Introduction to Graphic Design
Typography for Print and Video

Session A
June 7—July 9
* The entire course will meet online

Course Description

This studio course will introduce you to graphic design as a discipline and a practice. The class will focus on the various ways design functions—how visual communication takes form and is recognized by an audience. We will learn and use design principles and processes, and begin to understand the context and impact of graphic design.

This class is taught through a series of weekly studio assignments, both during class and outside meeting times. Each week, we will discuss your work in group critiques and analyze assigned readings. There will also be occasional workshops, lectures, and presentations.

We will focus on developing the ability to skillfully create and manipulate core graphic elements, such as type and image. We’ll practice how to translate ideas, information, and emotions into meaningful and evocative visual expressions. We’ll investigate the nature and use of key visual tools such as composition, color, contrast, hierarchy, scale, rhythm, and visual metaphor.

To help foster an appreciation of craft and materials and their relationship to visual form, as well as to develop a broad visual vocabulary, in the first half of the class we’ll work primarily with abstract shape and form. We’ll gradually transition to using letters and words, exploring typography at both reading and display scales. Through a series of interrelated, progressively complex assignments, you’ll develop a process intended to help you create a body of accomplished visual work, a vocabulary for critically engaging that work, and a better understanding of the discipline as a whole, providing a strong foundation for more advanced study and skill development.

Goals

— Obtain an understanding of the relationship between form and content.
— Ability to describe the rationale and logic behind design decisions.
— Understand how to identify and communicate to a specific audience.
— Apply a reflective and iterative process.
— Develop an ability for self and group critique.
— Situate your work within the context of historical and contemporary graphic design.

Objectives

Upon completion of the course, students will be able to:

— Demonstrate a foundational understanding of graphic principles and techniques (composition, hierarchy, structure).
— Demonstrate a design process that incorporates research methods, iteration, and feedback.
— Articulate the role of design or the designer while gaining exposure to a variety of historical and contemporary working designers, their philosophies, and working methodologies.
— Develop an individual design process.
Course Format

Class sessions will be structured around group critiques, reading discussions, and informal presentations, with occasional guest critics.

Critiques

Each student should be prepared to present visual progress to the class every week. You should also be ready to offer constructive criticism to peers, on both concept and form.

Reading and Class Discussion

Readings will be required each week. Students are expected to come to class having read the material prior to class and be prepared to participate when we have class discussions.

Writing

In addition, every week students will write short posts (at least 300 words) on at least one of the readings. You may not use the first person in your writing.

Design Club (Show and Tell)

Each week, post a piece of graphic design that you appreciate on our shared class website. There will be different prompts each week (specific formats like books or websites, or specific subjects, like identity design or political advocacy). While part of your appreciation can be about the content, you should be prepared to dissect the form of the piece — design details like typography, layout, production techniques, etc.

In-class exercises

In the beginning weeks, we'll do in-class exercises on various design principles. Be prepared to work in Adobe or Figma during class. Occasionally, I'll also give tutorials on software for more in-depth training specific to assignments. However this class is not predicated on learning software and you'll be partly responsible for teaching yourselves.

Presentations

1. Each student will be required to give a class presentation on a historical or contemporary designer or studio. These screen-based presentations should be 15 minutes long, and showcase visual documentation of their design approach (no text slides allowed).

2. At the class final critique, you will also be evaluated for your presentation format. Prioritize presenting visual content (instead of textual descriptions). How you document, compile, and share your work with the class should be just as considered as the final design. What is the best format or tool? What is shown on screen and how do you verbally describe your work?
Grading

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Projects and participation are evaluated according to the following criteria:

Projects

- Ability to translate conceptual ideas into visual forms or outputs.
- Commitment to in-depth research and an iterative process.
- Receptiveness to feedback.
- Prolific output and inquisitiveness that expands beyond the assignment.
- Designing communications that consider and engage a specific audience.
- Ability to contextualize your work against historical and contemporary design.
- Quality of craft and production, across media.

Participation

(Speaking, Writing, Presenting)

- Showing studio progress every week.
- Willingness to engage with new techniques and technologies.
- Speak critically and knowledgeably about design, visual culture, and technology.
- Ability to analyze questions from multiple perspectives, in both verbal and written form.
- Thoughtfully present your work.

Responsibility

Students are responsible for all assignments, even if they are absent or sick. Late assignments or failure to complete assignments before the beginning of class will jeopardize your evaluation in this course. Being unprepared for presentations, failure to do assigned readings, or missing deadlines for writing posts, will also effect your final grade.

Assignments not completed by due date are automatically downgraded—this can include assignments turned in severely late.

Attendance and Punctuality

There are no unexcused absences or cuts. Students are expected to attend all classes. Each unexcused absence thereafter results in a partial letter grade reduction of your final grade (e.g. A- becomes B+). Three unexcused absences results in a failing grade.

In addition to regular attendance, punctuality to all classes is expected. Three late arrivals equals one unexcused absence.

An excused absence means that I have received notification of a legitimate excuse (such as illness or a personal or medical emergency) before class starts—preferably by the night before. To nullify an absence, you will need a Dean’s note. If you miss a class you are responsible for catching up.
Software

This class is not software-oriented and you will be partly responsible for teaching yourselves. Some light skill-oriented instruction—such as software training (Adobe InDesign, Illustrator, Photoshop, and Figma) and craft production—will be worked into the curriculum, depending on the needs of the class members. If you have not had Mac experience, and/or you are not familiar with page layout software, it is recommended that you obtain experience/instruction outside of class early in the semester through the Digital Media Center online tutorials like lynda.com.

All graphic design courses have a lab fee of $150.

General Supplies

X-acto knife and blades
Self-healing cutting mat
18" Steel ruler
Pencils, glue stick, scissors
Bone folder or scorer
Letter-size paper

Helpful supplies (but not required):
Basic printer
Scanner
Bookbinding thread and needle

If any specific materials are required, I will try to give you enough advance notice to track them down. Otherwise, use your best judgment in determining what you’ll need to complete the assigned exercises and projects.

All readings will be provided as PDFs on the class website.