

DESIGN STUDIES 183: AN INTRODUCTION TO DESIGN CULTURE

Associate Professor Michael Martin
Fall 2005 • Tuesdays and Thursdays 2:10-3:30
3 credits

COURSE SYLLABUS



COURSE OVERVIEW

This course is designed to introduce students to Design Culture. By design culture we mean the full range of intentional activities we undertake and things we produce to shape our material lives and experiences and the social patterns through the creation of planned environments, landscapes, buildings, furniture, appliances, and artifacts of all sorts, including art works and media expressions.

“Designing” happens in a context, and that context has everything to do with how design is expressed, perceived, and valued. It also has everything to do with how design form, style and practice evolves over time. Design processes and designed works will be presented as socially, historically, economically, politically and culturally grounded events and artifacts. Three distinct sets of lectures are proposed within the semester. Readings, films, video, recordings, and slides will support the lecture topics. While the class is primarily “lecture” format, active learning exercises that take place during class will be a routine and essential aspect of the course.

Part I

In **Part I: Contemporary Design Culture**, we establish an overview of the pervasiveness of “design”, broadly considered, within the contemporary culture that we routinely engage. This section includes topical case studies that serve to illustrate interrelationships between culture and design, including the rodeo and “lifestyle design” enterprises such as IKEA and Martha Stewart. In these cases we hope to address several questions: What constitutes design action? What are design works? What’s “beauty” and aesthetics got to do with design? Is design culture mostly about markets and consumption – or is it more than this? Are ethics involved in design—and if they are, what are some ethical considerations for designers? For this first course section we will be reading Virginia Postrel’s 2003 book *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture and Consciousness*. This content of this book will help establish a framework for discussions and additional case studies later in the semester.

Part II

In **Part II: Messages and Meanings** we continue with case studies that help us understand how design communicates “meaning”, how designed artifacts inevitably reflect values and ideologies, and how these artifacts can even be created in the service of propaganda.

Part III

In **Part III: Design and the ISU Campus** we explore our immediate environment as a model of comprehensive design, as a container of designed artifacts, and as a place that reveals aspects of its history. We explore the establishment, planning, landscape design, buildings, artwork and interiors of the campus as well as campus literature and its website. Design processes and the quality of the environment are presented and analyzed in the context of encompassing historical national and international design movements. In this way the designing and designs of the university are seen in a historical context.

LEARNING OUTCOMES

The content of this course is designed to be a starting point and a framework—an introduction to design enterprise, its historical context, and how it fits into contemporary culture. By participating in this course I intend that you will develop the abilities to observe, experience, analyze, critically reflect upon, evaluate & form judgments, and write about design processes and the products of design.

Toward obtaining those encompassing abilities, through readings and case study analyses that engage students in many of the historical, social, technological, ethical, and environmental factors which have influenced designers, I intend that students will develop an enriched understanding of:

- Design in the context of site, region, and society
- Design in the context of science, ethics, and culture
- The historical, social, political, and ideological context of design
- The communal and ecological nature of all design processes
- The language of design discourse
- Reading and writing about art and design that addresses theory and criticism
- Interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary design processes and professional practice

COMPLETION REQUIREMENTS

- Attendance/participation
- Required readings (will be made available periodically on-line at E-reserve and/or Instruction Commons)
- 3 outside-of-class research activities
- 4 exams, based upon the lectures, readings, films and outside-of-class research activities
- In-class discussion/writing exercises

The course syllabus, schedule and lecture notes (for some lectures) are or will be available on-line at E-reserve and/or Instruction Commons. This course also features websites that will be repositories for PowerPoint files used during class, so that you can review images and text slides after the class has taken place (info about how to access the WebCT and Plato's Cave sites will be provided in class). As the course progresses, articles, bibliographic sources, and exam prep guidelines may be added. I will keep you updated as materials are added.

COURSE CONCEPT

This course was developed as part of a comprehensive restructuring of first-year studies in the College of Design. It has been designed by a collaborating team of faculty representing all four departments within the college (Art and Design,

Architecture, Landscape Architecture, and Community & Regional Planning) to serve as a broad-based course serving the needs of all students anticipating a design degree program. At the same time, it has been designed to be of general interest to students from the other colleges at ISU.

