theories and practices of documentation
2:30 - 4:30, tuesdays, dwe 3522a; thursdays milo9

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hours: wednesdays, 1:00-3:30; thursdays 1:00-2:20; whenever you can catch me.

course epitome
this course is a course in document design. we will be talking about, pulling apart, and making documents.

we will proceed zoologically, looking at one little beast after another until we can figure out what they do, how they do it, and why they bother. but our motives are not benign. our motives are frankensteinian. once we have some primitive knowledge about a beastie, we will try to stitch one together ourselves and charge it up.

half the classes will be discussions (pulling apart), half will be workshops (stitching together).

required text
zip, nil, nada; but see next item

recommended text(s)
chapell & bringhurst, short history of the printed word
shriver, dynamics in document design
williams, the non-designers design book

requirements
course participation 20%
presentation 10% (30 may, 1 june)
solo project 20% (15 june)
document journals 20% (29 june)
group project 30% (26 july)

rules of the game
no late assignments will be accepted, no extensions will be granted, and no incompletes will be awarded, without very strong reasons.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>class</th>
<th>topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 may</td>
<td>hello; how are you?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 may</td>
<td>business cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 may</td>
<td>design kit bag</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 may</td>
<td>letterhead &amp; envelope</td>
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<tr>
<td>16 may</td>
<td>arboreal defecation</td>
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<tr>
<td>18 may</td>
<td>job card</td>
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<tr>
<td>23 may</td>
<td>job cards</td>
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<tr>
<td>25 may</td>
<td>quick reference</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 may</td>
<td>presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 june</td>
<td>presentations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 june</td>
<td>quick reference</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 june</td>
<td>a spread: cook book</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 june</td>
<td>cook books</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 june</td>
<td>map</td>
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<tr>
<td>20 june</td>
<td>maps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 june</td>
<td>a table</td>
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<tr>
<td>27 june</td>
<td>travel guides</td>
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<tr>
<td>29 june</td>
<td>a spread</td>
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<tr>
<td>4 july</td>
<td>kid's infobooks</td>
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<tr>
<td>6 july</td>
<td>a spread</td>
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<tr>
<td>11 july</td>
<td>group think tank</td>
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<tr>
<td>13 july</td>
<td>a chapter opening</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 july</td>
<td>novels</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 july</td>
<td>a resume</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25 july</td>
<td>group presentations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Course participation --20%

contribute to discussions (always bring a document du jour), fulfill small assignments (assignment workshops, document critiques, etc.), and cooperate with others; be cheerful, thrifty, and brave.

How you make the grade

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; being cheerful, thrifty, and brave. 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 (a.k.a., verbal wanking).

I want some paper from you

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 C+ he was always talking, but didn’t say much, and his comments seemed unduly negative.

Derk

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

Amliw

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

Onid
**Solo Assignment--20%**

**Topic**

your choice, but for your own sanity, it's best to choose something already familiar to you. you might even choose something familiar to virtually everybody—shoveling snow, taking out the trash, decanting the perfect glass of beer—but you have to provide a realistic context: when would instructions for shoveling snow be necessary, for what audience, in what context, etc.?

**Format**

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. but a quick reference card or job card is probably the most manageable.

you should include a brief rationale 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.

**Length**

it depends on the genre, but if it runs much over ten pages, you're probably getting too ambitious for the assignment.

**How You Make the Grade**

given the focus of the course, design issues and graphic incorporation will be weighted most heavily, but i'll be assuming a fairly high level of writing competence as well.
presentation—10%

do this

pick some document 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 of the document—which means, minimally, genre and audience—and the elements that carry the communicative freight of the message. do not use an ad as your document (yes, they are documents, but using them overlaps too much with other rpw courses).

friendly advice

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

length

no more than ten minutes.

delivery

stand up and talk, gesticulate.

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

how you make the grade

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.
do this

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.

journal design

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.

length

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.

how you make the grade

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.
Group Assignment -- 30%

Groups

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 humor 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.

Get Real

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.

What Is It

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.
More on ... group assignment

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

think tanking
by 11 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.

presentation
your group will present your document to the class—what you did, why you did it, how it will change the world

Making the grade
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).

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

fred    a+
derf     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?

wilma   f-
amliw    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 years from now, and find that she graduated and got a stable job, i'll drop dead of apoplexy.

dino    b
onid     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

*
asserted notes

why you have all of this paper

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: please do not expect to use class/workshop time to learn the software.

how to conduct yourself in the room with many microsofted machines

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 commit 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.
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listen to quintilian

quoth he: 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.
### Checklist

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course participation</th>
<th>dates</th>
<th>requirements</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2 May</td>
<td>be cheerful, thrifty, brave</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 July</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 July</td>
<td>hand in participation memo.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solo project</td>
<td>15 June</td>
<td>hand in project and rationale.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Class presentation</td>
<td>30 May, 1 June</td>
<td>stand up and talk; gesticulate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Document journal</td>
<td>(12 May)</td>
<td>six entries, roughly 500 words each.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(19 May)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td>(26 May)</td>
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<td>(3 June)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>(10 June)</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>(17 June)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>26 June</td>
<td>hand it in, please</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group project</td>
<td>13 July</td>
<td>think-tank; come prepared to discuss.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>25 July</td>
<td>document (group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rationale (group)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>evaluation memo (individual)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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