Across the Borders: writing, inscriptions, and graphic design in ancient Britain and modern Minneapolis

3 credits, Writing Intensive Freshman Seminar, with proposed Liberal Education theme: Global Perspectives.

Wednesday 9:35 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., rooms B22 and B9 McNeal Hall. The on-campus part of the course consists of ten class periods, from January 18th to March 28th, and the learning abroad part will consist of eight full days in the UK during Spring Break.

Final Exam Date & Time: April 11th, 9:35 to 11:30 a.m.

Instructor: James Boyd Brent MFA, Associate Professor, 246e McNeal Hall, 612 624 1731, jboydbre@umn.edu

Office Hour
Wed 11:30 to 12:30, and by appointment—room 246e McNeal Hall.
I am available to help each of with any questions related to this course and the coursework—so please come and see me.

Course description:
This Freshman Seminar Abroad will explore graphic design, from a historical and contemporary perspective, and will focus on the importance of ethical and socially responsible design practice in our contemporary world as well as on the importance of the general concept of design thinking and design creativity as it pertains to local and global issues facing the world today.

We will be studying visual communication in northern England and southern Scotland, as well as in Minneapolis, focusing on how writing, inscriptions, and graphic design have played a part in articulating the interconnections and differences that characterize these regions, and have shaped the these cultures over time. The coursework will present the connection between design and the formation of culture and cultural identity, and will encourage an appreciation for the need for social responsibility and ethical understanding in design in our times. As well as focusing on the outcomes of design in this course, we will also be paying close attention to design as a process —this is often referred to as “design thinking” (see, for example: http://www.fastcompany.com/resources/design/dziersk/design-thinking-083107.html)

By locating part of the course in the Twin Cities and part in the UK, the course will enable you to make connections between design practice in these places. The historical aspects of design that we will encounter in the UK will stimulate thought and be the starting point for discussion about how issues from the past, such as creating cultural identity, encouraging social reform, and communicating important information to the people, are as pressing now as they have ever been. We will see examples of design used in the past that were not so positive, but perhaps necessary for the condition of the times, such as design used to communicate power and authority. Discussion in the course on these occasions will come back to the question, “what are we using design for now?—what are our priorities at this particular time in history, and what are we communicating to ourselves and to others through our design communication?” In our present time, we have unprecedented reach and range in visual communication, and therefore the practice of design has an important ethical component: “Is what I’m trying to promote here through design having an adverse effect on you, over there?”

The aim of the course is to present a larger picture of the importance of design as a cultural vehicle for change and also as a response to change, which in turn can help guide individuals towards a stronger sense of their individual and their collective futures.
You will also be challenged to consider the connections between design communication and cultural change in the past and in the present, exploring the role of ethical design communication today, asking is what made a designer an informed and engaged citizen in the eighteenth century in Northumbria any different from what it is today?

The United Kingdom has a rich history of visual communication in design; while focusing on historical and contemporary aspects of this visual communication legacy in the UK and on the connections between forms of visual communication and their cultural significance there, the starting point for the course will be the design culture of Minneapolis, a hub of design activity in the US.

Students will appreciate, through the study of numerous examples in situ in the UK as well a here in Minneapolis, that visual communication and the formation of culture are intertwined, hence we will emphasize its importance and why it is that excellence in execution—in the quality of the design production itself—matters so much in human culture.

Excursions and activities will assist in illuminating the program coursework. In the Learning Abroad component of the course (which will take place during Spring break 2012) the program will be based in Newcastle, England and we will also visit the Glasgow School of Art in Scotland. There will be interesting excursions in Northumbria and in the Scottish Borders.

In the Twin Cities, you will see first hand how Minneapolis design firm, Spunk, conducts their design practice in the current global design and business environment. The class will spend a class period with Spunk designers working on creating a web site for an international non-profit organization. This experience will take place before the trip to the UK; while at the University of Northumbria we will spend a day interacting with faculty and first year students in the School of Design—the theme for the day will be “Globalization and Design: why designers need to be culturally and socially aware.” Students will be able to see the connections between their own experiences as young creative people with those of the students at the School of Design, and also make connections between current design practice in Minnesota (Spunk) and current design education in the UK (the international perspective in the University of Northumbria’s School of Design’s educational curriculum).

