English

Spring 1999

Tuesdays: 10:00-11:30, ES1 350
Thursdays: 10:00-11:30, ML 109
And all other waking moments, everywhere

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Hours: Wednesdays and Thursdays 4:00-5:30

This course, whatever the title seems to mean, is primarily in document design, largely oriented around technical communication -- though both document and Technical Communication are broadly construed. All communicatively designed objects, from toasters to phone books, are documents to feed the omnivorous maw of 392a; all communication in the service of technology, from bubble gum to solid rocket boosters, is technical communication.

Our governing ideology will be that the meaning of life is clear, effective information transfer, from document (-designer) to audience. We're going to pretend that we can unproblematically isolate messages "behind" documents, and discuss ways to increase the efficiency of expressing those messages.

Shriver, Dynamics in Document Design

Course Participation 20%
Presentation 20% 1 June
Document Journal 30% 29 June
Group Project 30% 29 July

No late assignments will be accepted, no extensions will be granted, and no incompletes will be awarded, without very strong reasons.

In a really bad example of document design, the New York school system designed, produced, and circulated pencils bearing the slogan "too cool to do drugs". With sharpening, the pencils quickly tell the students that it's "cool to do drugs", and then simply "do drugs", and finally, they just say "drugs".

392a
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>class</th>
<th>topics</th>
<th>readings¹</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 may</td>
<td>hello; how are you?; i'm fine, thanks.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 may</td>
<td>workshop: resources &amp; web design</td>
<td>part one, chapter one</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 may</td>
<td>document design &amp; rhetoric</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13 may</td>
<td>workshop: business card design</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 may</td>
<td>document analysis</td>
<td>part two, chapter six</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 may</td>
<td>workshop: business card re-design</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 may</td>
<td>cooking with randy</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>27 may</td>
<td>workshop: group design</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>1 june</td>
<td>presentations</td>
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<tr>
<td>3 june</td>
<td>presentations</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8 june</td>
<td>marangraphics presentation</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 june</td>
<td>yet more group design</td>
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<tr>
<td>15 june</td>
<td>text as image</td>
<td>part two, chapter five</td>
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<tr>
<td>17 june</td>
<td>workshop</td>
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<tr>
<td>22 june</td>
<td>data arrays</td>
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<tr>
<td>24 june</td>
<td>workshop</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29 june</td>
<td>gazette / &amp; presentation; journals due</td>
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<tr>
<td>1 july</td>
<td>have a good canada day</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 july</td>
<td>workshop: journals due</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>8 july</td>
<td>production issues–colette nevin</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>13 july</td>
<td>group project think-tank</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>15 july</td>
<td>maps as documents</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>20 july</td>
<td>workshop</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 july</td>
<td>the whole enchilada</td>
<td>part two, chapter three</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 july</td>
<td>workshop</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>29 july</td>
<td>any questions? group projects due; participation memo due</td>
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</table>

¹this is a suggested schedule, so that, minimally, you can follow the lectures, contribute to discussions, and get through the key portions of the book by the end of the term. in a not-quite-perfect-but-with-more-time-and-opportunity-than-uw-often-affords world, you would read the whole book, right away, by tomorrow, and then reread the appropriate chapters as the topics came up. you probably can't manage that, but do read ahead if you can, and do re-read if you can. the entire book is valuable; it's also frustrating and bloated in many places, calling for tolerance and a sense of humour; ultimately, though once you become familiar with it, dynamics in document design is a tremendous design resource.
contribute to discussions, fulfill small assignments, and cooperate with others; be cheerful, thrifty, and brave.

notice that this grade is for course participation, not (just) class participation. that is, it's meant to reflect your engagement with the materials of the course, and with the other participants of the course. in addition to my own evaluation of your involvement and commitment, everyone else in the class will have the chance to comment on your participation, and i will take those comments seriously.

at my end, i have a merit/demerit policy. merit will be awarded primarily on the quality of participation: asking relevant questions; making relevant observations; complementing or developing someone else's contribution; and generally taking a constructive part in the class. quantity of participation is a positive factor to the extent that lots of quality contributions are somewhat preferable to a few quality contributions (but not to the extent of shutting out others). but calibre is much more important than volume. demerit will be assessed reluctantly, and only on the basis of repeated instances. the grounds for the demerit system are: absenteeism (you can't participate if you're not there); whispering, sniggering, or chatting while other people are addressing the class (or, especially, while other people are giving their presentations); or making lengthy, unfocused comments that draw away from the general thread of discussion.

