

University of Washington

Masters of Communication in Digital Media

Winter 2006

COM 585: Digital Media Message Design & Content Creation (5 credits)

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Office hours: Tuesday 4.30 to 5:30 and by appointment
Office: Communications 251b

Classroom: COM302

Time: Tuesdays, 6 p.m. to 10 p.m.
3 January – 14 March

1. Course Overview:

Introduces the terminology, history and evolution of web design and the use of hypertext. Provides an overview of effective web page design and efficient site architecture. Introduces project management techniques needed to organize digital assets, allocate resources, and meet deadlines. Covers the identification, creation and evaluation of message design to meet needs of the target customers.

This course is the first of two linked courses that focus on digital content planning, creation, management and deployment. Throughout the course, we will explore four major topics:

- Audience identification
- Applicable technologies
- Design principles
- Project management

The course focuses on the work that begins before words are written or images are shot – the planning that is essential to successful communication. “Know your audience” is more than an axiom: it is essential advice for developing effective, efficient, and profitable web sites (“web sites” will be used as a shorthand for the various forms of digital communication).

For sites to be effective in meeting business and user goals, they must be based upon principles from visual design, rhetoric, usability research, and information architecture. This course incorporates principles and ideas from visual design and information architecture. However, rhetorical concepts and usability are the focus of later courses.

Student Learning Outcomes:

- Understand the historical context, current trends and future projections of communication on the WWW
- Understand the types of web site genres and web site navigational structures
- Identify and provide for special access needs
- Select appropriate graphics formats and understand issues related to color and typography
- Make informed decisions pertaining to the selection and use of multimedia
- Understand applicable technologies and how to compare/recommend appropriate technologies to support site goals and business case
- Create storyboards and navigation flowcharts
- Learn project management skills needed to manage assets, allocate resources, and meet deadlines
- Build fluency in web-based communication by examining roles played by writers, owners and users of web sites.
- Create a content structure for a simple website by putting information into categories.
- Describe the purpose and organization of a typical home page
- Identify different roles on a typical Web team

Course Structure and Teaching Strategies:

Teaching methods for this course will include lectures, demonstrations, student presentations, guest lecturers, lab exercises, and reading and writing assignments.

The course instructor will coordinate all class material, keep in close touch with each student in order to assess and meet individual needs, and evaluate all course assignments. Material will be available on the class web site: <http://courses.washington.edu/com585/2006/>

Some classes will feature a guest lecturer who is a leading professional or scholar in digital media content creation. Class discussions are also a key element of the course, and students are encouraged to ask questions, offer their own observations, and share their own experiences with new technology. Each class session will include time for lab work and team meetings.

Course Requirements:

Required readings include book chapters and articles from scholarly journals, trade magazines, and popular publications.

Assigned readings will be available on-line through the library eReserve system. In addition, topical readings on-line and in print will be assigned when appropriate.

2. Evaluation:

Grades are based on a book report, a design analysis, a group project, and class participation.

A. Book Review, 20%

Select a book that is of particular interest to you. This is an opportunity to provide a focus for your explorations this quarter. If you do not see a book that fits your overall interests, please advise me immediately so that we can secure a book that will do so. This is not an exclusive list!

- *The Art and Science of Web Design*
- *The Design of Everyday Things*
- *The Deadline: A Novel About Project Management*
- *The Humane Interface*
- *Information Anxiety*
- *Information Architecture: Blueprints for the Web*
- *The Inmates Are Running the Asylum*
- *Pattern Approach to Interactive Design*

Prepare a cogent review that includes arguments in support of or against the theories and positions take by the author(s). Would you or would you not recommend this book to your fellow students; why?

The report should be delivered in both paper and digital format (the digital version will be shared on the class web site). There is no “number of pages” requirement, except to be thorough (1,000 – 1,200 words is a reasonable goal). Presentation (such as page layout and intelligent use of the return key) and spelling/punctuation/grammar are also considered in evaluating the report.

There will be a group session where students will share their thoughts about the books.

Preferred digital formats: HTML and PDF.

B. Design Analysis, 20%

Analyze the design of three of the following:

- an e-commerce web site (must have online ordering)
- a government web site
- a media web site
- an entertainment web site (such as for a movie)
- a personal web site.

In your analysis (three sites, three categories), include the following information:

- Site name and URL
- Your name

- Subject: (from above list)
- Audience (your deduction)
- Goals (your deduction)
- Site description
- Content type (static, dynamic, both)
- Three user tasks (your deduction)
- Dates viewed

You are “reversing engineering” design goals. Analyze site effectiveness at meeting your three user tasks. What are the major differences between the sites and why?

Preferred digital formats: HTML and PDF.

C. Team Project, 40%

The class will be divided into teams (the number will depend on the number of students enrolled). Each team will be presented with a project outline and statement of deliverables. The teams will make presentations/reports to the class as the quarter progresses, culminating in a final presentation, which will include storyboards. Team members will summarize their lessons learned, which will include an analysis of each team member’s contributions to the project.

D. Class Participation, 20%

These points will be based both on participation in the classroom and through e-mail. Occasionally, the instructor may pose a question or problem to the class and offer participation points for e-mail responses and discussion. Students may also suggest questions for class discussion and receive participation credit. There may be discussion leaders selected for in-class reading discussion.

Example assignment:

- Pick your favorite three web sites. Capture screen print; include statement explaining why you like the site; what you do there; how often you visit. This exercise will serve both as a class survey and as a means of illustrating goals, tasks and effective site design.

There will be no midterm or final exams.

3. Schedule

The class meets weekly on Tuesday from 6 p.m. until 10 p.m. The following schedule is subject to change; please check the class web site for updates on topics and assigned readings.

Part 1: Overview	
Week 1 : 3 January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Introduction, review syllabus and expectations • Optimal design team members and roles • In-class lab: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Become acquainted with UWICK tools (Secure FTP)
Part 2: Project Management	
Week 2 : 10 January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • WWW history and culture • Why planning is essential • Steps, process and tools • Value proposition (messages) • Deliverables <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Requirements document ○ Functional specification ○ Storyboards and wireframes
Part 3: Audience Issues	
Week 3 : 17 January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User-centered design • Understanding your audience • Steps, process and tools <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Interviewing ○ Focus groups
Week 4 : 24 January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Task identification and analysis <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Card sorts ○ Affinity diagrams ○ Site maps
Part 3: Design Principles	
Week 5 : 31 January	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information architecture • Navigation • Patterns – theory and practice
Week 6 : 7 February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Web site genres and grids
Week 7 : 14 February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Color and typography

Part 4 : Applicable Technologies	
Week 8 : 21 February	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• HTML, XHTML, XML<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What, why, how used• Multi-media technologies<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ What, why, how used
Week 9 : 28 February	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Static and database-driven sites<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Tie to business case○ Examine different middleware• Cookies, security, logs<ul style="list-style-type: none">○ Introduce privacy issues○ Introduce security issues
Part 5 : Presentations	
Week 10 : 7 March	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Presentations