Additionally, you will see how Roman occupiers of Britain, from the first to fifth centuries, used writing and inscriptions to promote their authority and their culture. You will also witness how writing was used in monasteries in the Dark Ages helping keep visual culture alive. We will explore the important role of visual communication in promoting democratic values in education in the eighteenth century, and examine ethical innovations in contemporary graphic design.

There will be a creative production part of the course, which will center on hands-on printing in the Surface Design Studio in McNeal Hall, and will include screenprinting, letterpress printing, relief printing, and digital printing. A variety of printing surfaces will be used, including paper and fabric, and there will also be a hands on stone lettering project, so that you can experience for yourself this ancient and universal design communication technology. The research component will focus on the course themes mentioned above, and will also include a brief overview of the history of printing and visual communication (including a field trip to the James Ford Bell collection of rare books).

**Global Perspectives Theme:**

This course "addresses a particular issue, problem, or phenomenon (the importance of design thinking and ethical responsibility in contemporary design practice) with respect to two or more countries, cultures, or regions."

The course focuses on design and culture in the region of the UK where Scotland and England meet, and uses a study of design in Minneapolis as a point of reference for this study of design at the border of England and Scotland. The study of historical aspects of design in the UK is presented solely in order to highlight the issues mentioned above (the importance of design thinking and of ethically and socially responsible design practice) in our present times, and to make the more universal point for students about
the cultural importance of social responsibility in design, and the connection between the phenomenon of social responsibility in design then and now, and how this is similar and how it differs between the US and the UK. Students will be actively engaged with a visual/written journal on their trip: writing and visual work will respond to such questions as “how ids this design used to communicate ideas, and what are these ideas? What are the predominant ideas that our contemporary cultures are preoccupied –or should be preoccupied--with? What characteristics and skills do contemporary designers need? Where does our responsibility lie as designers now? This writing will expand understanding of the importance of socially responsible and cultural aware design in our future.

The course focuses in depth on visual communication through design in text (writing, inscriptions) and images (graphic design) in northern England and Southern Scotland, historically and in contemporary design practice. Students will be asked to analyze and evaluate design expressions in the context of how it communicates authority and identity both locally and from afar, and from within a specific culture and from one culture to another.

This journal, writing, and discussion focus relates directly to the Global Perspectives theme that asks that “Students discuss and reflect on the implications of issues raised by the course material for the international community, the United States, and for their own lives.”

The course addresses the relationship between visual communication through text and image and the formation of culture in times of change. This relationship will be reiterated throughout the course and on the trip to the UK presented in the class: design will be shown to both create and reflect culture throughout history and in our present world, and its forms change according to specific times and places. The purpose is to show how this is relevant to contemporary culture and to contemporary design education, and particularly to you all, as future design practitioners. We are in a time of transition, and focusing class discussions on how designers are responding to and to some extent responsible for the conditions of our time, we will bring to light the relevance of design practice based on meaningful, ethical, and constructive approaches to design, for the good of our present and future interconnected world.

Student Learning Outcomes:
Student Learning Outcomes (SLO): these are important skills that have been identified and defined by the University (http://www.slo.umn.edu) as learning expectations for you in your undergraduate education here at the U. The SLO’s that this course specifically addresses are:

Can identify, define, and solve problems:
You will learn to make prints, designing in black and white and in color, using water-based screenprinting and other printing methods. By developing an understanding of how to apply design principles in a project, you will create visual meaning in your work. You will learn to analyze and evaluate your work in terms of these design principles, and so experience and learn about visual problem solving.

Can locate and critically evaluate information:
You will learn an important part of the creative production process: how to evaluate your own work and the work of others. You will do this by reviewing work in groups and individually. You will also learn about the history of printing, and each of you will learn how, through research, you can bring to life an aspect of printing or a particular period in printing history.

Have mastered a body of knowledge and a mode of inquiry:
The body of knowledge is this course is the how and the why of printing and visual communication from a design perspective, which include an appreciation of the visual and tactile aspects of printing. So you will gain this visual appreciation, and will also gain confidence with hands-on design materials, and also learn to appreciate the value of craft in design production.

Understand diverse philosophies and cultures within and across societies:
You will learn about and experience “Studio Culture,” the creative environment that is particular to printing and design production. This will include learning about what working in a studio is like, and how to work collaboratively as well as on one’s own.

