

J336 Visual Design | Fall 2004

SYLLABUS

--

Last revised: 08.30.04

--

Unique Numbers: 06595, 06600, 06605, 06610

Assistant Professor (Instructor)

Shawn M. McKinney | E-mail: smckinney@mail.utexas.edu

Office: CMA 6.170B | Hours: TuTh: 2 – 3 pm | Phone: 232-5986

Teaching Assistants

Jaime Richman | E-mail: jaimaleighphotography@hotmail.com

Amy Zerba | E-mail: amyzerba@yahoo.com

Lecture: CMA 2.320 (Auditorium) | TuTh | 8 – 9:30 am

Lab: CMA 4.308 / 2 hours per week / date and time depend on Unique Number

Web Site: <http://www.utexas.edu/coc/journalism/SOURCE/J336/index.html>

(To get to any of my course Web sites, start at the School of Journalism Web site, and follow the links: PEOPLE > Faculty > Shawn M. McKinney. Then, on my Bio page, look under “Course Web Sites,” in the column on the left side.)

Prerequisites

Upper division standing, J310, J315 and J320D, with a grade of at least C in each; a passing score on the College of Communication Grammar, Spelling and Punctuation Test; and a passing score on the School of Journalism Word Processing Test.

Objectives

This course is designed to stimulate both an understanding of and critical thinking about visual design, especially as it relates to journalism, print and publication design. We will examine the role of visual design as both a medium of communication and a tool of cultural production. Students will use Macintosh computers, images, text and hand skills in order to explore design, production and presentation concepts and methods.

This course provides an overview of visual design practices, including such activities as: making, scaling, editing, and processing images; designing, editing, and formatting text; and preparing materials for production and/ or publication. This course may employ lectures, lab assignments, handouts and readings, class reports and exercises, design projects, writing projects and exams to achieve its goals.

Textbooks

The following textbooks, available for purchase at the UT Co-op Bookstore West (2244 Guadalupe, 512.476.7211), are required to participate in this course:

- Visual QuickStart Guide: InDesign CS for Macintosh + Windows
Santee Cohen (Peachpit Press, 2003)
- Visual QuickStart Guide: Photoshop CS for Windows + Macintosh
Elaine Weinmann and Peter Lourekas (Peachpit Press, 2003)

Course Packet

A J336 Course Packet may be made available for purchase at a nearby copy center. This may include handouts, readings and other texts that supplement lectures and assignments. Exam questions are often based on materials found in the Course Packet.

Handouts

Additional handouts (e.g., project briefs) may be distributed during lecture hours and/ or published on the course Web site. Exam questions may also be based on such handouts.

Recommended Reading

The following books are recommended (not required) to further supplement and inform the issues and concepts introduced in this course:

- The Elements of Graphic Design
Alex W. White (Allworth Press, 2002)
- What Is Design Today?
George H. Marcus (Harry N. Abrams, 2002)
- The Elements of Typographic Style
Robert Bringhurst (Hartley & Marks Publishers, Second Edition, 2002)
- The Non-Designer's Design Book
Robin Williams (Peachpit Press, 1994)
- Graphic Design: A Concise History (World of Art Series)
Richard Hollis (Thames & Hudson; Second Edition, 2002)
- Visual Literacy: A Conceptual Approach to Graphic Problem Solving
Judith and Richard Wilde (Watson-Guptill Publications, 2000)
- Typographic Design: Form and Communication
Rob Carter, Ben Day and Philip Meggs (John Wiley & Sons, Third Edition, 2002)
- Design Literacy: Understanding Graphic Design
Steven Heller and Karen Pomeroy (Allworth Press, Revised Edition, 2004)
- Design Writing Research
Ellen Lupton and J. Abbott Miller (Phaidon Press, 1999)
- Understanding Comics
Scott McCloud (Perennial; Reprint Edition, 1994)

Magazines and journals that may also prove of interest include: Eye, Communication Arts, Emigre, Print, I.D., Step, HOW, Baseline and AIGA Journal.

Lab Sessions, Unique Numbers

During registration, each student is assigned a “unique number,” corresponding with a required lab session. Lab sessions enable students to familiarize themselves with computer applications used in this course. They also provide students with a means of acquiring basic design and computer skills necessary for visual design production.

Open (additional, optional) lab hours may also be available, for working on projects and assignments. A teaching assistant will be assigned to monitor open lab hours for this course, and will be available to answer questions or provide assistance, as needed.

