

# Visual Culture and Design

## OBJECTIVE

To lay a foundation for understanding and informed criticism of visual and informational artifacts as well as the methods of devising effective communication strategies.

### **Nassim JafariNaimi**

nassim@gatech.edu

Office Location: TSRB #320

Office Hours: Monday 9:30 – 10:30

TA: **Firaz Peer**

firazpeer@gatech.edu

Class Meetings: MW 12:05 – 1:55 pm

Lab: Fri. 11:05 – 11:55am, Skiles 209

## OVERVIEW

Visual design is concerned with the invention of useful and beautiful products that mediate and facilitate communication. At its full potential, it has the ability *to teach, to please, and to move*. Communication is not a problem newly discovered in our time. However, the understanding of the problems of communication and methods of inquiry for arriving at appropriate solutions have become increasingly important in the contemporary culture. The need for effective communication is evident once we consider the wide presence and impact of digital and non-digital products in our everyday experiences. Examples span a wide range: from road signs to political campaigns, shopping lists to hypermedia applications.

The purpose of this course is to lay a foundation for better understanding communication that's mediated by visual artifacts as well as the methods of designing effective communication pieces. To this end, we will begin with a brief introduction to the grammar of visual design. We will look at the elements that make up the vocabulary of visual communication such as line, space, color, images, and type. In addition, we will study the principles of composition that bind these elements to create a unified whole. After this study, we will focus on understanding visual communication from a rhetorical perspective. We will seek to understand how communication products relate to the audience who experience them in a specific context and their social and cultural significance. We will also look at human centered design exploring the relationship of communication design and interaction design. We will wrap up with a discussion of what is meant by good design, touching on issues related to the role of design in culture and design ethics.

### **Learning Outcomes**

- Understand basic theoretical foundations of visual design and communication.
- Understand information design artifacts as reasoned and persuasive arguments that are audience specific and situated.
- Use the theories and topics presented in this course to identify the problems and analyze the issues of information artifacts in the respective rhetorical and problematic contexts.
- Create digital artifacts with an awareness of history, audience, and context.

## CLASS POLICIES

### **Evaluation**

This course consists of discussions of selected readings, studio/critique sessions, and a set of projects.

Grades will be determined based on the following:

Project Assignments: 70%

Readings: 30%

Extra 10%: active sketchbook; blog posts; and other individual explorations and contributions to class

\* Also, see note on attendance

### ***Attendance***

Due to a significant amount of in-class material and work, prompt attendance and active participation in class discussions and group critiques is required. Three absences are allowed. After that, your grade will drop by one letter grade with every two absences. You will only earn a failing grade if you are absent for 6 sessions or more.

### ***Projects and Assignments***

Be sure to hand in your work in time. If you deliver your project later than the due date, your grade on that project will fall one letter grade. If you deliver your work more than one week after the due date, you will not earn any credit for it.

### ***Readings***

As you can see under grading section, I put a great emphasis on your preparation and participation in class. All of you are required to read the assigned papers/ book sections and be ready to discuss them in class. In addition, I will be making you in charge of some of the readings in class in which case you will be required to open and lead the class discussion.

### ***Communication***

I will use email as means of communication for this course. It is your responsibility to check email often to obtain information related to the course. T-square is also used heavily for communication in class. Make sure to update the settings on your t-square page so you will receive automatic emails about announcements, readings, and assignments. **You are responsible for all announcements made in class, via email or t-square.**

### ***Office Hours***

Mondays 10:00 – 11:00. You can always request a meeting by email.

### ***Information for Students with Disabilities***

Please notify the instructor if you have any disabilities with which you need special assistance or consideration. The campus disability assistance program can be contacted through ADAPTS: <http://www.adapts.gatech.edu>

### ***Honor Code Statement:***

Students are expected to adhere to the Georgia Tech Honor Code: [honor.gatech.edu](http://honor.gatech.edu)

## **READINGS**

### ***Required***

Lupton, Ellen. Thinking with Type: A Critical Guide for Designers, Writers, Editors, & Students (Design Briefs). New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press, 2004.

### ***Supplementary Readings***

This course is inspired and informed by the following readings. Selections will be distributed in class for discussion.

- Albers, Josef. *Interaction of Color*. (1994)
- Carter, Rob, Philip Meggs, and Ben Day. *Typographic Design: Form & Communication*. (2002)
- Dewey, John. *Art as Experience*. (1934)
- Handa, Carolyn. *Visual Rhetoric in a Digital World: A Critical Sourcebook*. (2004)
- Hill, Charles A., and Marguerite H. Helmers. *Defining Visual Rhetorics*. (2004)
- Meggs, Philip B. *Type & Image: The Language of Graphic Design*. New York, NY: Van Nostrand Reinhold, 1992.
- Müller-Brockmann, Josef. *A History of Visual Communication: From the Dawn of Barter in the Ancient World to the Visualized Conception of Today*. (1971)
- Mullet, Kevin, and Darrell Sano. *Designing Visual Interfaces: Communication Oriented Techniques*. (1995)
- Nelson, George. *How to See*. (2006)
- Taylor, Joshua C., *Learning to Look: A Handbook for the Visual Arts*. (1981)
- Wurman, Richard Saul. *Information Anxiety*. (1989)

### **SOFTWARE & SUPPLIES**

#### ***Software***

We will be doing most of the early work using paper and pencil as well as Adobe Suite and Flash. Later in the course, we will use mapping and visualization software as appropriate for specific group projects. While most of the software are available at Georgia Tech library, the students are responsible for accessing the software and not the course. It is also important to note that this is not a class on the software. While there will be tutorial sessions, I recommend that you consult the software help files, available books, or online material if you need more help using the software.

