

08:30-09:50

tuesdays, thursdays

ML 117

moi

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hours: 8:00 - 9:20, mondays and wednesdays; 10:00-11:00, tuesdays

course epitome

this course is a course in information design. we will be talking about, pulling apart, and making packets of information (a.k.a., 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. they are frankensteinian. once we have some primitive knowledge about a beastie, we will try to stitch one together ourselves and hook up the lightning rods.

required text

edward tufte, envisioning information, graphics press 1990.

recommended text

allison goodman, 7 essentials of graphic design, f+w press 2001.

requirements

course participation	20%	
presentation	10%	(5, 7, 12 october)
solo project	20%	(2 november)
document journals	20%	(18 november)
group project	30%	(2 december)

rules of the game

don't miss this (some people do, and they have unhappy surprises): no late assignments will be accepted, no extensions will be granted, and no incompletes will be awarded, without very strong reasons.

<i>class</i>	<i>topics</i>
14 september	hello; how are you?
16 september	information design
21 september	maps
23 september	gestalt principles, documents
28 september	type
30 september	space, grids
5 october	<i>presentations</i>
7 october	
12 october	
14 october	weight
19 october	colour
21 october	<i>peer review</i>
26 october	quick references
28 october	job cards
2 november	travel guides <i>solo projects due</i>
4 november	cook books
9 november	logos, identity
11 november	data arrays
16 november	novels
18 november	novels <i>journals due</i>
23 november	<i>group think tank</i>
25 november	comics
30 november	voice interfaces
2 december	<i>group presentations</i>
1 december	<i>projects due, participation memos due (group and course)</i>

course participation

contribute to discussions, and coöperate with others (conspicuously including the peer review sessions, student presentations, and the group think tank); be cheerful, thrifty, and brave.

making the grade

notice that this grade is for course participation, not (just) class participation. it is 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 a goodly measure of quality contributions are preferable to only a few quality contributions (but certqinly not to the extent of shutting out others). but calibre is 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 talking to 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 beyond their class presentation—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. by the way, the fact you don't have much to say about class members reflects at least partially on your own engagement with the course. your evaluations should look something like this:

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. his presentation made no impact on me.

peer review

by 7 october, you will have a peer match-up (on the web site): exchange project proposals with your peer reviewer by 18 october; look over the one you get with a critical eye, and your design sensibilities ratcheted up; on 21 october come prepared to discuss your mutual evaluations.

information design

solo assignment

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

an information-rich 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; instructional information is often a good bet—for a manageable challenge, and testable success. but quick reference (or job) cards, brochures, and other brief projects are perhaps the most tractable. if you choose something longer (say, a cookbook), you should absolutely not try to provide a final version, just a design spec with representative elements (e.g., table of contents, a chapter head, a recipe spread, an index sample).

format

you should include a brief rationale with your project: in particular, you should specify the audience that would use your document, the purpose for which they would use it, 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.

proposal

prepare a project proposal (any structure you choose, and any medium you choose, is fine: it's your peer you have to satisfy, not me), and get it both to your peer reviewer and to me by 18 october.

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 and graphic competence as well.

this is a learning project. i care more about what you get out of the project, in terms of understanding information design, and i mark these projects very critically.

presentation

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, audience, purpose, and context—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. the hook will come out.

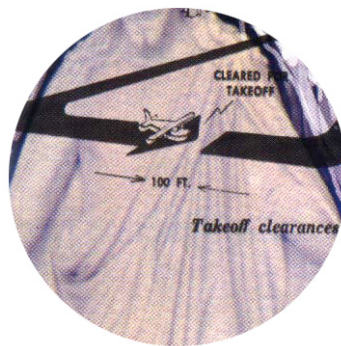
delivery

stand up and talk, gesticulate.

you might want to prepare handouts. you might need an overhead. you might want to use a computer network or send me a pdf or pps file to use on my machine. make all arrangements beforehand.

making 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. repeat after me "audience, purpose, and context."



information design

*document journal**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, 8 october - 12 november, with a bit a cushion at the end.

journal design

think of the journal as an information-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 web page, or a pdf file, 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.

making 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 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 from other courses, texts, experiences. just remember your audience (chiefly, me, though i encourage you to share them as well): if you delve into ancient chinese semiotics, define your terms.

group assignment

groups

the groups will be assigned by early november. you will have a month or so to develop your ideas and coördinate 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 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

an information-rich 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.