**Can communicate effectively:**
Using writing throughout the semester, you will develop verbal understanding of the subject matter, and also develop writing skills to better communicate your ideas. Another important aspect of communication in this course is learning to verbally articulate one’s design ideas through discussion and review of work. Also, as mentioned above, visual communication is another skill tackled in this course: learning to communicate through images—developing visual literacy.

**Understand the role of creativity, innovation, discovery, and expression across disciplines:**
Design and printing takes place at the intersection of disciplines, so is by its nature interdisciplinary. By using and combining printing technologies, and directly experiencing the way these influence the expression of ideas, you will learn to appreciate how printing and visual communication/design production can affect the creative process. For example, we will look at the question of how new printing technologies, such as 3-d printers, are affecting the way designers design, and how this is different for, for example, using letterpress printing or carving letters in stone.

**Class format:**
In the on-campus part of the course the ten classes with consist of 50% lectures and class visits, and 50% guided studio time in some of the design technologies that will be studied in design examples in Minneapolis and in the UK, such as an introduction to letter carving in stone, and introductions in letterpress and in screenprinting, leading to three small studio/creative projects in these mediums.

Class visits to Spunk and to Highpoint center of Printmaking will both involve class studio work that will be undertaken in these two places. The trip to the James Ford Bell Library will be for a historical overview of some of the design/printing technologies that we will be learning about during the semester.

In the learning abroad part of the course, students will keep a written and visual journal and start to work while there on their term papers which will be presented back in class after Spring break.

**System of grading/evaluation:**
You will be evaluated on written papers and creative visual projects. The final course grade will be 55% research (writing, including written project descriptions and analysis), and 35% studio projects. There will be six response papers and one longer term paper. These account for 90% of the final grade. 10% is for active class participation and engagement with class material and projects. All papers will be evaluated on content as well as on the effectiveness of the writing. There are opportunities to revise work, improving both the flow of ideas and the quality of writing.

**Release of Work Statement:**
Students understand that enrollment in this course grants consent for their work to be selected for inclusion in college or departmental publications (online or in print). Your instructor may select to use your work to represent her/his skills as an instructor in a teaching portfolio (online or in print).

**Expectations**

**Attendance:**
You are expected to attend all class sessions, be punctual and not leave class early, present your work at critiques, participate in critiques of your own and others’ work, and show respect for your colleagues at all times. Work not presented at critiques will be deemed late—late work is work that will be accepted up to one week after the due date but will be graded one letter grade less than otherwise earned. You are expected to participate in the class blog and to contribute to the class—your final grade will reflect your
contribution to the class as well as the quality of your work. There will be a studio clean up every three weeks and very thorough clean up at the end of the semester—all these clean ups are mandatory and count towards your course grade.

Workload:
You are required to complete all in class and out of class assignments, and you will also be asked to hand in all preliminary sketches, sources, etc. Work will need to be done outside of class studio time—an average of six to twelve hours per week (in addition to the 6 hours on class contact time).

Grading structure:
To achieve a satisfactory grade (C) you need to:
Attend all class sessions and be punctual, and participate in all class discussions, complete all assignments, as well as all parts of each assignment, with creativity, thoroughness, and thoughtfulness, present your work professionally, and meet assignment deadlines (late work will result in one grade lower than earned). Also, each of you is expected to treat your classmates with respect and be willing to learn from them, as well as being prepared to share your ideas.

Assignments: 90% (writing assignments 55%, studio assignments 35%)
Active class participation: 10%

University grading standards:
A = outstanding. B = very good. C= good/average - meets course requirements. D= meets course requirements, but work below average

Weekly reading load: an article/chapter on historical and contemporary design.

Course writing load: six short papers and one term paper are due during the course. All papers will be evaluated on content (on the depth of your ideas) as well as on the clarity and expression of your writing. There will be opportunities to revise work, improving both the flow of ideas and the quality of writing.

Academic workload:
You are required to complete all the class projects. Work will need to be done outside of class studio time—an average of three hours per week (in addition to the 2 hours on class contact time).

Accepting and returning assignments:
Assignments should be handed in—they will be graded and returned within ten days.

Grading late work:
Late work within one week of due date will be accepted but will incur a third of a grade point penalty—after one week the penalty will be one full grade point.

