GDES 4161W Senior Thesis & Writing

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GDES 4161W Senior Thesis & Writing is a capstone experience for seniors in the BFA Graphic Design Program, and is followed by the required course Senior Thesis and Exhibition. A hybrid of studio and seminar, Senior Thesis and Writing will combine inquiry, research, creative problem-solving, and design prototyping. The course will use research to launch the initial design stages of a comprehensive graphic design thesis project.

‘Design authorship’ – combining writing and designing, self-publishing, and research and project initiation – is integral to the course. The textbook will elucidate the ways graphic designers enlarge their domain to combine image-making, typography, writing, social and political causes, business opportunities and collaboration across media. As a work of writing about graphic design and visual culture itself, the text is self-exemplifying.

Senior Thesis and Writing is writing intensive and also reading and speaking intensive – students will be expected to read, verbalize and share their writing and designs. Unless expressly opted-out, student writing will also be reviewed by the Writing Enriched Curriculum program for assessing writing in the graphic design major.

Desired writing outcomes from GDES 4361W, Senior Thesis and Writing:

- Competent use of writing mechanics (spelling, punctuation, use of capitals, etc.)
- Consistent use of correct grammar (clauses, syntax, tenses, sentences, etc.)
- Effective use of organizational structures (paragraphs, transitions, introductions, conclusions, etc.)
- Use of lively, descriptive vocabulary commensurate with college-level education.
- Use of appropriate graphic design field-specific terminology.
- Visual and literal choices work with chosen media (print, screen, kinetic, etc.)
- Understands the relationships between legibility, readability and writing comprehension (type face choice, size, color, composition, line measure, etc.)
- Layout evidences knowledge and understanding of visual hierarchy and sequencing principles.
- Demonstrates understanding of, and addresses the underlying needs of, target audiences, using reader-appropriate writing and typography.
- Develops their individual voice through appropriate writing modes (descriptive, narrative, expository, persuasive and creative).

Text (required)
The Designer As... Author, Producer, Activist, Entrepreneur, Curator and Collaborator: New Models for Communicating by Steven McCarthy. Available at UMN bookstore, Barnes & Noble or online (Amazon, etc.).

Materials
1. lined writing paper or lined journal, pens; or laptop with ability to print out
2. $150 budget for computer output and on-demand published book
3. digital storage device, other as needed
Attendance and punctuality policy

Daily attendance is required to learn the course material. Absences should be for substantiated medical and personal emergencies only. Two unexcused absences are the maximum allowed before lowering the student’s course grade. Please arrive on time and plan to stay the entire session, unless notified otherwise or given permission. Being substantially late (>5 minutes) is disruptive to the class and the professor, and will be counted as an absence. Assignments are also due on the specified date; late assignments will be lowered a letter grade.

Assignment policy

Assignments are outlined on the subsequent page; changes and/or details will be provided in a timely manner. Pay attention to the constraints of the assignment, so that your time and effort are used effectively.

Conduct and participation policy

A studio/seminar setting is conducive for an informal atmosphere, with student interaction an expected benefit. Please keep the focus on the task at hand too, and be respectful of your classmates and their work. Turn off cell phones and other personal devices; refrain from non-related web browsing; earbud use only during individual studio time! Please be appropriately generous with your thoughts and ideas, especially during class discussions and presentations; but also, allow space for everyone to participate.

Communication policy

There are times when I’ll need to reach the class for special announcements, due date changes, etc. It is required that you maintain a University of Minnesota email account, and check it daily, or as close to daily as is reasonable. If you prefer using a non-UMn email address, then set up your “U” account so that it forwards to the other one.

Grading policy

Due to the diversity of learning tools and parallel working methods, course grades will be determined at the end of the semester. Assignments will be assessed with both comments and scores, not necessarily letter grades. Students will still have a strong sense of their performance from feedback as the course progresses; students should see the professor if an idea of interim grades is desired.

grading terminology

A = outstanding
A- = excellent
B+ = very good
B = good
B- = okay
C+ = not bad
C = adequate
C- = weak
D = poor
F = failing
SEMESTER DELIVERABLES

Critical Paper (15%)
Using first person voice, write an opinion-based paper that criticizes some graphic design artifact, process, system or interaction, or an aspect of visual culture involving graphic communication. ‘Criticism’ needn’t be thought of as solely negative language; it can be pointed, comparative and constructive as well as damning. Rhetorically, this paper can be more subjective and casual than a research paper – no sources needed. Include an image of the work discussed. The goal of the critical paper is to identify a topic area that you might improve upon with your thesis project. The subject of the critique could be a ‘problem to be solved’ or an ‘opportunity to be exploited.’ Page goal: 4-5 pages, double-spaced. Print out and provide electronic .doc.