In attending a course titled "An Introduction to Design Culture," perhaps you envision learning about what designers do; learning about some important designers or beautiful and famous designs; or learning how design fits into the larger fabric of society and daily experience. Perhaps you are interested in the science, art and products of design and want to learn something about them, or you are considering majoring one of the design fields here in the College and expect that this course will shed some light on them. Or maybe you have wondered about the word itself—what do we mean by "design"? Design is a verb "We need to design this or that"; at other times a noun: "That's a great design"; sometimes an adjective "That toaster has some great design qualities". We will be exploring all of these aspects of what "design" means during this term.



The larger ambitions of the course are to link ideas and designing, and to present you with resources and

tools for continuing the study of design or specific design disciplines on your own. Upon completing Design Studies 183 you should possess an enriched understanding of design, and be able to think and write thoughtfully about, and evaluate, design. The course has been previously subtitled as "Adventures in Design"—an attempt to capture the spirit of a quest as you come to know about the many facets of design.

The lectures for this course comprise a series of illustrated essays. Each lecture will have a limited number of clearly described topics. The intent is to begin with illustrative holistic design case studies, and to analyze them: discussing two or three principles related to design, the designer (if there is one), and the context of the design works being discussed. The lectures coupled with readings and films construct a tapestry of insights that constitutes "An Introduction to Design Culture." The expectation is to be diverse and rich enough in content, exams and course activities to enable you to study design independently, and to more fully experience, understand and enjoy the designed environment that we inhabit.

Design entails both the processes of invention and production, as well as the final constructed or perceived reality and the experience of it. Design is ultimately a social act, a cultural phenomenon. The course is designed to help portray this idea. Welcome!

COURSE SCHEDULE AND LECTURE TOPICS

The course meets for two sessions per week on Tuesdays and Thursdays for the full 15 weeks of the semester. The format will vary from day to day; sessions may include lecture presentations augmented by a variety presentation media, class discussion, pop quizzes and writing exercises.

Readings and assignments will be separately announced from this syllabus. Important note: The course schedule and lecture topics are subject to modification.

LECTURES & COURSE METHOD/ACTIVE LEARNING

To some degree this course is like a smorgasbord: a large and diverse array of samplings regarding design is presented. It is up to you to actively partake and to make some sense of it all. The illustrated lectures, films, and readings for this course complement each other. In the smorgasbord model, you are encouraged to partake of everything, to savor and reflect upon the diverse offerings, to begin developing perspectives about design. This approach has been developed because a major part of learning is developing the

capacity to distill facts and ideas, make them your own, and use them synthetically.



One of the frequently asked questions is: "What is important in this reading or lecture for the exam?" This is difficult to answer—you need to have a solid grounding in both facts and concepts. The objective is for you to begin to identify concepts supported by facts, and to make connections between the lecture topics, the required readings, in-class exercises and out-of-class assignments.

While some notes related to the lectures are provided, attendance at lectures and diligent note taking are essential to passing the course because the full text, images and films or videos used in the lectures are not necessarily repeated elsewhere. It is highly recommended that you print out, read and bring the course outline materials to class, and use a three-ring loose-leaf binder so that notes from independent study and readings can be assembled with your lecture notes and printouts from the course website in the sequence in which they are presented.



RESOURCE #1: THE INSTRUCTION COMMONS and E-reserve

The Instruction Commons is a publicly accessible website within the ISU E-Library. You can access it through the ISU E-library webpage (I will demonstrate how to do this in class—it's easy!) At the Index page you will note that there are several features here that will help you navigate the information and content of the course:

- A description of the course
- Contact information for Professor Martin
- Clickable links to E-reserve, the WebCT site, and Plato's Cave
- The course syllabus and schedule
- Course lecture notes (added periodically)

Lecture material: Lecture Abstracts and Outlines have been prepared for some of the lectures. Typically, each includes a topic outline, and may include spelling and expanded definitions of selected terms and names. The abstract is a condensed version of the lecture content. These outlines and notes should be useful during review of your lecture notes and to help you recall the over-all organization and various details of the lectures. Print out the relevant lecture abstract outlines pages as we progress through the semester. Review the lecture outlines before the lectures to become familiar with the lecture topics,

concepts and spelling, etc. You are expected to bring the lecture abstract and outline to class for reference.

