Welcome to English 408c Rhetoric of Digital Design!

Please feel free to contact me with any concerns or questions you have about the class, the readings, or the assignments. I will (normally) be in my office during the hours noted, and I’m always very happy to have students drop by during these times, or by appointment at other times. Beyond office hours, contact is probably best initiated via email. I will read your emails within one day, and will try to respond within two business days.

Note: I’m on the department’s Appointments Committee, and we are currently working to hire a new colleague. We will be interviewing four candidates in January, and this may mean I have to reschedule office hours. I’m sorry for the inconvenience.

Course description:

This course will address some of the basic tools and techniques for digital media projects—composition, text, colour, graphics, site design, multimedia, usability, interactivity—as well as some of the technical and structural issues faced by many developers of academic and commercial digital media publications. One of our key concerns will be the fundamentals of design—how best to present complex information (the kind that scholarly as well as commercial digital work tends to produce) in accessible, appropriate, and possibly even beautiful ways. Along the way, we will reference the critical literature on digital design and practice, humanities computing, and information design and delivery. Of course we’ll be working with design software: we will do extensive workshops in PhotoShop, Fireworks, Dreamweaver, InDesign, GarageBand, and Flash or iMovie.

Course meeting times

The course meets twice weekly, Monday and Wednesday from 1:00 until 2:30pm, in the new computer lab in East Campus Hall, 1280. I know it’s a bit of a hike to get there from campus: if you can (that is, if you’re not rushing from another class, say, in PAS) take this extra distance into account when estimating your travel time. We have a lot to cover in class and we need to start on time.
Required and Recommended texts

The following texts are required for this course. They are available at the University Bookstore in South Campus Hall now. Please buy them, and bring them to class as the assigned readings dictate.


The course has a significant ‘digital courseware’ component on the class website—here you will find software tutorials, lecture notes, and examples galore. We will often be reading pieces accessible online: be sure to print copies to bring to class, or take notes from which you can make clear reference to the text. Links to these texts are provided from the website listed in the contact information above. Many offer essential visual examples of design concepts and will greatly help you to understand the material. Be sure to follow the links!

Assignments and Mark Distribution

The following are the graded components of the course:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
<th>Due Date</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation / Attendance</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>(ongoing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Critique Assignment</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>(sign up sheet)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Design Assignments (5)</td>
<td>50%</td>
<td>(ongoing)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Project</td>
<td>25%</td>
<td>31 March</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Project Proposal</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td>22 February</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Progress report/mockup</td>
<td>(10%)</td>
<td>10 March</td>
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Participation / Attendance: Your participation in this course will be measured by three factors: whether you come to class (attendance sheets), whether you are prepared to participate (in-class critiques, productivity during in-class exercises), and the quality of this participation (effort as well as accomplishment). As far as attendance is concerned, you will lose one point for each unexplained absence from class. Participation will be assessed on a positive basis, as described above—thoughtful comments and energetic completion of in-class work trump doodling and email-checking.
Critique Assignment: You will write a short paper (3 pages, about 750 words) critiquing a digital design resource according to the principles of good design discussed in class and in the readings, examining elements such as composition, use of colour, typography, photographs, usability or universal design, and gestalt. A detailed handout will lay out specific expectations of content and format. You will present a five minute summary of this critique to the class. You will sign up for this presentation during the first week of class.

Design Assignments (5): We’re always working on something specific: exercises from the textbook, or stuff that I make up for you to do. In-class exercises will allow you to practice on real problems, and five of these in-class exercises will be handed in via email for assessment. Each will be worth 10% of your final grade.

Final Project: Your final project will take the form of a carefully planned and instantiated digital design. Your project might be a newsletter, a poster, a website, a database, a user interface, an animation, or a hypertext; no matter what the medium, it will have a clear purpose, topic, and audience. You will be assessed on how well the form and content of your project serves the goals articulated in your proposal. The digital component will be presented to the class in demo form in Week 12; the to-be-graded version will comprise a disk containing the digital materials, as well as a short paper describing the rationale (design decisions and technical choices). The project might be a solo or a group undertaking, depending on the scale of the proposal. A detailed handout will more comprehensively explain what is required of your project.

Project Proposal: The project proposal is an essential component of the term’s work; digital design work proceeds from careful re-iterations of an original goal and plan on paper, to careful re-iterations of the instantiation of this goal and plan in digital form. Without a clear goal worked out and planned on paper, you’ll never manage to get a digital project done. This proposal, then, will lay out the purpose and topic of your final project, and suggest the technologies to be used to construct it, as well as a timeline for the accomplishment of project milestones.

Progress Report: Several weeks before the projects are due, you will provide me with a report detailing your progress—this assignment is meant to ensure that you are devoting adequate time to the project well in advance of the deadline, and will also have the happy effect of giving you time to recover from technical problems or insoluble design issues. The progress report is not graded, but if you do not complete it, you will lose 10% from your final project grade.

Absence and Late Policy

Absence from class requires advance permission: I’m always happier to hear about an absence or a conflict earlier rather than later. Absences should have compelling reasons:
“I’m really busy with assignments in all my other courses” is not a legitimate excuse, for example. Medical absences must be documented by a doctor’s note.

