

DePaul University  
College of Computing & Interactive Media / School of Design  
Spring 2015

# Semiotics & Visual Design

## GD270

Thursdays 10:05AM-1:20PM  
14 E Jackson Room 506

Professor Dolores Wilber  
Office: CDM 510  
dwilber@cdm.depaul.edu

Office hours  
Tu 8:30AM-10:00AM + 1:30PM-3:00PM CDM 510  
Please register online to confirm appt

### Course Description + Objectives

Design and designed products can be interpreted as signs that are the result of human needs and desires. This course examines theoretical issues in how design of a message or product influences the user's decision to read it, use it or buy it. Semiotics theory examines these concepts as well as design value and criteria for evaluation in contemporary culture.

Semiotics is the study of signs and symbols and an explanation of how people extract meaning from words, sounds, and pictures. Understanding semiotics as a designer will instill your work with references that enable them to communicate multiple layers of information.

### Expectations

Knowledge of the Macintosh operating system and Adobe CS is essential for success in this course. Be in class on time with all the necessary materials. You are expected to remain in class during the whole class session. Your projects will be graded based on your ability to express yourself within aforementioned parameters. Additionally your grade will take into account the improvement of your work relative to your starting point at the beginning of the semester. Because the class is quite short, you are expected to work a minimum of 6 hours outside of class on your current assignments. We will use class time for in-class work, lectures, critiques, and conversations on design.

### Learning Goals

- Understand the theory, practice and vocabulary of semiotics and design, including symbols, index and icons
- Create examples of semiotics in design practice
- Explore semiotics in relation to diverse audiences in a variety of settings in advertising, media and culture

### Course management system

D2L <https://d2l.depaul.edu/d2l/home>

### Class work

Much of your work will be conducted outside the class, especially idea development, content development, planning and sketching. You are responsible for the time management necessary to ensure that you have computer time outside of class.

### Critiques

We will have project critiques and presentations that ensure that we learn from one another and share information. Attendance and participation in critiques is mandatory.

### Projects

Each project is described on the following page. Examples of all projects will be shown in class. All critiques are posted on the class blog. You can only post JPGs. PDFs can be uploaded through Google Docs. Pre-final critiques require print-out as well; they do not need to be mounted. Final Critiques require full color output and mounting (flush to edge). A Design statement (250 words) describing the intent and meaning of your project, is required to be posted you're your final project on the class blog. Statement your design goals, audience, measure of success and any other relevant information. Each critiques requires a design post; you must comment on three other student's work for each posting by the Friday following the critique.

### Blog

All work must be posted to D2L and to <http://semioticscdm.blogspot.com>

You will receive an invite. It's easiest to interact with the blog with a GMAIL account. You must accept the blog invite to post to the blog. Please email if you have not received an invite. It is easier to participate on this blog if you have a Gmail address. Each post must have your last name in the title and the project name. Further information on all aspects of each project are will be clarified in class discussion and individual meetings with the teacher. When in doubt, make an appointment with me or email me.

You must post all projects, critiques and comments to the class blog and to D2L.

### **Project Descriptions**

#### **Project: ABCs**

Construct a glossary, using every letter of the alphabet, of typographic or design-related words with their definitions. You may not use any images, unless they are illustrations or photographs of letterforms — no images that are not typographic are to be used in this project. You are required to have a PDF version of your project that we will project in class for the FINAL CRITIQUE. You will also need to minimally print the cover and one spread for the Final Critique as well as post to the blog and D2L; you do not need to mount the project.

#### **Project: Textbook Remix**

Re-design format and all levels of typographic treatments and images, of a middle school history textbook chapter opener. You will be creating spreads and translation moving from print to IPAD to phone. Examples will be provided. This is a heavy lifting, excellent project to build both your design and typographic skills, and to understand the number of typographic levels necessary in a complex design project. It is also an excellent portfolio piece. Full-color output mounted on black presentation board as well as PDFs are required for final critique. We will work via SKYPE with a textbook architect (the newest description of a designer working in textbook design crossing print, tower, laptop, tablet and phone).