Research Paper (30%)
The purpose of this paper is to formalize your interest in the topic that will be the heart of your Senior Thesis. You'll dig deeply, cast broadly, cite a variety of sources, check the sources of your sources (that’s why it is called ‘re’-search) and use a third-person voice to maintain objectivity. Use the paper to objectively justify the subject you’ll pursue with your Senior Thesis Project. Consistently use a standard method of citation (APA, MLA, Chicago, Harvard, etc.). Page goal: 8-10 pages, double-spaced. Use at least a dozen sources; of these, no more than half should be URLs. Images may be used, but are in addition to page count. Print out and provide .doc.

You will also format the critical and research papers into a multi-page layout for printing in an on-demand digital book. Specifications to follow for a CMYK, PDF document.

Reflection Essays (10%)
Reflection essays are informal bits of writing, typically written in class, that respond to the assigned readings. I will use these to ascertain what you got out of the textbook. While you should summarize the chapter to the point where it’s obvious that you read the material, your reactions and opinions are the main thing. We’ll also use these to try specific exercises related to writing technique and style. There will be six required reflection essays total, due at the end of each class (see chapter reading dates).

Senior Project Prototype (30%)
This original design will be a proposed solution to your semester-length investigation. Process and documentation are as important as product, as you will carry your design into the GDES 4262 Senior Thesis and Exhibition course. Size, medium, format and complexity are open-ended, but should be commensurate with a senior-level BFA experience.

Documentation (15%)
The process documentation is basically a compilation of your creative process: image gathering, competitive audit, thumbnails, roughs, design prototypes, etc.

Final presentation format to be determined for the Project Prototype and Documentation.
The fine print
This syllabus is meant to provide a schedule for the semester, and is subject to change with unforeseen circumstances; reasonable notice will be given.

“It is University policy to provide, on a flexible and individualized basis, reasonable accommodations to students who have disabilities that may affect their ability to participate in course activities or to meet course requirements. Students with disabilities are encouraged to contact their instructors early in the quarter to discuss their individual needs for accommodations. This syllabus is available in alternative formats upon request.”

Weekly class schedule (we will take a 10 minute break mid-way through each class)

**january**
21. introduction to course, instructor, each other, the textbook
23. discuss Burdick, Writing for Designers essays; ‘interest mapping’ exercise
28. Discuss *The Designer As...* chap. I (1-49), in-class reflective writing, discussion
30. open studio time, oral presentation of interest areas, topic ideas

**february**
4. Discuss *The Designer As...* chap. II (50-93), in-class reflective writing, discussion
6. open studio time, discuss Critical Mass essay
11. Discuss *The Designer As...* chap. III (94-123), in-class reflective writing, discussion
13. (Professor lecturing at Iowa State University), open studio time
18. Discuss *The Designer As...* chap. IV (124-159), in-class reflective writing, discussion
20. open studio time, discuss Emigre Mutt essay, oral presentation of thesis topic
25. Discuss *The Designer As...* chap. V (160-193), in-class reflective writing, discussion
27. open studio time, ‘half draft’ of research paper due; peer feedback

**march**
4. Discuss *The Designer As...* chap. VI (194-225), in-class reflective writing, discussion
6. open studio time, presentation of design concepts
11, 13. individual meetings (sign up slots), open studio time otherwise
18, 20. SPRING BREAK
25. research paper due, oral readings
27. open studio time

**april**
1. presentation of 3 rough design prototypes, discuss A. Miller essay
3. open studio time
8. designed book PDFs due (roughs)
10. open studio time
15. designed book PDFs due (final) >> upload to on-demand publisher or output
17. open studio time
22. presentation of refined design prototype
24. open studio time
29. refined project iteration due

**may**
1. open studio time
6. final project presentations
8. books and documentation due