Assignments are due in the form and at the time/location specified on the assignment sheets—please take note of this.

Rights and Responsibilities

Every member of this class— instructors as well as students—has rights and responsibilities to ensure a pleasant and productive experience for all. We are all answerable to University policies governing ethical behaviour (Policy 33) and academic integrity (Policy 71), as well as to those outlining grievance or dispute procedures (Policy 70). Here are some more specific expectations for this course:

You will:

- know the university policies that govern your behaviour
- attend all scheduled classes
- arrive prepared: with assigned reading and writing completed, and with the textbook and/or coursepack in hand
- participate actively in your own learning, while respecting the rights of others to learn as well: this means active listening as well as active speaking
- give thoughtful consideration to instructor feedback on written and oral work

I will:

- adhere to the university policies that govern my behaviour
- attend all scheduled classes
- make myself available for consultation in person and over email
- return assignments of 1 page or less within one week, and all others within 2 weeks
- provide helpful and respectful feedback on student work

A Note from the Faculty of Arts

Academic Integrity:

**Academic Integrity:** In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility.

**Discipline:** A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing academic offences, and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about
“rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the Undergraduate Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71 - Student Discipline, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm

Appeals: A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm

Academic Integrity website (Arts): http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/arts/ugrad/academic_responsibility.html

Academic Integrity Office (UW): http://uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/

Accommodation for Students with Disabilities:

Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term.
Class Schedule

What is ‘digital design’

4 January:
• Introduction, key concepts

6 January:
• Read: course website, “What is digital design?”
• Workshop: examining various digital media projects; CS4 “Bridge Lesson 1”
• Task: web site critique; what is digital media

Design basics: Text, Colour, Graphics

11 January: Theory of Composition
• Read: White, Dondis excerpts in coursepak; course website “Composition”
• Workshop: Deciphering connotative and denotative meaning in visual images
• Task: create visual message … on paper

13 January: Text and Colour
• Read: course website “Colour”; WSG “Typography”; Williams, Tollett in coursepak
• Workshop: building sensible graphics with Fireworks; CS4 “Fireworks Lesson 1”
• Task: supply banner graphics for provided web page

Design basics: Usable and doable

18 January:
• Read: WSG “Universal Usability”, “Process”
• Workshop: evaluate the usability of several web resources
• Task: describe how to turn usability FAIL into usability WIN

Design basics: Photography

20 January:
• Read: course website “Photography”; WSG “Graphics”
• Workshop: CS4 “Photoshop Lesson 1”, “Photoshop Lesson 2”
• Task: start taking pictures …

25 January:
• Read: course website “Digital Photography”
• Workshop: CS4 “Photoshop Lesson 3”, “Photoshop Lesson 4”
• Task: keep taking pictures …
27 January:
• **Workshop:** CS4 “Photoshop Lesson 5”, “Photoshop Lesson 6”
• **Task:** manipulate and optimize a photo for web delivery

1 February:
• **Read:** course website “Photoshopping controversies”
• **Workshop:** manipulate your own photos, create a mashup, whatever
• **Task:** Party Invitation using colour, text, photo, etc.

**Designing for the Web**

3 February:
• **Read:** WSG “Information Architecture”
• **Workshop:** CS4 “Dreamweaver Lesson 1”, “Dreamweaver Lesson 2”
• **Task:** personal web portfolio

8 February:
• **Read:** WSG “Interface Design”
• **Workshop:** CS4 “Dreamweaver Lesson 3”
• **Task:** personal web portfolio

10 February
• **Read:** WSG “Site Structure”
• **Workshop:** CS4 “Dreamweaver Lesson 4”
• **Task:** personal web portfolio

[insert Reading Week here]

22 February:
• **Read:** WSG “Page Structure” and “Page Design”
• **Workshop:** CS4 “Dreamweaver Lesson 5”
• **Task:** can you guess? PERSONAL WEB PORTFOLIO!

**Designing for Multimedia**

iMovie OR Flash: it’s class choice …

24 February
• **Read:** WSG “Multimedia”
1 March:
  • ???

Garageband and podcasting

3 March:
  • Read: course website “Podcast”
  • Workshop: Recording voice, layering tracks

8 March:
  • Workshop: Publishing a podcast
  • Task: create finished audio file for web use

Web forms and such

10 March:
  • Read: WSG “Forms and Applications”
  • Workshop: Adding forms to Dreamweaver pages; using survey widgets
  • Task: Create an online form or survey

Designing for the Page

15 March:
  • Read: WSG “Editorial Style”; Laurel, Hayles from coursepak
  • Workshop: CS4 “InDesign Lesson 1”, “InDesign Lesson 2”

17 March:
  • Read: course website “Print in the Digital Age”
  • Workshop: CS4 “InDesign Lesson 3”, “InDesign Lesson 4”

22 March:
  • Workshop: CS4 “InDesign Lesson 5”
  • Task: layout a simple newsletter with InDesign

Projects
24 March:
  • Read: Buchanan from coursepak
  • Workshop: work on your projects in class. You’re welcome

29 March:
  • Workshop: work on your projects in class. You’re welcome
31 March:
- **Present**: 5 minutes presentation of your final project.