INTRODUCTION

Communicating through images is different than communicating with words. In this introductory visual communication course, we will explore how the senses shape our understanding of the visual world in order to understand how perceptual principles can be translated into design principles. By understanding how the eye and brain work together to derive meaning from images, we will be able to create visual designs that better communicate ideas and information.

In the first part of the course, we will focus on perception and the mechanisms used by the brain to make sense of visual information such as described by Gestalt theory. We will use these pattern recognition mechanisms to introduce and experiment with basic graphic design, image manipulation, typography, and color theory. The second part of the course will focus on visualizing information. Visualizing information is the process by which non-visual information, such as phenomena and abstract data, is transformed into visual messages. This process requires abstraction and simplification in order to explain how something works, rather than how something looks. Examples of this include diagrams, schematics, and maps among others. For the final part of the course we will focus on organizing visual information to portray complex and multi-layered stories. We will study the principles by which effective infographics tell rich stories with data, and experiment with layout design to organize a cohesive reading of visual information for a visual book or portfolio of creative work.

Learning in this course will occur mostly from the practice and experimentation of principles and techniques presented in lectures. This course will integrate theory and the use of digital technology, allowing you to develop the skills necessary to practice and test your understanding of the subject. In the lecture component of the course, we will test some of the design principles presented in class through in-class exercises using applications for iPads. During the workshop session, students will become familiar with the Adobe software to create their own designs that incorporate the subjects covered in class.
LEARNING OBJECTIVES
Upon completion of this course, you will be able to:

- Understand how the eye and brain work to derive meaning from visual cues
- Translate perceptual principles into design principles for the display of graphic information
- Understand the role of color, typography, and composition in graphic design
- Develop diagrams, schematics and maps to describe non-visual information
- Organize visual information through effective layout design
- Synthesize and organize information through infographics
- Create a cohesive visual book or portfolio conveying a thesis or a body of research.
- Work fluently using Adobe Photoshop, Illustrator and InDesign.

MAJOR TOPICS:
The course will be divided into three main sections. Each section will include the presentation of concepts, theories, and examples of visual communication, the introduction to digital software skills, and the practical application of the concepts learned through weekly exercises. Below is a general description of each of the three sections and some of the topics, and skills that will be covered and developed in each of them.

1. Perception and Design
In this part of the course we will study how the human eye and brain work together to derive meaning from visual cues and navigate a visual world. We will put into practice perceptual principles like pre-attentive features and principles derived from Gestalt theory to experiment with basic graphic design techniques.

Topics:
- How we see: sight, perception & cognition
- Preattentive features of the brain
- Gestalt theory
- Color theory
- Introduction to typography

Digital skills:
- Adobe Photoshop: image manipulation, contrast, color manipulation
- Adobe Illustrator: Basic drawing skills, manipulation of typography

2. Visualizing Information
The process of making non-visual information visible such as processes and data is a way of extending the ability of the eye and the brain to perceive what is beyond their natural reach. In this section we will explore multiple ways of simplifying and abstracting information to present it in a visual form.

Topics:
- Diagrams
- Graphs
- Schematics
- Maps

Digital skills:
- Adobe Illustrator: diagramming, map-making and graphing data.
3. Organizing Visual Information
In this last part of the course, we will focus on the organization of complex and multi-layered messages using visual media. We will explore the elements behind successful layout, infographics and portfolio design.

**Topics:**
- Layout
- Grids
- Infographics
- Portfolio Design

**Digital skills:**
- Adobe InDesign: page layout, poster and book design

**TEXTBOOK, MATERIALS & EQUIPMENT**
This course does not require a textbook. Resources will be posted on the course’s Moodle page and Google Drive.

iPads will be provided for in-class use. However, due to their limited amount, you may be asked to find a partner to share them in class. You will be required to fill a sign-in sheet, which will determine the iPad that you will use throughout the semester. You are responsible for the proper use of your assigned iPad and will be asked to return it at the end of class. You are also encouraged to use your personal iPad. In order for it to be used effectively in class, you must install the following apps:
- Google Drive
- Explain Everything Classic
- Spectrum for iOS
- Adobe Photoshop Express
- Vizable
- Graphic

You are encouraged to purchase a stylus to use with your iPad, but it is not required.

The workshop component of the course will be held in the computer labs in Morrill III, Room 212. The computers are equipped with the necessary Adobe Creative Suite software (Photoshop, Illustrator, and InDesign) for you to use. You are welcome to bring your own laptop to work during the workshops.

In order to complete homework assignments, you will be required to access a computer with the Adobe Creative Suite software outside of class hours. The university has several computer classrooms throughout campus including the DuBois Library Learning Commons, and room 444 of the Fine Arts Center. For a full list of classrooms, visit: http://www.umass.edu/it/computer-classrooms/it-computer-classroom-locations

**COURSEWORK**
The course work for this class consists of digital skills assignments, class participation, and a final portfolio or book project.

**DIGITAL SKILLS ASSIGNMENTS:**
Each week, an assignment will be given for students to complete individually. The assignment will incorporate the topic covered during the lecture course and require the implementation of the digital media skills learned during the workshop. Assignments will be given on Thursdays and will be due by midnight on the following Monday to be discussed and viewed publicly on Tuesday’s class. All assignments must be turned in digitally on the course’s Google Drive.