How To Use The Lecture Abstracts and Outlines

First, there is much that the abstracts/outlines are not:

- they are not a textbook for the course
- they are not the full text of the lectures or a substitute for them
- they are not an exact outline or a summary of the lectures
- they are not a comprehensive study guide for exam preparation

Second, there is much that the abstracts/outlines do contain:

- the correct spelling of key terms, names, etc.
- basic definitions of certain terms
- topic summaries or guides to various aspects of the lectures
- sufficient content which, when coupled with your lecture notes and other study aids, should be helpful in recalling course content and for exam preparation

E-reserve is a separate area within the ISU library website. This is in lieu of a course reader—instead of producing a photocopied reader, I have your required readings available as PDF files at this site. You can of course read them online without making copies, but you need to make paper copies so that you have these articles or book chapters on hand when open-book portions of exams take place.

RESOURCE #2: Required Text

The single required textbook for this course is:

Postrel, Virginia. 2003. *The Substance of Style: How the Rise of Aesthetic Value is Remaking Commerce, Culture and Consciousness*. New York: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.

This book is available at the MU Bookstore, the Campus Bookstore on LincolnWay, or through Amazon.com and the like. It's not expensive, whether new or used, hardback or paperback. I call that a bargain—the best I ever had...

RESOURCE #3: PLATO'S CAVE

The College of Design (CoD) Visual Resources Collection has scanned some of the lecture slides of a number of courses, including Design Studies 183, into the ISU database for use by students for study review. New with this course are copies of the PowerPoint presentations. However, notation regarding content, purpose, and principles from the lecture are not included. These materials are

accessible through the course website and computers across campus at <www.vrcdb.iastate.edu>. This should be very helpful as a supplement to your notes for examination preparation. Because Plato's Cave contains copyright protected information, the site is closed to off-campus computers. An access code will be provided in class. You must be registered for the course to obtain the code.

A note on the slide and PowerPoint images: In designing illustrated lectures such as those that are the centerpiece of this course certain questions emerge: How many images are sufficient? Sufficient to be illustrative of, and meaningful to, the issues being discussed—yet, not so many as to become a blur. What is the right number to remain memorable? I have probably erred on the side of "slightly too many." I can't help it. I love pictures.

During the lectures, focus on the concepts being discussed while various slides are on the screen rather than attempting to record all the detail data. The important issues are those that are providing a framework for consideration of why the particular examples/designs/people/places/things etc. are of note, and understanding the concepts underlying the images.

RESOURCE #4: THE WebCT SITE

The class WebCT Site will be a repository for PowerPoint files used in class. These are of much higher resolution than images stored within Plato's Cave, but then again the files are much bigger. Use either resource, depending upon your image resolution needs.

Like Plato's Cave, access to the WebCT granted only to those registered for the course. You will need your ISU user name and password to enter. The address is:
<<http://webct.ait.iastate.edu:8900/ISUtools/webhtml/login.html>>

CONTACTING ME (PROFESSOR MARTIN)

My phone number is 294-8974; my e-mail is <mdmartin@iastate.edu>; appointments should be arranged by contacting me via e-mail rather than by phone.



LEARNING DISABILITIES

If you are learning disabled and have a university issued statement of suggested accommodations, please contact me by email or in person as soon as possible.