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 23 november, 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.

information design

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 and graphic competence, reliability, and usability as well. half of your mark will come from your collaborator's assessments (see below).

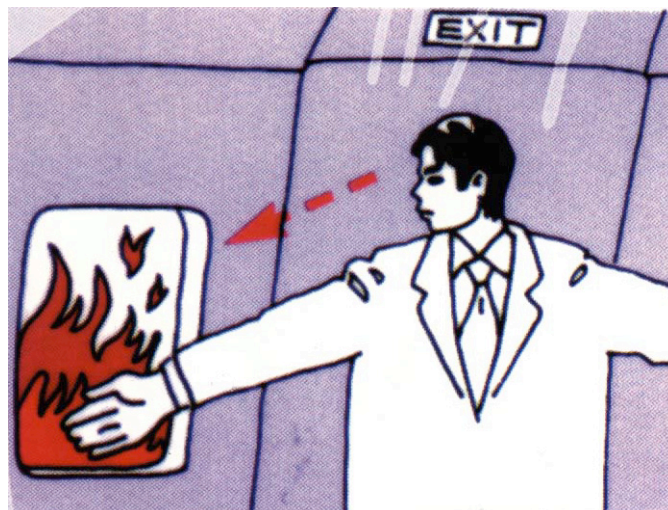
mutual assessment

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- for this project or an inc for the course, at my discretion. this memo should be similar to the course participation memo, with more specificity, something like:

fred a+ he surprised the hell out of me. i always thought he was a bonehead, but he knows everything there is to
derf 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 broker peace deals in the middle east?

wilma f- a complete washout. she missed meetings, fought with us about trivial issues (or, worse, matters we'd
amliw 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 a good team player. he never seemed to go out of his way, and his contributions weren't particularly
onid 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.

*information design*

assorted notes

why you have all of this information

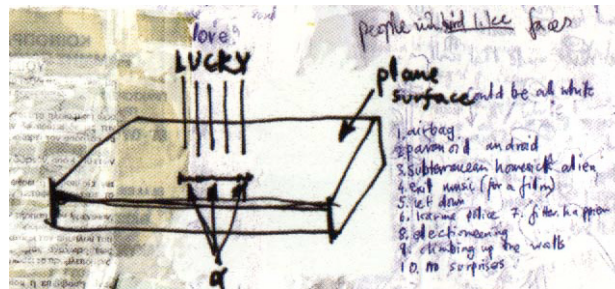
this syllabus is our contract. familiarize yourself with the details. i expect you to fulfill your requirements according to its specifications; i will fulfill mine. if you have any questions, make sure you ask.

no food or drink

sorry, but one of the conditions for using ml 117 is that we can't have any food or drink, not even water. the equipment is too expensive, and even cleaning it is evidently a major expense.

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

	dates	requirements	
course participation	14 september		<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	to	be cheerful, thrifty, brave	<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	30 november		<input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/> <input type="checkbox"/>
	1 december	hand in participation memo.	<input type="checkbox"/>
class presentation	5, 7, 12 october	stand up and talk; gesticulate.	<input type="checkbox"/>
solo project	21 october	proposal to peer reviewer and prof	<input type="checkbox"/>
	2 november	hand in project and rationale.	<input type="checkbox"/>
document journal	(8 october)		<input type="checkbox"/>
	(15 october)		<input type="checkbox"/>
	(22 october)		<input type="checkbox"/>
	(29 october)	six entries, roughly 500 words each.	<input type="checkbox"/>
	(5 november)		<input type="checkbox"/>
	(12 november)		<input type="checkbox"/>
	18 november	hand it in, please	<input type="checkbox"/>
group project	23 november	think-tank; come prepared to discuss.	<input type="checkbox"/>
		document (group)	<input type="checkbox"/>
	1 december	rationale (group)	<input type="checkbox"/>
		evaluation memo (individual)	<input type="checkbox"/>