do not miss this: you will get an automatic grade of f- for course participation if you do not submit a memo grading and commenting on everyone else's course participation. some people, obviously, you may not have any informed opinion of—they're quiet in class. you don't have any 392a-relevant contact with them outside of class—but for everyone you form an opinion of, assign them a participation grade and submit it with a few justificatory comments, something like:

fred derf c+ he was always talking, but didn't say much, and his comments seemed unduly negative.

wilma amliw a always helpful; very knowledgeable; constructive. i learned a lot from her analysis of repair manuals.

Dino onid -- he was quiet. i don't have an opinion about him.

? i'm not kidding.
go out and trap some documents. bring them home and mount them in the pages of a journal. comment upon them, astutely, sensitively, knowledgeably. i would advise, very strongly, that you not only start collecting your documents right away, but that you also start assembling the journal right away. a good schedule would be one-per-week, 10 may - 25 june, with a bit a cushion at the end.

think of the journal as a document-design problem. what's the best size? the best shape? the best material? the best layout? consider your resources. consider the topic. consider the documents and images that must be incorporated. consider the audience. it may be that you want to do it all on the web. it may be that an old-fashioned scrap book, or an engineering notebook, or a three-ring binder, suits your material and your interests most fully. it's up to you. but it should show some thought, not be slapped together.

six entries, around 500 words each. keep in mind that 392a construes "document" quite widely: cd cases, web pages, jeans labels, course syllabi, are all appropriate fodder for entries, as are standard-issue quick reference cards, user guides, or reference manuals. (for longer documents, reproduce relevant pages-index, table of contents, typical multilevel page, whatever--to illustrate those aspects of the document you want to comment on.) you can include more than one entry on the same document (one on navigation, for instance, and another on typography). images can also be drawn diversely--an icon, a photograph, a bus-route map. do not, however, include any entries on ads in your journal.

you will get a base-line grade of b just for completing and handing in the journal on time. you will get a zero for not completing the journal. think of it as a contract job: if you do the work, you get paid. if you don't, you don't. grades higher than b will be awarded for (1) the quality of your journal design, and (2) the quality of your analyses. if you find interesting documents embed them in a thoughtful design, and analyze them in sharp, knowledgeable, theoretically informed ways, you will do very well. discussions should demonstrate familiarity with the terminology and the concerns of the text and the course, but if you find them inadequate for a given analysis, feel free to innovate or adapt analytical methods.

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3 i'm not kidding.
pick something that interests you (for reasons of attraction or repulsion, or, I guess, both) and figure out what makes it tick. Then tell us. You'll need to pay attention to the rhetorical situation—which means, minimally, genre and audience—and the elements that carry the communicative freight of the message.

You can double up with your journal here: your presentation can (and probably should) be on one of the documents discussed in your journal.

Stand up and talk, gesticulate; the rest is up to you.

Assume as a common vocabulary and methodology the material in Schriver's Dynamics in Document Design.

You might want to prepare handouts. You might need an overhead. You might want to use a computer network. Make all arrangements beforehand.

It depends on the size of the class, but no more than ten minutes.

Oratorical brilliance will help you, and drooling incoherence will hurt you. But it's the 'content' I will attend to most closely, not the 'style'. And the features of content that will determine your grade are (1) the quality of the analysis, and (2) the relevance of both the document and (especially) your treatment of it to the concerns of the course.
the groups will be assigned by the end of May. You will have plenty of
time to develop your ideas and coordinate your efforts, but I expect that
time and effort to be reflected in the project.

**Necessary Qualities:**

"We need a strong individual who's also capable of being a team player. A
sense of humour is a must. They have to be adaptable to unusual and
stressful environments: humidity, heat, cramped, close quarters with no
privacy at all. They need good judgment and just a dash of self-
analysis—too much may lead to depression. We need someone with good
language skills, who thrives on cultural diversity and who has strong
social and interpersonal skills" that's Dr. Al Holland, the Chief NASA
psychologist, describing the appropriate personality for astronauts going
to Mars. It's not a 392A group-member description. Your requirements are
higher. You need all of that, and some design sense too.