COURSE POLICIES and GRADING

Course grades: overall (final) grades for the course will be based upon four exams (15% each, 60% total) three out-of-class assignments (10% each, 30% total) and occasional in-class writing exercises (10% total). Total course points earned by the end of the term will determine your course grade (in-between scores are rounded up or down):

A:	above 94
A-:	90-93
B+:	88-89
B:	83-87
B-:	80-82
C+:	78-79
C:	73-77
C-:	70-72
D+:	68-69
D:	63-67
D-:	60-62
F:	below 60



EXAMS

Exam formats will vary. While factual knowledge pertinent to the material covered in the course is important, the principal focus of 183 is ideas and concepts and their interconnectedness, supported by detailed knowledge and precise text reference. The course is a framework of information; it is up to you to think through the connections. Understanding of design concepts, their implication and application as presented in your examination answers will be vitally important. Parts of each exam will be 'closed-book' and parts will be 'open-book'. Some of the exams will include essay portions based upon the lectures, assignments and readings. You will be allowed to use your copies of the readings, class handouts, and your lecture notes for the essay parts of the exams. This may prove to be a very challenging learning and examination process—particularly if you have a background that stresses "facts" and examinations geared only to "true/false" and "multiple choice" responses. Hang in there!

DON'T MISS AN EXAM...READ THIS!

Each exam constitutes between 10-20% of the course grade; missing an exam will obviously profoundly hinder your ability to pass the course—so please note: make-up examinations will not be offered, as there is no way to do so equitably. (In **very unusual**

cases where a **compelling reason** for missing class on an exam date exists, and you provide **ample documentation** for this eventuality, and you inform me about this issue **before** the time of the exam, I **may** or may not allow for alternative work to be submitted for credit in lieu of the exam. Do not count on this for anything but truly extraordinary circumstances!)

Generally, exam grades will not be curved—but they may be, at the discretion of instructor, depending on the overall class performance on any particular exam. I will devote time during class to review exam responses.

EXAM EVALUATION RUBRIC

(for essay responses)

A: Excellent performance; superior mastery of factual data; creative synthetical utilization of course material, concepts and ideas in examination essays

B: Very good work; demonstrated mastery of course material; synthetic use of course concepts and ideas in examination essays

C: Adequate performance; reasonable knowledge of course materials; ability to demonstrate understanding of course concepts and ideas

D: Low pass; marginal performance and demonstrated knowledge of course materials, concepts and ideas

F: Failing work; inadequate mastery of course materials

OUT-OF-CLASS ASSIGNMENT

EVALUATION RUBRIC (each one 10 points maximum)

10 points: Outstanding performance and an exemplary product; rigorous, thoughtful, innovative and creative well beyond the bounds of assigned criteria

9 points: Strong performance and strong product; rigorous, thoughtful and diligently accomplished in every respect

8 points: Complete, clear and very well-presented overall

7 points: Complete but perfunctory

6 points: complete but some problems with communication, or well-presented but not quite complete.

5 points (or less): serious deficiencies with respect to assigned criteria

AND DON'T TURN IN AN ASSIGNMENT LATE...READ THIS!

Each out-of-class assignment constitutes 10% of the course grade; missing one will obviously profoundly hinder your ability to pass the course—so please note: the due dates for the three out-of-class assignments are listed on the course schedule. They will also be emphasized at several points during the course of the term. For each one they are due at the **beginning** of the class period on their due date. If turned in after the beginning of class on the due date, they will receive half the credit they would have earned had they been turned in on time; no credit given if turned in after the due date. I will not make any exceptions to this policy.



IN-CLASS ASSIGNMENTS/QUIZZES

The in-class writing exercises or pop quizzes will occur randomly and will be based upon the readings, assignments, and lectures. They will be graded "S" or "F", and **must be turned in at class that day** to receive any credit. An "F" will be given for no paper having been submitted, or for papers that are deemed as not responsive to the issues and content being raised in the question at hand. Your score for this 10% of the course will be dependent upon the number

of passing papers you submit; attending class and providing thoughtful answers to the questions should prove to be an easy way to polish up your course grade.

ATTENDANCE POLICY

Your attendance at class sessions is essential for strong performance in the course and for garnering credit for the in-class exercises that will occur randomly.