Visit the UT-Austin Web site <<http://www.utexas.edu/>> for further information about unique numbers and lab session times and locations. Follow the links: Academics > Registrar > Course Schedules > (current semester) > Course Offerings: College of Communication > School of Journalism > Journalism-J-undergraduate courses. Be sure the heading at the top lists the current semester. Scroll down until you find this course.

Students with an IF account may also use the Communications lab on the 3rd floor. This lab provides access to basic Macintosh hardware and software (e.g., Microsoft Word, Adobe Photoshop), but may not match the facilities available on the fourth floor.

Supplies (Required)

A group of basic supplies, specified by the instructor, is required to participate in this course. Visual design production typically necessitates a significant outlay of financial resources; however, the instructor makes sure the supplies remain essential, affordable and available. The total cost of supplies ranges from \$100 to \$200 U.S. dollars (closer to \$100 if purchased as a “Supply Kit” from the University Co-op BookstoreWest).

Click on “Supplies,” on the course Web site (under “Course Info”), for an itemized list.

Grades: Method of Evaluation

Each student’s final grade (GPA) is based on how many points they earned during the course; they can earn a maximum of 1,000 total points. Items are tabulated as follows:

- | | |
|--|------------|
| 1. Lecture Attendance and Participation: | 100 points |
| 2. Lab Attendance and Participation: | 100 points |
| 3. Lab Assignments (Pass/Fail): | 100 points |
| 4. Written Exams (2 x 100 pts): | 200 points |
| 5. Design Projects (4 x 100 pts): | 400 points |
| 6. Writing Assignments: | 100 points |

This course uses the 10-point grading scale, as follows: A = 90-100; B = 80-89; C = 70-79; D = 60-69; F = 59 or less. Thus, final point totals = final grades, as follows: A = 900-1000; B = 800-899; C=700-799; D = 600-699; F = 599 or less.

Grades: Confirmation

Students are responsible for confirming that grades are recorded correctly. Report recording errors to the instructor immediately. In accordance with current University policy, a student must submit (to the instructor) written permission to post grades, if the student wishes to be able to view grades online, and if the University supports such a policy. Such permission may be formally requested near the beginning of each semester.

Grades: Questions

If a student has a question about a grade they are asked to follow this procedure:

1. Wait 24 hours after receiving the grade.
2. Submit a brief, typed memo or e-mail, with your question, to the instructor. Explain why you think the grade is incorrect. Explain what you think the grade should be, and why. Write with care, logic and precision.
3. Make an appointment to discuss the memo or e-mail with the instructor. After the meeting, the instructor will provide you with a brief, typed memo or e-mail explaining the final decision. The decision will be based on the strength of your written argument and basic rules of logic (regarding class goals and objectives).

Lecture Attendance and Participation (10% of Final Grade)

Lecture attendance and participation (Please Ask Questions!) is strongly recommended. A student can earn as many as 100 total points for lecture attendance and participation. Important information is often delivered during lectures, information that may change during the semester (ex: deadlines, exam materials), and that may serve as a basis for exam questions. Please follow the lecture attendance guidelines listed below.

1. **BE PUNCTUAL.** It is unprofessional and disruptive to be LATE. It can distract the instructor, as well as students who are trying to pay attention.
2. **BE RESPONSIBLE.** If you miss class, borrow someone's notes. Get a copy of handouts you missed (usually on our website). Do not bother the instructor.
3. **BE COURTEOUS.** Do not: put your feet up on a chair, conduct long or loud discussions with a neighbor, make disruptive noises, ask sarcastic questions, use a cell phone, check e-mail, read unassigned material, or do work for another class.
4. **BE RESPECTFUL.** If you have to come late to class, or leave early, clear this with the instructor ahead of time. Open and close doors, or move seats, quietly.
5. **BE PREPARED.** Always come to class prepared for discussion questions. Bring your handouts to every class. Check the online schedule to see what's next.

Lab Attendance, Participation and Assignments (20% of Final Grade)

Lab attendance and participation is strongly recommended. Computer software applications and design skills — ones that enable students to complete the major projects in this course — are primarily covered during lab sessions. Points can be earned in lab sessions two different ways — for attendance and for assignments. Thus, a student can earn as many as 200 total points for lab attendance and assignments. But each time a student misses lab or fails to complete an assignment properly, no points are earned.

Lecture attendance guidelines also apply during lab sessions, with these additional points:

1. DO NOT surf the Web or use e-mail during a required lab session.
2. DO NOT leave personal (or other) belongings in the lab.
3. DO NOT bring any food or drink into the lab.
4. Keep computers and work surfaces dry, clean and orderly.
5. Clean up your own mess (including print-outs) after working in the lab.
6. Use personal headphones if you plan to listen to music.

