

Memo – Carmen McDonald

Visual Communication and Information Design.

Visual Communication and Information Design refers to the multiple disciplines of art history, rhetoric, philosophy, graphic design and visual literacy. In this introductory course, the history of visual communication and its evolution is explored while basic design principles are studied and applied to modern mass media and web technologies. Using industry standard software, this hands-on course teaches practical skills and applied theory of design.

Course Objectives -

- Identify and apply the basic principles of design
- Reflect on the historical contexts of visual communication and information design
- Gain a basic understanding of design software and apply where appropriate
- Import, edit and arrange images for effective information design across mass media
- Complete multiple-page layouts of web interfaces
- Become acquainted with the range of disciplines and professions that contribute to the development and creation of design work
- Document the design process throughout the course by posting commentary on weekly readings, gathered tutorials and lab activities

Course Materials -

Links to Design Resources:

7 usability guidelines for websites on mobile devices

Mobile Awesomeness

Mobile Web Design

iPhone and iPad Development GUI Kits, Stencils and Icons

Required Text Books:

First Weeks Reading: Non-Designer's Design Book - "Joshua Tree Epiphany"

Adobe Photoshop CS5: Classroom in a Book (Mandatory for every class session)

Color Index - Jim Krause (Mandatory for every class session)

Non-Designer's Design Book - Robin Williams

Don't Make Me Think: A Common Sense Approach to Web Usability - Steve Krug

(Optional)Layout Index - Jim Krause

Project 1: History of Visual Communication

Research and gather materials relating to visual communication from different periods during the 20th century. Write a one to three page summary on how the design of the pieces gathered have evolved, be sure to include the medium used and what design principles can be identified. Use of the same graphical element represented from different time periods (i.e. logos, magazine covers,etc...) is allowed.

Project 2: Information Design

For this project, designing for a number of mediums will be explored and the content for this assignment will be provided. The deliverable is an email that can be viewed on a computer, mobile device, eReader and as a printed direct mail piece. All designs should be cohesive and no adjustments to the copy should be made. Arrangement and use of imagery along with typography are at the discretion of the designer.

Project 3: Introduction to Web Design Principles

The final project encompasses all the principles of design as well as touch upon basic web usability. This project involves designing a paper prototype that will be transferred to final user interface screens for a website (10-20pages). The website to be designed will be given, lend careful consideration to usability elements discussed in class.

Calendar:

The calendar includes 16 weeks of Lessons/Activities/Discussions centered around various topics in Visual Communication and Information Design. Each week is inspired by a theme and is closely aligned with readings and lab activities. The Units (referred to as “Design Components”) in the course calendar guide the course activities and themes as well as interweave the various topics within a closing project for each unit.

Design Component 1 is the introductory to the course and provides the students with the basic principles of design as well as the history of visual communication. It is aligned with readings on design principles, the basics of Photoshop and a study of visual communication past and present. The component or unit is concluded with Project 1.

Design Component 2 makes use of Photoshop as a design tool, and requires the students to make use of what they’ve learned thus far in the course. At this stage students should begin developing their creativity and designing for different mediums. This unit begins to discuss the progression of print and the use of more modern technologies – email, mobile devices and eReaders. Though the course has a focus other than print, students should still be able to design for that medium and carry out a basic theme across print, email or web. Project 2 concludes this component.

Design Component 3 begins the foundations of interface design for the web. While the students will not learn HTML or CSS in the course they will still be able to design the interface and flow of a website. Touching on topics of usability, I decided to use this unit to close out the course and hopefully peak students interest in tech comm.

Designing the course:

In designing the course and what it should involve I considered a number of publications and other texts that I myself have used. I also toyed with the idea of teaching more than one application for use of design but decided against it as the course was only 16 weeks. In an effort to not overwhelm the student, I wanted a good balance between the curriculum and the work load. With that in mind subscriptions to Comm Arts, Graphic Design, Computer Arts (to name a few) will not be required but encouraged. InDesign was replaced with Photoshop mainly because web and mobile devices are widely used for

receiving information. Though print is not extinct yet, I felt that a move in this direction would be more beneficial to the students. Project 1 covers the history of visual communication and print, there will be some discussion on the topic of print design but a class that solely focuses on print design (in my opinion) was not needed.

The text books that are required in the course were chosen based on how much the students would use them. The idea of requiring books that would eventually be sold back at the end of the semester rather than used as an ongoing resource was not appealing and so the following did not make it into the course:

Laws of simplicity
Making words move
Graphic Design: A user's manual

As we were discussing the courses that should be included in the curriculum, a course centered around information design and visual communication was a necessity and it was decided that this should be a core course. In preparing students for a career in technical communication, they should be familiar with implementing methods of conveying information – whether it be verbally, visually or written. Technical communicators are responsible for a broad range of skills that do not consist of writing only, and design across various mediums is just as instrumental as the language used in disseminating information.