CLASSROOM DECORUM: It's all about respect, considerateness, and common sense

I respect each of you and will attempt to show you every courtesy; I have not forgotten what it is like to be a student in a large class, and so I will attempt to do everything I can to enhance your learning experience. I respect the value of your time—I pledge to start class on time and end class on time each day that we meet, and I always attempt to make presentations interesting and user-friendly. In return, I ask that you each show respect for your fellow students and for instructors and the several guest presenters...so...

Please do:

- Come to class on time
- As space permits, sit closer rather than further away
- Take notes (this helps you, believe me—the hand engages the brain, and your notes will be an essential class resource, since some course material is only encountered during class)
- Be attentive during class, and feel free to ask questions or offer comments at any point
- Participate fully during in-class discussions
- Approach me at any point with suggestions, ideas, reasonable complaints, constructive criticisms, etc.

Please do not:

- Carry on conversations with classmates while presenters are presenting (you may think you're being discreet, but this is very distracting to everyone in the room—especially me)
- Begin "packing up" before 3:30—when several dozen people do this at once, it is very distracting for those who want to listen and for anyone making a presentation...also, there is very often important information disseminated at the end of the class day.

CELL PHONES and LAPTOPS (and other small useful toys)

Cell phones must be turned off and **stashed** during class. A ringing cell phone is a huge distraction for the entire room, but even "silent" use of cell phones

during class (messaging etc.) can be a distraction for nearby classmates. Class is only 80 minutes long—please just put 'em away until 3:30.

Some students take notes directly on laptops—this is completely acceptable—but it is absolutely unacceptable to operate a laptop for any other purpose during this class. It can be very distracting for anyone in sight of your screen—so don't do it.

We're all in this together—remember that whatever you do in class not only affects your learning experience—it affects the experience of others. I mean this as positive reinforcement—anything from the “do” list above is constructive not just for the do-er but for everyone else in the room (Including me).

ACADEMIC HONESTY and its antithesis

I fully expect this will not be an issue this term, but please note: Any incidence of academic dishonesty may result in dismissal from this course, at the discretion of the instructor. I'm not kidding—I have done this in prior classes where I thought circumstances warranted it—even when the dishonest act concerned a relatively minor element of the course (in terms of its point value).

For me this is a very serious issue. The penalty for academic dishonesty is not limited to loss of credit for the exam or assignment in question. It may cost you a passing grade in this class, and it certainly will become part of your permanent ISU record. Academic dishonesty includes, among other things: any form of cheating on exams; representation of another student's work as your own, or representation of your work as the work of another; any misrepresentation of the authorship of assignments; any type of plagiarism (see ISU student handbook for a definition of plagiarism). In all instances I will follow ISU policy and refer cases of academic dishonesty to the university's Office of Student Affairs.

SUGGESTIONS for EFFECTIVE NOTE-TAKING

Your notes are very important in this class, because they will be your primary reference for study AND you will be able to use them during the essay portion of exams. Also, taking notes during a presentation engages the brain in a way that passive listening cannot. Any form of note-taking helps you stay focused—and for visual learners (like me), reviewing the notes and diagrams I create are “prompts” that help me recall things I would otherwise forget.

Here is Professor Palermo's suggested format for note-taking (this is time-tested method that is particularly appropriate for presentations involving visual or graphic imagery as well as text):

PAGE SET-UP

Start notes with title, date and page number. Use three-hole paper so that you can add them to your notebook with the course handouts.

NOTE TAKING

Draw a line down the page -- just left of the center. Write notes during the lectures like crazy - - put too much down, not too little. Up to 50% of the content of a lecture is forgotten within one hour.

During the lectures, draw key figures, slides or PowerPoint frames on the left hand side of the page.

HEADLINE SUMMARY

After the lecture, go back and read your notes. Put headlines or summaries of the lectures on the left.

PARAPHRASE SUMMARY

Also after the lecture, re-read your notes and prepare a paraphrased summary and write it out on the right hand side of the page.

TAKING NOTES ON READINGS

Use the same format for notes from readings. Include book page numbers and bibliographic references so that you can find them again.



SYLLABUS PHOTO CREDITS

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COURSE SCHEDULE

(Provided on separate sheet)