Click on “Rules,” on the course Web site (under “Course Info”), for further guidelines.

Written Exams (20% of Final Grade)

A student can earn as many as 200 total points by completing written exams (typically, two per semester). The instructor is not required to offer make-up exams. Students who are late to an exam may not be allowed to take the exam, or may have points deducted from their final score. If a make-up exam is given, points may still be deducted from a student’s final score, for missing the original exam. Also, students who miss an exam may be required to take a comprehensive final exam at the end of the semester.

Exams will consist of materials taken from course handouts, lectures (including visiting lectures), textbooks, lab sessions, readings and any other materials the instructor advises students to consult. Lecture materials may include lecture notes, audio, video and dvd clips, overhead transparencies, computer and PowerPoint presentations, and slide shows.

Design Projects (40% of Final Grade)

A student can earn as many as 400 total points by completing a series of design projects (typically, four per semester). Design projects are due at the beginning of a lecture, unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. A project list and examples of student work may be available for viewing on the course Web site.

Design Projects: Guidelines: ORIGINALITY

Student work must be original work. Although students are encouraged to discuss their work with others, students may only submit their own, original work for evaluation.

Design Projects: Guidelines: EXHIBITION

Student work may be exhibited. Projects and assignments submitted for evaluation in this course are subject to being exhibited, published or reproduced, on the course Web site or elsewhere, in print or digital form, for educational purposes only.

Design Projects: Guidelines: EVALUATION

FOLLOW THE RULES. Study project briefs carefully. Design projects (and other works of art), are inherently subjective. They resist attempts to evaluate them on a purely quantitative basis. Thus, neither hard work nor a record of high achievement in previous courses of study will guarantee any student a high grade on any project in this course.

In order to be fair, the instructor emphasizes quantitative aspects, such as attention to detail (e.g., following instructions and specifications) and pride of craft (e.g., precise trimming and mounting), often at the expense of qualitative aspects (e.g., creativity and exertion). Thus, a student's ability to FOLLOW THE RULES is weighed more heavily than anything else, when grading student work in this course.

Design Projects: Guidelines: IMAGES

The use of found images is permitted. This is an educational environment; therefore, students are permitted to use found images as part of design projects they create in this course, unless otherwise notified by the instructor. However, the use of original, student-generated images is still encouraged and preferred. And remember that finding the "right" image takes time. Start building a personal file of useful or relevant images today.

Design Projects: Letters of Explanation

A one page "Letter of Explanation," printed on student-designed letterhead (J336, Project 1), must accompany each major project. The purpose of the letter is to explain design ideas, decisions and methodologies, raise questions, comment on a project, or suggest a means of improving the project (or the course).

All written assignments must be typed, and printed from a computer. They must be neatly printed on good quality, clean, white paper. They should be succinct, error-free and carefully edited. Accuracy is required. Several points may be deducted for spelling, grammar or punctuation errors. Students should proofread all written materials before submission.

In addition, points may be deducted from a letter of explanation for such errors as: failure to sign a letter, failure to follow format specifications (correct instructor contact information, correct type font, size or style, adequate line spacing, adequate margins, date of submission, etc.) or failure to discuss the subject matter of the project.

Writing Assignments (10% of Final Grade)

A student can earn as many as 100 total points by completing a series of writing assignments (number varies per semester). The content of any writing assignment must be a student's original work. Topics, focus and length will be determined by the instructor.

All written assignments must be typed and printed from a computer. They must be neatly printed on good quality, clean, white paper. They should be succinct, error-free and carefully edited. Accuracy is required. Several points may be deducted for spelling, grammar or punctuation errors. Students should proofread all written materials before submission.

Creativity

Creativity is an inherent component of visual design. However, students who think they lack creative ability should not feel discouraged or intimidated. Any student sincerely interested in visual design, who consistently attends lecture and lab, pays close attention to details, follows project rules and specifications and asks meaningful questions will position themselves to earn the grade they desire in this course.

Late Projects and Assignments: Not Accepted

Late assignments (including: projects, essays and exams) will not be accepted or earn points. Late assignments will receive a grade of zero (0). Assignments are due at the beginning of lecture (or lab), unless otherwise indicated by the instructor. Meeting deadlines and paying attention to details are crucial aspects of visual design practice.

Make-ups, Redos and Extra Credit: Not Available

Opportunities to submit extra credit assignments or to make-up or redo assignments, projects or exams will not be made available. To earn a satisfactory grade, a student must strive to do good work, as determined by the instructor, based on published, accessible criteria, on every assignment, project and exam, the first time around.