#### **Project: Three-dimensional typography**

Select a phrase, poem, tagline, or slogan to typographically illustrate (actually spell-out) in three-dimensional form. Photograph the construction for the final presentation. The work may exist as a series.

Examples will be shown in class.

Full-color output mounted on black presentation board, flush to page and PDF.

Inspiration:

<https://www.facebook.com/video.php?v=10152247740772142>

### **Attendance**

Class attendance and participation is mandatory. Please note that because our class meets once weekly that is equal to two class periods in classes that meet twice a week. One and a half absences will result in one full grade drop; additional absences will result in additional grade drops. Having to work at an outside job is not an acceptable reason to miss class. If you are more than 15 minutes late for class, you will be marked absent. If you miss a critique without an "emergency" excuse, your project grade is automatically dropped by one full grade (e.g., a "B" would become a "C"). You will receive an automatic F, if you miss three classes. If you miss a critique without an "emergency" excuse, your project grade is automatically dropped by one full grade.

### **Textbook**

*This Means This, This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics*

Sean Hall, Laurence King Publishers

[2nd Edition] [Paperback] 2014

ISBN-10: 1856697355

### **Grading Formula**

Class participation in discussion and critique process	10%
Project: Thematic Icon Set	30%
Project: How to Guide	30%
Project: Sequential Found and Constructed Typography	30%

### **Project: Thematic Icon Set**

Students will generate a set of 10 icons and one invented symbol based on the plot of a novel or a movie. At least two of the icons must represent abstract ideas rather than concrete objects. The icons will progress from hand-drawn rough sketches to a more refined fidelity, either digitized or through skillful hand-rendering. The set will be fully realized as a printed poster series.

### **Project: How to Guide**

For this project, you will create a How To Guide that outlines the steps to complete a task. The guide must include at least eight

steps. Each step must be expressed with both text and visuals, included but not limited to: iconography, photography, illustration. The deliverable possibilities: Book, Website, Poster, Card set, App, Video.

### **Project: Wayfinding**

Students will create a cohesive way finding system that spans environmental graphics, print collateral, and an interactive touch point. The final deliverable will include printed pieces, as well as printed “mockup” photographs of the way finding system as it would be seen in the world. Creating convincing mockups will be demonstrated in an upcoming lecture, and links to helpful resources will be provided.

### **Project Evaluation**

This is a highly rigorous course that will require outside work, in-class work and verbal critique. Work as hard as you can and to the best of your abilities. Come to class with all supplies and work due. Final grades will be evaluated on the following criteria:

- \\ Research and Development: Did you develop a clear problem statement?
- \\ Sketches and Ideation: Did you produce a lot of process work?
- \\ Concept: Does the piece work in a cohesive, well thought out manner?
- \\ Elements of Composition: Is the piece visually unified?
- \\ Transformation Incorporation: Did you explore techniques to add visual interest to the work?
- \\ Artistic Quality: Does the final piece look good, overall?
- \\ Craft: Is the piece neat and well made, including attention to details
- \\ Work Ethic: Did you push yourself—and then push yourself further?
- \\ Critique Professionalism: Did you speak up during critique and remain positive/constructive?
- \\ Meeting Deadlines: Is your final work or any stage of the assignment late?

A	95-100
A-	93-94
B+	91-92
B	87-90
C+	83-84
C	80-82
D+	76-77
D	72-75
D-	70-71
F	Below 70

### **Add/Drop dates**

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March 30, 2015	Begin SQ2015 Day & Evening Classes	Spring Term
April 03, 2015	Good Friday – University officially closed	
April 03, 2015	Last day to add classes to SQ2015 schedule	Spring Term
April 04, 2015	Easter Holiday – University officially closed	
April 05, 2015	Easter Holiday – University officially closed	
April 10, 2015	Last day to drop classes with no penalty, Last day to select pass/fail option	Spring Term
April 11, 2015	Grades of "W" assigned for classes dropped on or after this day	Spring Term
April 18, 2015	Last day to select auditor status	Spring Term
April 25, 2015	Begin optional mid-term exam week	Spring Term
May 01, 2015	End optional mid-term exam week	Spring Term
May 15, 2015	Last day to withdraw from SQ2015 classes	Spring Term
May 17, 2015	College of Law 2015 Commencement Ceremony	Spring Term
May 25, 2015	Memorial Day – University officially closed	
June 05, 2015	End SQ2015 Day & Evening Classes	Spring Term
June 06, 2015	Begin SQ2015 Day & Evening Final Exams	Spring Term
June 12, 2015	End SQ2015 Day & Evening Final Exams	Spring Term

