6 sessions and is a free service for all UBP students. Coaching may also be used as a bridge to additional services if it seems students could benefit from resources and support outside the scope of a brief, goal-oriented space. Sign-up for UBP Wellness Coaching to learn more about your wellbeing or other mental health resources on campus! You can also email wellness@kenan-flagler.unc.edu to get started. To explore additional wellness resources or a calendar of wellness events, check out the UBP SharePoint: <https://kenanflaglerunc.sharepoint.com/sites/ubp/SitePages/Student-Wellness.aspx>

Acceptable Use Policy

By attending the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the acceptable use of IT systems and services. The Acceptable Use Policy (AUP) sets the expectation that you will use the University's technology resources responsibly, consistent with the University's mission. In the context of a class, it's quite likely you will participate in online activities that could include personal information about you or your peers, and the AUP addresses your obligations to protect the privacy of class participants. In addition, the AUP addresses matters of others' intellectual property, including copyright. These are only a couple of typical examples, so you should consult the full Information Technology Acceptable Use Policy, which covers topics related to using digital resources, such as privacy, confidentiality and intellectual property. Additionally, consult the Safe Computing at UNC website for information about data security policies, updates, and tips on keeping your identity, information, and devices safe.

Policy on Non-Discrimination

The University is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and to ensuring that educational and employment decisions are based on individuals' abilities and qualifications. Consistent with this principle and applicable laws, the University's Policy Statement on Non-Discrimination offers access to its educational programs and activities as well as employment terms and conditions without respect to race, color, gender, national origin, age, religion, sex, genetic information, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression. Such a policy ensures that only relevant factors are considered, and that equitable and consistent standards of conduct and performance are applied.

If you are experiencing harassment or discrimination, you can seek assistance and file a report through the Report and Response Coordinators (email reportandresponse@unc.edu or see additional contact info at safe.unc.edu) or the Equal Opportunity and Compliance Office. Please note that I am designated as a Responsible Employee, which means that I must report to the EOC any information I receive about harassment or discrimination. If you'd like to speak with a confidential resource, those include Counseling and Psychological Services and the University's Ombuds Office.

Additional Statements Required by UBP

The professor reserves the right to make changes to the syllabus, including project due dates and test dates. These changes will be announced as early as possible.

You have the option to pass/fail one major or minor course (with grade of C or better) and have that course count towards your major or minor. The deadline for this semester is Oct 11. If you would like to read more about this policy, please read the pass/fail policy on the Registrar's website. Note that Honors courses cannot be pass/failed.

The College of Arts and Sciences provides a secure, proctored environment in which exams can be taken. The Center works with instructors to proctor exams for their undergraduate students who are not registered with ARS and who do not need testing accommodations as provided by ARS. In other words, the Center provides a proctored testing environment for students who are unable to take an exam at the normally scheduled time (with pre-arrangement by your instructor). For more information, visit the testing center website.