Criticism

Like writing, effective design typically depends on editing and revision. As often as possible, this course will employ discussions and design critiques focused on student work-in-progress or finished work. The intention is to identify strengths and weaknesses, provide positive feedback and make suggestions for improvement. All criticism is intended to be constructive; the aim is to develop and improve visual design skills.

Papers and Exams: Property of the Instructor

Submission of a paper (i.e., writing assignment) or exam does not constitute public disclosure of ideas. Graded papers and exams may be kept by the instructor. Papers and exams may not be returned to students, but can be inspected, upon request.

Computer Literacy

Students will receive basic assistance in order to learn basic computer skills needed to complete this course. However, each student is responsible for learning how to use a Macintosh computer and assigned software programs. Resources are available elsewhere on campus to assist students in achieving the level of computing proficiency they desire.

Instructor Availability

The instructor is available to meet, briefly, during posted office hours, or by appointment. Contact the instructor first, by e-mail, in order to schedule an appointment. Students are welcome to discuss any issue, via e-mail, as long as they do so in a respectful manner.

Accommodations and Disabilities

Early in the semester, students with disabilities who need special accommodations should notify the instructor by presenting a letter prepared by the Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) Office. To ensure that the most appropriate accommodations can be provided, students should contact the SSD Office at 471-6259, or 471-4641 TTY, or visit Services for Students with Disabilities, at: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/ssd/>.

Scholastic Dishonesty and Plagiarism

The University defines academic dishonesty as cheating, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, falsifying academic records and any act designed to avoid participating honestly in the learning process. Scholastic dishonesty also includes, but is not limited to, provi-

ding false or misleading information to receive a postponement or an extension on a test, quiz, or other assignment, and submission of essentially the same written assignment (or creative project) for two courses without the prior permission of faculty members.

By accepting this syllabus and participating in the course, you have agreed to these guidelines and must adhere to them. Scholastic dishonesty damages both the student's learning experience and readiness for the future demands of work and career. Students who violate University rules on scholastic dishonesty are subject to disciplinary penalties, including the possibility of failure in the course and/ or dismissal from The University. For more info, visit Student Judicial Services at: <http://deanofstudents.utexas.edu/sjs/>.

Content Disclaimer

The instructor reserves the right to include written, visual and/ or audio content, as course material, that some students may find disturbing or offensive. Such materials will only be utilized for educational purposes, or in the interests of presenting a true and accurate picture of our visual design environment. For instance, the nude human form, slang or swear words, song lyrics, lines of prose or poetry, or images related to controversial topics (e.g., abortion, war, drug use) will be considered, in the context of this course, "fair use," both as elements of visual communication and as part of our visual environment.

Thoughts on Grades

Precise and consistent alignment, mounting and printing results are among the fundamental principles by which visual design presentations and products are defined and evaluated. Thus, the instructor reserves the right to deduct points, on any assignment or project, for alignment, mounting or printing errors — even if such details appear insignificant to some students. Such errors are no less significant to a design instructor than poorly cropped or out-of-focus photographs are to a photography instructor. As this is a Journalism class, the instructor also reserves the right to deduct points for spelling, grammar or punctuation errors.

The grading and evaluation process in this course generally places more emphasis on "following rules" than on "being creative." The skill and ability exhibited by most students enrolled in the School of Journalism who study visual design is such that they have not yet acquired sufficient understanding, practice or experience to enable them to focus primarily on "being creative" or "breaking rules." Students must first prove, repeatedly, that they understand and respect the rules of any discipline or profession they aspire to join, before attempting to break those rules.

A student who plans to graduate from the School of Journalism with a working knowledge of visual design principles and practices should not expect to be hired or retained as an employee whose job primarily involves "being creative" or "breaking rules." At this point in their career, a student's fundamental value to a prospective employer typically depends on the ability to follow rules and instructions, precisely and consistently. If they are fortunate enough to be employed to practice visual design, they will quickly discover that precision and competence are paramount in a professional environment.

Final grades will be posted 1-2 weeks after the last day of class. They are the result of precise calculation and careful consideration. They are not subject to debate, discussion or negotiation. Portfolios will also be made available for pick-up at that time. Typically, the instructor will email students to inform them when portfolios are ready for pick-up.

Educational Philosophy

Educational psychologist Carl Rogers noted: “You cannot teach anyone anything, you can only facilitate their learning.” The purpose of this course is to assist students who want or need to learn about visual and print design. What a student gets out of this course depends, in large part, on what they put into it. Visual design principles and practices are learned by making and discussing things. Lectures, projects, and other course materials provide students with learning opportunities; it is up to each student to make these count.

--

© 2004 Shawn M. McKinney