You'll have to manage your time well; aside from some brief discussions
and possibly overlapping projects, no class or workshop time will be
allocated to the projects.

The topic is your choice, but it would be a very good idea to discuss it
with me before going ahead.

I encourage you very strongly to make this a real-world project. It's
going to have inevitably the taint of the transcript about it, since
we're all trapped on campus and you're trying to escape with a piece of
paper that makes prospective employers sit up and beg, if not lie down
and roll over. But try to find an existing programme, product, or place
that needs documentation, and supply it. If you sign contracts and
collect filthy lucre for this project outside of class, so much the
better.

A technical document. Period. The rest is completely up to you: in fact,
part of the assignment is to choose an appropriate format for the task or
object you document. You should include a brief rationale (yes, another
written object) with your project: in particular, you should specify the
audience that would use your document and the context in which it would
be used (are there other documents? Has the user been trained in some
way? Is it snowing?)—factors which are crucial for your design
decisions.

It depends on the genre, but if it runs much over ten pages, you've
probably chosen something too ambitious for the assignment.

By 13 July, you should have your genre and topic worked out. Come to
class, sit as a group, give us an outline, and we will kick ideas around
as a class.
your group will present your document to the class—what you did, why you did it, how it will change the world

given the focus of the course, design issues will be weighted most heavily, but i'll be assuming a fairly high level of writing competence, accuracy, and usability as well. half of your mark will come from your collaborator's assessments (see below).

everybody in the group must submit a memo assigning an individual grade for participation to every one else in the group, along with at least sixty words justifying that grade. if you do not submit this memo, you will get either an f- or an inc, at my discretion. 4

this memo should be similar to the course participation memo, with more specificity, something like:

he surprised the hell out of me. i always thought he was a bonehead, but he knows everything there is to know about granite, and provided virtually all the technical material. he worked very hard, especially on the last-minute layout problems, and was relentlessly encouraging to everyone. can we get him to solve the balkan crisis?

a complete washout. she missed meetings, fought with us about trivial issues (or, worse, matters we'd already decided) when she did show up, and blew her deadlines. in the end, we gave her some small jobs, writing some of the copy, but nobody was happy with that, and we had to group-edit it. if i meet her five yeras from now, and find that she graduated and got a stable job, i'll drop dead of apoplexy.

a good team player. he never seemed to go out of his way, and his contributions weren't particularly inspired. he pulled his weight, though, and brought his sections in on time. he clearly wanted the project to proceed, but was happy to let others do the main work.

4 i'm not kidding.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>dates</th>
<th>requirements</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>4 May</td>
<td>to be cheerful, thrifty, brave</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 July</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29 July</td>
<td>hand in participation memo.</td>
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</table>

**Checklist**

- c 2 June stand up and talk; gesticulate.

**Document Journal**

- (21 May) six entries, roughly 500 words each.
- (27 May)
- (4 June)
- (11 June)
- (18 June)
- (25 June)

- 29 June hand it in, please

**Group Project**

- 29 July rationale (group)
- evaluation memo (individual)
this syllabus is our contract. familiarize yourself with the details. i expect you to fulfill your requirements according to its specifications; i will fulfill mine. if you have any questions, make sure you ask.

familiarize yourself, too, with the technology available in ml 109 for our workshop sessions. there will be a brief introduction to the system and software in our first workshop, but after that, you're on your own: please do not expect to use class/workshop time to learn the software.

the first workshop, in which there will be a general introduction to the computing resources you have access to, and a brief introduction to web-site construction, is optional. if you're already comfortable with the computing resources, and either familiar with, or happy to remain oblivious of, web-site construction, you can stay home and trim your nails, eat bon-bons, watch the soaps. but after that session, treat the workshop sessions exactly as you would treat class time: your absence will be noted, as will your transgressions of the following two commandments.

1. Thou shalt not surf.

2. Thou shalt not read, neither shalt thou compose, email.

you should also know that, in the spirit of a more famous, and more numerous, collection of commandments, these two are also watched over by a wrathful and omnipresent deity. i can see your screens. here, for instance, is an e-mail message i saw last year:

Good morning, Sunshine. I hope you slept well. Sorry I wasn't awake to kiss you goodbye.

as it is the duty of the master to teach, so it is the duty of the pupil to show himself teachable. the two obligations are mutually indispensable. —quintilian