#### ***Supplies***

- A sketchbook & pencil
- Steel ruler
- Portable flash drive
- Tracing paper
- 8.5"x11" paper
- Black mounting board
- Spray Mount Adhesive
- X-acto knife

## COURSE SCHEDULE

### *Part I. Grammar of Design*

#### Week 1, Jan 5

##### **Course Overview**

*Project 1:* Type and Meaning

*Tutorial:* Introduction to Adobe Creative Suite

#### Week 2, Jan 12

##### **Typography**

*Reading:* Thinking with Type

"The Power of Punctuation," Martin Solomon

*Project 1:* Type and Meaning

*Tutorial:* Introduction to Flash

\* *Viewing:* HELVETICA

#### Week 3, Jan 19

##### **Composition**

##### **Official School Holiday**

*Project 1:* Type and Meaning [due, Fri, Jan 24]

*Tutorial:* Introduction to Flash

\* *Recommended Readings:*

"Emil Ruder: A Future for Design Principles in Screen Typography", Kenna

"Writing with Complex Type" Lewis & Nadeau

#### Week 4, Jan 26

##### **Grids**

*Reading:* Thinking with Type

*Project 2:* Informational Poster

*Tutorial:* Adobe Creative Suite

#### Week 5, Feb 2

##### **Design Languages**

*Reading:* TBD

*Project 2:* Informational Poster\* [due, Wednesday, Feb 26]

*Tutorial:* Adobe Creative Suite

### *Part II. Rhetoric of Design*

#### Week 6, Feb 9

##### **Visual Design :: Representation**

*Reading:* TBD; Isotypes

*Project 2:* Informational Poster

*Tutorial:* TBD

TED talk: "The best stats you've ever seen," Hans Rosling

TED talk: "The big idea my brother inspired," Jamie Heywood

\* Project 2 is in collaboration with MARCUS Autism Center and the Georgia Head Start Association.

**Week 7, Feb 16**

**Visual Design :: Selection, Organization, and Interpretation**

*Reading:* TBD

*Project 3:* Informational Poster

*Viewing:* Maya Lin, A Strong Clear Version

*Tutorial:* TBD

\* *Recommended Reading/Viewing:* "One Man. One Cat. Multiplied"  
Blogpost By [Robert Krulwich](#) ; Friday, December 20, 2013 - 06:27 AM

**Week 8, Feb 23**

**Visual Design :: Selection, Organization, and Interpretation**

*Discussion:* Data

*Project 3:* Informational Poster [DUE]

*Tutorial:* Mapping and Visualization

*Listening:* This American Life; Episode 110: Mapping (SEP 4, 1998)

**Week 9, Mar 2**

**Visual Design :: Inquiry**

*Readings:* "Affordances of the Digital Medium" from Inventing the Medium  
(chapter 2), Janet Murray

"The System Diagrams: Shifting Perspectives", Jun, Kim, Lee

"Models of Models", Hugh Dubberly

*Project 3:* Interactive Visual Argument

*Tutorial:* Mapping and Visualization

**Week 10, Mar 9**

**Visual Design :: Rhetoric and Deliberation**

*Readings:* "Rhetoric, Humanism, and Design", Buchanan

"Shaping Belief: The Role of Audience in Visual Communication," Ann C. Tyler

*Project 3:* Interactive Visual Argument\*

*Tutorial:* Mapping and Visualization

\* *Recommended Reading:* "The Rhetorical Stance," Wayne Booth  
Robin Kinross, "The Rhetoric of Neutrality"

**Week 11, Mar 16**

**SPRING BREAK**

**Week 12, Mar 23**

**Visual Design :: Community and Unity**

*Readings:* TBD

TED talk: "Visualizing ourselves ... with crowd-sourced data," Aaron Koblin

*Project 3:* Interactive Visual Argument

*Tutorial:* Mapping and Visualization

\* Project 3 is in collaboration with  
Fulton County Department of Health

**Week 13, Mar 30**

**Project 3**

Critiques

**Week 14, Apr 6**

***Part III. Summary and Conclusion***

Readings: TBD

Project 3: Interactive Visual Argument

**Week 15, Apr 13**

**Project 3**

Critiques

**Week 16, Apr 20**

**Project 3**

Final Presentations