Policy for missed exams:
Any tests or exams can be made up provided prior notice of absence is given and arrangements made in advance

Makeup work for legitimate absences:
Work not handed in because of legitimate absences can be made up, but must be completed within two weeks of the original due date

Extra credit options: n/a

PEDs in classroom:
Use of laptops is encouraged but the instructor may restrict or prohibit the use of personal electronic devices in his or her classroom, lab, or any other instructional setting.
Use of class notes and materials:
The faculty of the University encourages students to take and share notes in their classes, laboratories, and the many other instructional settings in which they participate as they pursue their education at the University. Taking notes is a means of recording information but more importantly of personally absorbing and integrating the educational experience. The faculty recognizes that collaborative note-sharing and discussion helps students learn.

Scholastic dishonesty and student conduct code:
http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/academic/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf

Sexual Harassment: http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/humanresources/SexHarassment.pdf

Statement on climate of inclusivity:
You are expected to be attentive during class, ask questions if you do not understand something, and to offer your opinion. You are also expected to listen respectfully to other students and to me when speaking. The University of Minnesota is committed to providing a safe climate for all students, faculty, and staff. All persons shall have equal access to its programs and facilities without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, sex, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, or sexual orientation. Racism, sexism, homophobia, classism, ageism and other forms of bigotry are inappropriate to express in this class. Reports of harassment are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help.

Academic freedom and responsibility:
http://www1.umn.edu/regents/policies/academic/Academic_Freedom.pdf

University grading standards
A = outstanding, B = very good, C= good/average - meets course requirements, D= meets course requirements, but work below average, F= fails to meet course requirements

Disability statement
Reasonable accommodations will be provided for students with documented disabilities. Please contact the instructor to work out the details for any necessary accommodation at the beginning of the semester. You will also need to work with the Office of Disabilities Services, 12 Johnston Hall, 612-626-1333.

Availability of disability and mental health services:
If you have any special classroom requirements please contact one of the offices listed below. They will work with you and, if necessary, they will contact the instructor to work out the details for any necessary accommodations.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Service</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Phone</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student Academic Success Service</td>
<td>340 Appleby Hall, Mpls</td>
<td>612-624-3323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling/Consulting Services</td>
<td>199 Coffey Hall, St. Paul</td>
<td>612-624-3323</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disability Services</td>
<td>180 McNamara, Mpls</td>
<td>612-626-1333</td>
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<tr>
<td>Center for Writing</td>
<td>10 Nicholson Hall, Mpls</td>
<td>612-626-7579</td>
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Weekly schedule:

Week one Introduction: writing, inscriptions, and graphic design
Week two In class project: Letterpress/relief printing/screenprinting
Week three Ford Bell Library: the history of printing since the fifteenth century
Week four Ancient calligraphy and design in Northumbria
Week five In class project: Letter forms in stone
Week six Printing in contemporary design practice: Field trip to Spunk Design, Minneapolis
Week seven Contemporary design in the UK
Week eight  Traveling in the UK: Lecture and discussion.
Week nine  Learning abroad trip to the UK
Week ten  Class presentations
Week eleven Final class period: Class presentations

Trips:
During the on-campus part of the course we will make the following field trips:
Highpoint Center for Printmaking, Spunk Design, and the Rare Books collection of the James Ford Bell Library.
In the UK, as well as including workshops and lectures with design professionals, professors and students at the School of Design at Northumbria University in Newcastle, the learning abroad trip will include visits to:
• Glasgow, Scotland, home of the prestigious Glasgow School of Art
• Cherryburn Cottage Museum, the birthplace of wood engraver, Thomas Bewick
• Hadrian's Wall, one of the greatest monuments to the power - and limitations - of the Roman Empire
• Abbotsford House, historic estate designed by writer, Sir Walter Scott
• Lindisfarne, Northumbria, England—where the Lindisfarne Gospels were created
• Caerlaverock Castle, Scotland
• Design professionals—Glasgow, Scotland; Newcastle, England

Examples of Texts/weekly readings:
The Lure of the Local, Lucy Lippard
Designing Across Cultures, Ronnie Lipton
Design Writing Research, by Ellen Lupton
The Meanings of Modern Design, by Peter Dormer
The Nature and Aesthetics of Design, by David Pye
Use and Contemplation, by Octavio Paz
Here by Design, Goldstein Museum, University of Minnesota
Terence Conran on Design, Terence Conran, Elizabeth Wilhide
The Value of Things, Marysia Lewandowska
Mythologies, by Roland Barthes
_A Whole New Mind: Why Right-brainers Will Rule the Future_, Daniel Pink
_Ten Faces of Innovation_, Tom Kelly