

George Mason University
Department of Art and Visual Technology
AVT 419-003: Special Topics (Infographic Design) | Spring 2017

Syllabus and Policies

Infographic Design & Data Visualization

Instructor: Yathrib “BeBe” Ragsdale

Office Hours: By Appointment

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Class meeting days and time: M/W 4:30–7:10 p.m.

Location: School of Art Building 1020

Prerequisite

AVT 215, AVT 311, and AVT 411 (Motion Graphics),—or permission of instructor

Course Description

This course will focus on research, discovery, and execution. Learn how to gather, dissect, and execute a design solution based upon research, and cultivate it into an appropriate and digestible format. This course will offer students a diverse opportunity to become familiar with a means to envision and then build and test a design solution through to execution. The student will use the principles and methods of design to graphically represent very complicated data into a well-organized execution. Students are open to explore multiple subject matters and focus their content with visual hierarchy. Each project will begin with a sketch/storyboard, with a focus on the demographic/end-user. The final creative brief will aid the student as they execute a compelling product. Each design solution should offer a call to action, visual content that’s easily digestible, and worth sharing.

Objectives

- Develop visual sensitivity and competency in graphic communications by following a disciplined design methodology
- Define problems, research, conceptualize, establish priorities, and develop graphic alternatives
- Introduce students to design history, perceptual psychology, and information design
- Further develop computer design skills in page layout and image creation programs
- Develop the ability to effectively communicate design concepts visually as well as verbally

Content

Through lecture, studio, and critique, students will design a series of projects developed from rough schematic level to final mounted presentation. The learning objectives are achieved through a series of sequential projects. We will build on concepts learned in the initial content areas and apply them in subsequent projects. Students will provide a solution to the visual communication problem, and keep record of the process, conceptual development, and exploration of ideas that lead to the solution.

Course Expectations

In professional practice, graphic designers solve client problems that often have tight time requirements. Our projects will also have deadlines to hit so you can get a feel for the pace set in professional practice. You will be given as much time as possible to work during the studio, but discussion and critiques will consume a significant amount of the time. The time spent in the studio may only be a fraction of the time that is necessary to complete the projects successfully so be prepared to make headway outside of the classroom. The primary objective of the course is to provide creative solutions to design problems, not to learn design software from the beginning. You should have basic skills in design software and use it as a design tool with certain proficiency.

Design Process

You will be following the recommended design process as outlined in the Project Statement. In many cases, you will follow specific methodologies, as they are known to increase ideas and enhance production efficiency. Evaluation of your design process will always factor heavily in the final project grade. This evaluation includes your ability to meet interim deadlines, to present the required quantity of sketches and to participate in critiques. The process of design is critical. The best final solutions come from practicing a methodology that can be repeated for a variety of design problems. You will be examining and cataloging your process for all of the projects during the semester. The process includes library research, word lists, thumbnail sketches, collected imagery, and objects. You are required to present many ideas for the critique and develop a final solution based on these ideas and their revision and refinement.

Process Documentation and Notebook

Students are required to keep well-organized, well-presented documentations of your design/learning experience (research, idea generation, and refinement) in this class. These documentations should be arranged in chronological order. You will have to submit your process with the final design of each project on your designated Dropbox.com link. You will have to choose your best-documented process to put into a process book for your final review. You will also be required to keep a sketchbook, which will also be used to document your process.

- Your Dropbox folders should contain project spec sheets, notes, research, design exploration (including sketches) and final solutions of all class projects.
- Your Dropbox folders must be well documented. You should include a heading/subheading, and a description.
- Your process Dropbox folders will count toward a significant part of your final grade.

Take your design process seriously. Use your process boards to help you advance from one idea to another. Use your notebooks to not only record what you are doing, but to maintain a dialogue with yourself, identify why you are making the design decisions you are making. Keep your notebooks current as you progress through each project. Students have often mistakenly believed that they could finish their project first, and organize and assemble their process books later. This is a daunting task to do shortly before a deadline. Your work will suffer if you do not follow the design

process. Performance Requirements, Critiques, and Class Participation

Due to the dynamics of the course your attendance, participation and punctuality are critical to your successful completion of the class. You must be on time—and prepared—with no exceptions. Not being properly prepared with required assignments is considered an absence from the class. Final projects are due at the beginning of class. Projects turned after the start of class are automatically reduced 1/2 letter grade. Late projects will be docked **1 LETTER GRADE PER DAY**. If compelled to miss a class, you must email/ask me with an acceptable explanation within 12 hours to be excused. If absent, you are responsible for materials covered in class. Please “buddy-up” with a classmate for this information. Two un-excused absences will gravely effect successful completion of the course. Excessive tardiness will also affect your final grade (3 unexcused late arrivals equals an unexcused absence). Personal communication devices must be turned to “silent mode” and put away.