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### Online Course Evaluations

Evaluations are a way for students to provide valuable feedback regarding their instructor and the course. Detailed feedback will enable the instructor to continuously tailor teaching methods and course content to meet the learning goals of the course and the academic needs of the students. They are a requirement of the course and are key to continue to provide you with the highest quality of teaching. The evaluations are anonymous; the instructor and administration do not track who entered what responses. A program is used to check if the student completed the evaluations, but the evaluation is completely separate from the student's identity. Since 100% participation is our goal, students are sent periodic reminders over three weeks. Students do not receive reminders once they complete the evaluation. Students complete the evaluation online in CampusConnect.

### Academic Integrity and Plagiarism

This course will be subject to the university's academic integrity policy. More information can be found at <http://academicintegrity.depaul.edu/>. If you have any questions be sure to consult with your professor.

### Academic Policies

All students are required to manage their class schedules each term in accordance with the deadlines for enrolling and withdrawing as indicated in the University Academic Calendar. Information on enrollment, withdrawal, grading and incompletes can be found at: [cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment](http://cdm.depaul.edu/enrollment).

### Students with Disabilities

Students who feel they may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact the instructor privately to discuss their specific needs. All discussions will remain confidential. To ensure that you receive the most appropriate accommodation based on your needs, contact the instructor as early as possible in the quarter (preferably within the first week of class), and make sure that you have contacted the Center for Students with Disabilities (CSD) at: [csd@depaul.edu](mailto:csd@depaul.edu).

Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd.

Phone number: (312)362-8002 Fax: (312)362-6544 TTY: (773)325.7296

### Harassment

The policy as specified in the DePaul Student Handbook will be adhered to in this class.

## **Changes to Syllabus**

This syllabus is subject to change as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, it will be thoroughly addressed during class, posted under Announcements in D2L and sent via email.

## **Withdrawal**

Students who withdraw from the course do so by using the Campus Connection system (<http://campusconnect.depaul.edu>). Withdrawals processed via this system are effective the day on which they are made. Simply ceasing to attend, or notifying the instructor, or nonpayment of tuition, does not constitute an official withdrawal from class and will result in academic as well as financial penalty.

## **Retroactive Withdrawal**

This policy exists to assist students for whom extenuating circumstances prevented them from meeting the withdrawal deadline. During their college career students may be allowed one medical/personal administrative withdrawal and one college office administrative withdrawal, each for one or more courses in a single term. Repeated requests will not be considered. Submitting an appeal for retroactive withdrawal does not guarantee approval.

College office appeals for CDM students must be submitted online via MyCDM.

The deadlines for submitting appeals are as follows:

Autumn Quarter:	Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent winter quarter
Winter Quarter:	Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent spring quarter
Spring Quarter:	Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter
Summer Terms:	Last day of the last final exam of the subsequent autumn quarter

## **Excused Absence**

In order to petition for an excused absence, students who miss class due to illness or significant personal circumstances should complete the Absence Notification process through the Dean of Students office. The form can be accessed at <http://studentaffairs.depaul.edu/dos/forms.html>. Students must submit supporting documentation alongside the form. The professor reserves the sole right whether to offer an excused absence and/or academic accommodations for an excused absence.

## **Incomplete**

An incomplete grade is a special, temporary grade that may be assigned by an instructor when unforeseeable circumstances prevent a student from completing course requirements by the end of the term and when otherwise the student had a record of satisfactory progress in the course. CDM policy requires the student to initiate the request for incomplete grade before the end of the term in which the course is taken. Prior to submitting the incomplete request, the student must discuss the circumstances with the instructor. Students may initiate the incomplete request process in MyCDM.

