

SEMIOTICS AND VISUAL DESIGN

DePaul University
College of Computing & Interactive Media / School of Design
Winter 2018

Tu, Th 3:10PM-4:40PM
CDM 632, 243 S. Wabash

Instructor: **Marissa Strassel**
mstrasse@cdm.depaul.edu

Office hours
Th 1:30PM-3:00PM
Please email to confirm appt and
office location

This syllabus is subject to changes as necessary during the quarter. If a change occurs, updates will be announced during class and sent via email.

Semiotics is defined as the theory of signs. Semiotics explores the tools, processes, structures and contexts that human beings have for creating, interpreting, and understanding meaning in a variety of ways. This course examines theoretical issues in how the design of a system, message or product influences the user's decision to read it, use it or buy it.

We will be exploring semiotics in our everyday lives. We will work to understand how context and culture influence meaning and how structures help organize meaning.

/ Expectations

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 outside of class on your current assignments. We will use class time for in-class work, lectures, critiques, and conversation.

/ Materials + Software

- Adobe CS
- Sketchbook
- Variety of black pens for sketching

We may need a few additional supplies throughout the quarter and these will be announced in advance

/ Required Reading

This Means This, This Means That
A user's guide to semiotics, Second Edition by Sean Hall

/ Course 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 Outcomes

- Conceptual, visual and critical thinking within research-driven design projects
- Pre-planning, sketches and preliminary visualization before implementation
- Iterative approach to refining ideas
- Composition and manipulation of type and graphic elements
- Composition and layout with Adobe Creative Suite
- Verbal and visual presentation of your work

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/ Course Outline + Schedule

Below is a rough outline of the projects we will undertake in this class. We will have one field trip to the Art Institute. To receive credit for project work it must be submitted through D2L on time according to project requirements detailed in the weekly schedule. Participation in critiques is required.

Schedule is subject to change.

Week 1-3 Introduction to Semiotic Theory, Discussion, Critiques, Field Trip, [Project One](#)

Project One / Part One: Observations

Throughout our day, we notice systems and signs in place. Walking along the street, driving, or walking through a building we notice patterns, colors, shapes, and symbols that have meaning. Your first assignment is to observe and document through photography or video these observations. You should capture at minimum 10 images of parts of a system or system(s). We will share these in small groups during the next class.

Project One / Part Two: Observations

A place you may not think of that is full of signs is the museum. From the Medici in Florence to the Dutch still life, paintings are rife with symbols and signs. We will visit the Art Institute to observe paintings and discuss. Student will have a followup project assigned to complete on their own. This will include a written response to your findings.

Week 3-7 Discussion, In-Class Work Sessions, Critiques, [Project Two](#), [Project Three](#)

Project Two (In-Class): Flags and Symbols

We will watch a video (TED Talk: Roman Mars, https://www.ted.com/talks/roman_mars_why_city_flags_may_be_the_worst_designed_thing_you_ve_never_noticed) then conduct an agile design session for the remainder of class.

Project Three: Thematic Icon Set

Students will generate a set of 10 icons and one invented symbol. 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 or postcard series.

Week 8-11 Discussion, In-Class Work Sessions, Critiques, [Project Four \(Final\)](#)

Project Four (Final): 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(s), Card set, App, Video

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/ Grades

This is a 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 supplies and work complete. 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?
- Taking risks: Did you try something new? Did it work? If it didn't, how could you make it better?
- 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 complete and on-time?

/ Communication

Email is the primary means of communication between faculty and students enrolled in this course outside of class time. Students must include specific class/section number details in all email correspondence. It may take up to 48 hours to receive a response. Email will be addressed M-F, 9-4. Students should solve immediate problems by reaching out to classmates, looking on D2L, or doing a web search. Students need to check email daily.

/ Attendance

Attendance is required. Three absences for any reason, whether excused or not, may constitute failure for the course. Roll will be taken. If students arrive 15 minutes late they will be marked absent. If students leave 15 minutes early they will be marked absent. Students are not required to report or explain reasons for absence. If students miss class they should review D2L documentation, look at the videos, and consult with classmates. Students who withdraw from the course for whatever reason must do so by using the Campus Connection system (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.

/ 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.

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/ 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: <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/PoliciesandProcedures.aspx>

/ Incomplete Grades

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. All incomplete requests must be approved by the instructor of the course and a CDM Associate Dean. Only exceptions cases will receive such approval. Information about the Incomplete Grades policy can be found at <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/Current%20Students/Pages/Grading-Policies.aspx>

/ 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. Lewis Center 1420, 25 East Jackson Blvd. Phone number: (312)362-8002 Fax: (312)362-6544 TTY: (773)325.7296

/ Proctored exams for OL courses

If you are an online learning student living in the Chicagoland area (within 30 miles of Chicago), you will need to come to one of DePaul's campuses to take an exam. Online learning students outside of the Chicagoland area are required to locate a proctor at a local library, college or university. You will need to take the exam within the window your instructor gives. Students should examine the course syllabus to find exam dates and the instructor's policy on make-up exams. Detailed information on proctored exams for online learning students can be found at <http://www.cdm.depaul.edu/onlinelearning/Pages/Exams.aspx>