**IN-CLASS EXERCISES & CLASS PARTICIPATION:**
**App exercises:** The lecture component of the course will ask students to use iPads provided by the Experimental Classroom for use in in-class exercises. These exercises will test the concepts presented in class and contribute to class discussion. All work done in class must be uploaded to the “Class Work” folder on Google Drive in order for the students to receive credit for their work.
Instagram homework: Students will be asked to use Instagram to submit examples of visual communication pertinent to the class subject on a weekly or biweekly basis.

Class Participation: Participating in class, during the lecture and workshop, is an essential component to create a successful learning environment. Learning from your peers, commenting on other’s works, and contributing to class discussion is expected as essential class participation in this course.

FINAL PROJECT - PORTFOLIO, BOOK, OR EXHIBIT: The final project will allow students to incorporate the learning from the course into a portfolio, book or exhibit displaying the work created in the class. Students are encouraged to select a topic of interest at the beginning of the semester and use the class assignments to create a body of work supporting the topic. Research or creative work from previous or current courses is an ideal subject to further develop with this project. Please discuss your ideas with the instructor early in the semester.

EVALUATION CRITERIA: NO PROJECTS WILL BE ACCEPTED LATE AND NO “INCOMPLETE” GRADES WILL BE GIVEN. All projects are due as scheduled regardless of their level of completion.

NO FINAL GRADES WILL BE SUBMITTED UNTIL DIGITAL DOCUMENTATION OF THE WORK HAS BEEN SUBMITTED. See Documentation of Coursework.

Students will receive a grade for each project based on the following categories:

- INCORPORATION OF PRINCIPLES PRESENTED: each project must convey the understanding of the design principles covered in class. Students are encouraged to submit more than one version of their homework, as a way to show their effort in developing acute visual communication skills.
- CREATIVITY: risk-taking, and originality will be rewarded as a way to engage the viewer.
- DIGITAL SKILLS: the work must demonstrate competency in using the software provided. The instructor may require students to submit original files, or develop a simple project in front of the class or peers to demonstrate the student’s skill level with the software.

WORK IN THIS CLASS IS PUBLIC
All the work in the class will be seen and discussed publicly. We use this as a way to have interesting discussion, to learn from others, and most importantly to test the efficacy of the graphic communication presented. The goal of this interaction is to gain as much feedback, and to test how your ideas are perceived and interpreted by others.

LATENESS AND ABSENCES
Class and workshops starts promptly at their schedule time. Persistent late arrivals will negatively affect your grade. More than TWO unexcused absences will reduce your final grade by ½ letter grade. Being absent from class more than THREE times without written excuse, will result in a failing grade.

DOCUMENTATION OF COURSEWORK
All your work from the course needs to be digitally recorded as a PDF file and submitted to the course Google Drive. Occasionally, the instructor may request that you save your work in its original format. Please make sure to label your files following the example below. Failure to do so will result in a lower letter grade.

LASTNAME_ASSIGNMENT NUMBER.PDF
ARAGON_3.PDF
GRADING & GRADING SCALE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ASSIGNMENT</th>
<th>WEIGHT</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DIGITAL SKILLS ASSIGNMENTS</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASS PARTICIPATION</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FINAL PROJECT</td>
<td>30%</td>
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Marginal work D
- Student exhibits difficulty in demonstrating understanding of the issues and concepts presented in the assignments.
- Student misses or leaves class sessions early without notice or repeatedly comes late to class.

Competent work C
- The work addresses all the issues presented in the assignments, demonstrating a basic understanding of the subject.
- Student occasionally contributes to class discussions and is occasionally enthusiastic about assignments and class work.

Notable work B
- The work addresses and expands upon the issues presented in the assignments.
- Student demonstrates understanding of issues, and exhibits strong competence in digital skills.
- Student actively participates in group discussions, demonstrating enthusiasm about the subjects presented in class.

Excellent work A
- The work expands upon the subject presented in class by discovering and proposing issues that help enhance the work.
- Student engages in independent and self-motivated research and testing of ideas.
- Student demonstrates superior ability in digital skills, rendering key concepts visible to a wide public audience.
- Student actively participates and proposes a critical dialogue in class discussions.

EXPECTATIONS:
All work should be the product of the individual student. Extensions for medical reasons or family emergencies should be requested as soon after the event as possible and in advance of the deadline, and should be supported by proper documentation. For information about academic honesty:
http://www.umass.edu/ombuds/pdf/acadhonestyguideforstudents.pdf

ACCOMODATION FOR DISABILITIES:
Students with documented disabilities who require accommodations should make an appointment to speak with the professor, and if needed, appropriate departmental staff.

CLASS SCHEDULE*
May be subject to change

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK</th>
<th>SUBJECT</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9/6</td>
<td>The eye and the brain: how we see</td>
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<td>9/13</td>
<td>Perceptual theories: Gestalt</td>
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<tr>
<td>9/20</td>
<td>Graphic Design</td>
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<td>9/27</td>
<td>Color</td>
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RESOURCES
Excerpts from the following books will be used for class discussion.