Final critiques may last one or two class periods. Be prepared to participate in the entire final critique. Individual and group critiques will be held at each stage of a project. Students who fail to have adequate work to present will lose a valuable opportunity to learn, which will also directly affect their grades. Students must be prepared for class to be counted as present, i.e. having all necessary supplies and computer files, and process notebook with you. Critiques are an important opportunity to shape verbal skills. Designers in professional practice need to be able to convey ideas to clients, ask relevant questions, and understand client concerns.

Textbook

Infographics: The Power of Visual Storytelling, by Jason Lankow

Evaluation

All final projects will be graded by the following criteria: concept/development/process, execution, and presentation (project and personal).

- **Concept/Development/Process (1/3 of project grade)**—is defined as research, schematic thumbnail sketches, and computer roughs.
- **Execution (1/3 of project grade)**—is defined as the implementation of the design (visual organization, typography, communication). Basically, how successful is your design solution? How well did you incorporate your research and class/instructor feedback?
- **Presentation (1/3 of project grade)**—is defined as the final production quality of your project, as well as, your professional presentation (attendance, deadlines, verbal/written articulation, and participation).

The final semester grade is determined by final project grades (40%); assignments/exercises (10%); process documentation (10%); and class participation (10%). In lieu of a final exam, there will be final semester project (20%) and a mid-term exam (10%). A non-returnable digital portfolio on thumb/flash drive of all final projects must be turned in at the end of the semester. You may resubmit projects one time for a higher grade within two weeks (unless they are late), except for the final semester project. Student work may be on display at the Spring 2017 College of Visual and Performing Arts Master of Fine Arts Thesis Defense. If displayed, your work and intellectual property will be credited. Examples of course work may also be presented online for educational purposes and as a form of documentation.

GROUND RULES

In-class Peer Critiques: Will be held in small groups of 4-8 participants on rotations, so that students are offered a different perspective. These facilitated critiques are meant to offer constructive feedback, which will yield portfolio worthy work(s).

Share & Inspire: Each student will have an opportunity to spend 10 to 15 minutes to present a work of information design that they find creative unique and/or exemplary. We will then open for comments/discussion, where participants can gain additional participation points.

Participation points: A portion of your grade is based on class attendance, critique contributions, Share & Inspire presentation, and active discussion in response to the presentation.

Comps & Sketches: Students are expected to produce 10 to 20 concepts/sketches and solutions per project. These iterations and sketches must be posted to Dropbox. It's imperative that they document their work.

Creative Brief & Mood Board: Students will submit a brief and mood board with each project (and upload to Dropbox). The brief will outline the intended solution, mood, demographic, key message, and overall tone. And will answer how the student will engage with their target audience and achieve the intended communication goal. The mood board will visually display the intended style and aesthetic.

Motion Demos: *Students will view a series of Lynda.com tutorials prior to an in-class demo. During demo sessions students will work towards a goal to create something new, and apply these lessons to Project 4.*

Open work hour: Students may spend a moderate amount of the class period working on their projects, and making the necessary post-critique adjustments. Students are not dismissed until a substantial amount of progress is provided as proof of effort.

Grading Scale (Overview of grading standards)

- A. Superior execution; maximum originality; excellent concentration and initiative; cooperative with peers; excellent judgment; superior attitude and dedication; highly imaginative, original, and experimental; very consistent in work ethic; significant improvement
- B. Strong execution and originality; adequate concentration and initiative; cooperative with peers; good attitude, dedication, and judgment; imaginative and experimental; consistent in work ethic; noticeable improvement.
- C. Average execution, concentration, organization, and attitude; some imagination and originality; lacks some consistency in work ethic; some improvement.
- D. Poor execution and improvement; limited originality; little concentration and organization; poor judgment; evades responsibility and cooperation; lacks work ethic, concentration, organization
- F. Fails to execute to minimum standards, insignificant improvement; no originality; minimum concentration and organization; evades responsibility and cooperation; no work ethic.

+ above average

✓ average

– below average

Course Outline

1. Pitch potential subject of analysis
2. Fully research potential subject
3. Submit creative brief, mood board, and competitive examples
4. Submit sketch/storyboard for critique
5. Submit final copy/text for approval
6. In class critiques of several iterations/solutions
7. Final Submission

Project 1: Comprehension – The Examination and Organization of Information // Weeks 1–4

You must inform your audience about a subject that interests you or you feel strongly about. (Pick who your audience is based on the topic.) Find or collect data that teaches, informs, and/or shocks and portray that data visually. **Deliverables:** Design brief, Data/Research, Process documentation, final graphic.