All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptional cases will receive such approval.

If approved, students are required to complete all remaining course requirement independently in consultation with the instructor by the deadline indicated on the incomplete request form.

By default, an incomplete grade will automatically change to a grade of F after two quarters have elapsed (excluding summer) unless another grade is recorded by the instructor.

## **Supplies**

- Sketchbook
- Tracing Paper (highly recommended)
- X-acto Knife and blades (#11)
- Utility knife
- Studio Tack, Twin Tack adhesive film or Spray Mount
- Paper for printing (optional)
- Flash drive or external hard drive. Make sure that you make backup disks in case your disk gets damaged.

## **Local Digital Imaging Supplies**

- Microcenter, 2645 Elston Avenue, Chicago, IL 60647 (773) 292-1700 [www.microcenter.com](http://www.microcenter.com)

## **Local Art Supplies**

- Blick Art Materials 42 S. State Chicago IL 312.920.0300 [www.dickblick.com](http://www.dickblick.com)
- Utrecht Art Supplies, 33 S. Wabash Ave, Chicago IL 312.922-8597

## **DePaul Design Mailing List**

All students are strongly encouraged to sign-up for the DePaul Graphic Design mailing list

[Design@mailman.depaul.edu](mailto:Design@mailman.depaul.edu)

<http://mailman.depaul.edu/mailman/listinfo/design>

Join the DePaul AIGA on Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/AIGAdepaul/>

Class blog  
<http://semioticsvisualdesign.blogspot.com/>

# Syllabus

Readings will periodically be assigned.

## WEEK ONE

Thursday 4.2

Introduction to class  
Examples of projects  
Read, watch, define.

Semiotics is about the study of meaning. Semiotics is about visual communication and how we communicate, what means what; it is the study of how meaning is created.

Lecture 1 – Modified

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA\\_LM-WMC1A](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mA_LM-WMC1A)  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZb7NFGBKHg>

*This Means This, This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics*  
Chapters 1 Signs and Signing, 2 Ways of Meaning, 3 Conceptual Structures

One hour per chapter, small group discussions, rotating groups, post comments on two examples in chapter per hour.

Brand background if you're interested:

Semiotics I "Referring To An Object"

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JeJJSUZkAPk&index=15&list=PLcaVtvHbXtW-A6WVSmhPCAcnFkBRcCyXL>  
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=j0Qkhq70oIc>

Semiotics Study: A Font & A Brand

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GPOwOU7IkNY&list=PLcaVtvHbXtW-A6WVSmhPCAcnFkBRcCyXL&index=23>

Hip vs Square: 1960s Advertising and Clothing

[http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1499&context=gs\\_rp](http://opensiuc.lib.siu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1499&context=gs_rp)

For next week, read (Chapter 1-3 should have been finished during class):

*This Means This, This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics*  
Chapter 4 Visual Structures, 5 Textual Structures, 6 Matters of Interpretation;  
*1-Post reflections on each chapter, using one example of 250 words, each chapter*

## WEEK TWO

Thursday 4.9

### Thematic Icon Set

Students will generate a set of 10 icons and one invented symbol based on the plot of a novel or a movie. At least two of the icons must represent abstract ideas rather than concrete objects. The icons will progress from hand-drawn rough sketches to a more refined fidelity, either digitized or through skillful hand-rendering. The set will be fully realized as a printed poster series.

For next week, read:

*This Means This, This Means That: A User's Guide to Semiotics*  
Chapter 7 Matters of Interpretation, 8 Stories and Storytelling;  
*1-Post reflections on each chapter, using one example of 250 words, each chapter*  
*2-Post and present your concept for your Thematic Icon Set, 250 words posted on what you will do*

## WEEK THREE

Thursday 4.16

### Thematic Icon Set

*Present your concept for your Thematic Icon Set, 250 words posted on what you will do*