Project 2: Call to Action – Social Change // Weeks 3 – 6

Select a social or personal issue of which you are passionate about. Find or collect data that informs, and/or shocks and portray that data visually. This infographic is meant to show a complicated or sensitive issue and convince the viewer to take action. **Deliverables:** Research on your chosen topic, Design brief, Image collection, Process documentation via Dropbox, final graphic.

Project 3: Retention & Appeal – Visual Storytelling // Weeks 6–9

Students will create a visual story on a subject of their choosing. The infographic should tell a compelling story and will involve thorough research. **Deliverables:** Audience assessment, Design brief, Process documentation (Dropbox), final solution, and other materials as assigned.

Final Semester Project: In-Motion // Weeks 7 – 14

Students will research and create a dynamic infographic on a topic of their choosing. Once the design and concept is approved the student will develop a storyboard, and generate an animated motion graphic as a way to engage the viewer. **Deliverables:** Process documentation (Dropbox), Design brief, final animated piece posted to vimeo or youtube.

Mid-term Exam

Students will be evaluated on their Information Design knowledge through an (open-note) mid-semester examination.

Materials

- USB flash memory, cloud subscription (It is important to backup your work on box/dropbox/googledrive/etc)
- Project-dependent materials that will vary per concept
- Super-Black mounting boards, thin super-black boards, acetate, spray mount, black or white mounting tape, large black portfolio for housing final projects for review, cutting pad, Xacto™ knives & blades, self-healing cutting mat (all for home use) for final project submission
- Sketchbook

University and AVT Department Policies

University and School of Art Policies

In accordance with George Mason University policy, turn off all beepers, cellular telephones and other wireless communication devices at the start of class. The instructor of the class will keep his/her cell phone active to assure receipt of any Mason Alerts in a timely fashion; or in the event that the instructor does not have a cell phone, he/she will designate one student to keep a cell phone active to receive such alerts.

Commitment to Diversity

This class will be conducted as an intentionally inclusive community that celebrates diversity and welcomes the participation in the life of the university of faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. All may feel free to speak and to be heard without fear that the content of the opinions they express will bias the evaluation of their academic performance or hinder their opportunities for participation in class activities. In turn, all are expected to be respectful of each other without regard to race, class, linguistic background, religion, political beliefs, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, veteran's status, or physical ability.

Statement on Ethics in Teaching and Practicing Art and Design

As professionals responsible for the education of undergraduate and graduate art and design students, the faculty of the School of Art adheres to the ethical standards and practices incorporated in the professional Code of Ethics of our national accreditation organization, The National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

Open Studio Hours

SOA teaching studios are open to students for extended periods of time mornings, evenings and weekends whenever classes are not in progress. Policies, procedures and schedules for studio use are established by the SOA studio faculty and are posted in the studios.

ArtsBus

Dates for Spring 2017:

February 18

March 25

April 18

ArtsBus Credit:

* Each student must have up to 5 AVT 300/Artsbus credits before graduation. For credit to appear on your transcript you must enroll in AVT 300. This also applies to anyone who intends to travel to New York independently, or do the DC Alternate Assignment.

* If you plan/need to go on multiple ArtsBus trips during a semester and need them towards your total requirement, you must enroll in multiple sections of AVT 300. Please go to the ArtsBus website: <http://artsbus.gmu.edu> "Student Information" for additional, very important information regarding ArtsBus policy.

* Non-AVT majors taking art classes do not need Artsbus credit BUT may need to go on the Artsbus for a class assignment. You can either sign up for AVT 300 or buy a ticket for the bus trip at the Center of the Arts. Alternate trips must be approved by the instructor of the course that is requiring an ArtsBus trip.

Visual Voices Lecture Series

Dates for Spring 2017:

January 26

February 9

March 9

March 23

March 30

Visual Voices is a year-long series of lectures by artists, art historians and others about contemporary art and art practice. Visual Voices lectures are held on Thursday evenings from 7:20- 9:00 p.m. in Harris Theater:

<http://soa.gmu.edu/visualvoices/>

Important Deadlines

<i>January 1 Day of Week</i>	<i>Sunday</i>
Martin Luther King Day (no classes)	Mon Jan 16
First day of classes ; last day to submit Domicile Reclassification Application; Payment Due Date; full semester waitlists removed	Mon Jan 23
Last day to add classes —all individualized section forms due Last day to drop with no tuition penalty	Mon Jan 30
Last day to drop with a 33% tuition penalty	Mon Feb 13
Final Drop Deadline (67% tuition penalty)	Fri Feb 24
Immunization Record Deadline	Wed Mar 1
Midterm progress reporting period (100-200 level classes)—grades available via Patriot Web	Mon Feb 20 – Fri Mar 24
Selective Withdrawal Period (undergraduate students only)	Mon Feb 27 – Fri Mar 31
Spring Break	Mon Mar 13 – Sun Mar 19
Incomplete work from Fall 2016 due to Instructor	Fri March 31
Incomplete grade changes from Fall 2016 due to Registrar	Fri April 7

Dissertation/Thesis Deadline	Fri May 5
Last day of classes	Sat May 6
Reading Days Reading days provide students with additional study time for final examinations. Faculty may schedule optional study sessions, but regular classes or exams may not be held.	Mon May 8 – Tue May 9
Exam Period (beginning at 7:30 a.m.)	Wed May 10 – Wed May 17
Commencement and Degree Conferral Date	May 20

Once the add and drop deadlines have passed, instructors do not have the authority to approve requests from students to add or drop/withdraw late. Requests for late adds (up until the last day of classes) must be made by the student in the SOA office (or the office of the department offering the course), and generally are only approved in the case of a documented university error (such as a problem with financial aid being processed), LATE ADD fee will apply. Requests for non-selective withdrawals and retroactive adds (adds after the last day of classes) must be approved by the academic dean of the college in which the student's major is located. For AVT majors, that is the CVPA Office of Academic Affairs, Performing Arts Building A407.

Students with Disabilities and Learning Differences

If you have a diagnosed disability or learning difference and you need academic accommodations, please inform me at the beginning of the semester and contact the Disabilities Resource Center (SUB I room 234, 703-993-2474). You must provide me with a faculty contact sheet from that office outlining the accommodations needed for your disability or learning difference. All academic accommodations must be arranged in advance through the DRC.

Official Communications via GMU E-Mail

Mason uses electronic mail to provide official information to students. Examples include communications from course instructors, notices from the library, notices about academic standing, financial aid information, class materials, assignments, questions, and instructor feedback. Students are responsible for the content of university communication sent to their Mason e-mail account, and are required to activate that account and check it regularly.

Attendance Policies

Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the class as a whole. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of nonparticipation. Students who miss an exam with an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.

Honor Code

Students in this class are bound by the Honor Code, as stated in the George Mason University Catalog. The honor code requires that the work you do as an individual be the product of your own individual synthesis or

integration of ideas. (This does not prohibit collaborative work when it is approved by your instructor.) As a faculty member, I have an obligation to refer the names of students who may have violated the Honor Code to the Student Honor Council, which treats such cases very seriously. No grade is important enough to justify cheating, for which there are serious consequences that will follow you for the rest of your life. If you feel unusual pressure about your grade in this or any other course, please talk to me or to a member of the GMU Counseling Center staff.

Using someone else's words or ideas without giving them credit is plagiarism, a very serious Honor Code offense. It is very important to understand how to prevent committing plagiarism when using material from a source. If you wish to quote verbatim, you must use the exact words and punctuation just as the passage appears in the original and must use quotation marks and page numbers in your citation. If you want to paraphrase or summarize ideas from a source, you must put the ideas into your own words, and you must cite the source, using the APA or MLA format. (For assistance with documentation, I recommend Diana Hacker, *A Writer's Reference*.) The exception to this rule is information termed general knowledge—information that is widely known and stated in a number of sources. Determining what is general knowledge can be complicated, so the wise course is, "When in doubt, cite."

Be especially careful when using the Internet for research. Not all Internet sources are equally reliable; some are just plain wrong. Also, since you can download text, it becomes very easy to inadvertently plagiarize. If you use an Internet source, you must cite the exact URL in your paper and include with it the last date that you successfully accessed the site.

Writing Center

Students who are in need of intensive help with grammar, structure or mechanics in their writing should make use of the services of Writing Center, located in Robinson A116 (703-993-1200). The services of the Writing Center are available by appointment, online and, occasionally, on a walk-in basis.

The Collaborative Learning Hub Located in Johnson Center 311 (703-993-3141), the lab offers in-person one-on-one support for the Adobe Creative Suite, Microsoft Office, Blackboard, and a variety of other software. Dual monitor PCs make the lab ideal for collaborating on group projects, Macs are also available; as well as a digital recording space, collaborative tables, and a SMART Board. Free workshops are also available (Adobe and Microsoft) through Training and Certification; visit ittraining.gmu.edu to see the schedule of workshops and to sign up.