COMM 400: DESIGNING FOR DIGITAL ENVIRONMENTS
FALL 2021
MONDAY FROM 5:30 P.M. TO 8 P.M. (ONLINE)

INSTRUCTOR: **E-MAIL:**
Julia DeCook, PhD jdecook@luc.edu

HOW TO ADDRESS ME: **OFFICE:**
Dr. DeCook or Professor DeCook SOC 205 (temporary office)

PRONOUNS: **OFFICE HOURS:**
she/her/hers By appointment

In this course, we will focus on what it means to create content for consumers and audiences in digital environments. We all know what online content means – these days, it's a given that people will consume content on apps, websites, and other digital media.

But what are the politics and social orders that are imposed through these logics of design? How can design reinforce oppressive systems like racism, sexism, ableism, and other -isms in ways that are invisible to us? How do we design our digital interfaces and technology in ways that are just, accessible, and equitable?

Rather than focusing on just building things, this course will approach the concept of design from a social justice framework to better equip students with the theories, vocabulary, and insight to build better digital environments.

We will cover things like user experience and accessibility, the ways that ideology are embedded into our systems and everyday lives, and learn about community-based approaches to designing a better digital environment and offline world.

COURSE OBJECTIVES AND GOALS
By the end of this course, students will be able to not only design for digital environments, but do so with social justice, equity, and accessibility at the forefront of their designs. Students will also produce a digital portfolio of their work and online presence that reflects these principles.

REQUIRED MATERIALS/BOOKS
There are three (3) required books for this course. Additional readings or viewings for the course will be posted on the Sakai page throughout the semester and students may need their Loyola UVID and password to access some content through LUC Libraries.

Students are responsible for checking Sakai to see if there are additional readings for that week. Students will be expected to complete readings before class in order to fully participate in class discussion and activities.

Additionally, students are expected to have access to their own reading materials, laptops or desktop computers, notebooks, pens/pencils to take notes in class and to participate in class activities and to complete class assignments. If this is not possible for whatever reason, please let me know and we will find solutions or alternatives.

TECHNOLOGY REQUIREMENTS
For this class, you will need access to a reliable desktop computer, laptop computer, or tablet to be able to do the discussions, readings, viewings, and other assignments. You will need access to some kind of Word processor, like Microsoft Word, Apple Pages, or Google Docs to work on your assignments. To accomplish this, you will also need a reliable Internet connection.

You will also need to access Sakai regularly to keep up to date with the course materials. Remember that the course schedule outlines all of the required readings, and Sakai will be where readings that are *not* the required book will be.

REQUIRED TEXTBOOKS
Design Justice: Community-led Practices to Build the Worlds We Need
By Sasha Constanza-Chock
ISBN: 9780262043458
Available for free as an ebook through Loyola Libraries and OAPEN

Design for Real Life
By Eric Meyer and Sara Wachter-Boettcher
ISBN: 9781937557409
Available for free as an ebook through Loyola Libraries

Race After Technology: Abolitionist Tools for the New Jim Code
By Ruha Benjamin
ISBN: 9781509526390
Available for free as an ebook through Loyola Libraries

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
There is a total possible of 150 points that students can receive in this course. The grading scale is:

GRADE	PERCENTAGE
A	94+
A-	90 to 93
B+	87 to 89

B	84 to 86
B-	80 to 83
C+	77 to 79
C	74 to 76
C-	70 to 73
D+	67 to 69
D	64 to 66
F	63 and below

Below is a table that breaks down the points of each graded assignment. Brief descriptions of the assignments are below the table.

ASSIGNMENT	POINTS
Syllabus Quiz	5 points
Participation and Professionalism	20 points
Walkthrough Assignment #1 (website)	10 points
Walkthrough Assignment #2 (app)	10 points
Walkthrough Assignment #3 (static page)	10 points
Walkthrough Assignment #4 (video)	10 points
"Bad Design" Case Study	5 points
Accessibility Case Study	5 points
Midterm Project – Website Design	30 points
Final Project and Portfolio	45 points
TOTAL	**150 points**

Syllabus Quiz (5 points)
Students will be required to pass a syllabus quiz consisting of five (5) questions about the course. You will have two attempts to earn a perfect score on the syllabus quiz.

Participation/Professionalism (20 points)
I expect you all to attend class regularly, complete the readings on time, turn in all assignments on their due dates, and to regularly participate in class discussions.

On that note, since we will be mostly engaging with each other through discussion, I expect you all to be respectful, kind, and patient with one another. If a student is perceived to be hostile, intimidating, or disrespectful to me or their classmates, they will be asked to leave the class and if required, mediated conflict management will be conducted and reports will be made about the student's behavior.

Further, if a student is seen not paying attention in class or does not engage in discussion with their fellow classmates on a regular basis, this will affect their score.

Additionally, if a student is regularly late for class (more than 10 minutes past scheduled start time), schedules a meeting time outside of office hours and does not show up to the meeting, or demonstrates any other lack of consideration for the instructor or classmates as deemed by the instructor, they will also have points deducted from their professionalism score.

Walkthrough Assignments (10 points each, 40 points total)
In these walkthrough assignments, students will form groups, and as groups you will choose a media object of your choosing based on the theme of that case study (app, website, static page, video) and then give a brief presentation (roughly 5 to 8 minutes) about the media object's accessibility, issues with its design, and ways that it can be improved.

On that note, these short case studies do not need to be a "bad" piece of design – in fact, choosing a good piece of design and unpacking what makes it good is a way of applying those principles to your own work. We will have a separate assignment for "bad design."

Bad Design Case Study (5 points)
Staying with your walkthrough assignment groups, you will do a "bad design" case study. Like the walkthrough assignments, the bad design case study can be anything of the students' choosing – digital or otherwise. "Bad" can mean a lot of different things, and often we know that something is poorly designed without quite being able to describe why it's "bad."

In this case study, I want you all to really unpack what makes something a piece of bad design – including if it reinforces racism, sexism, classism, or is completely inaccessible to those with disabilities (both physical and cognitive).

Examples of non-digital objects can include hostile architecture, crash test dummies, and more. Examples of digital objects can include things like VR headsets, smartphones (which are often too big for women's hands), and more. If you want to do a case study of a poorly designed app or user interface, that is also an option. More information will be given about this assignment throughout the semester.

Accessibility Case Study (5 points)
In your groups, you will also do an accessibility case study. Using the accessibility checklist from the ADA and the WAVE tool, students will choose a website and write a brief case study about whether or not the website meets accessibility standards per the ADA and provide examples using the WAVE tool.

The checklists and other readings on accessibility will be provided to students, and you will then write a 3 to 4 page report (double spaced) on your experience doing an accessibility test for the website you chose as well as give a brief presentation in class on what you found.

Midterm Project (30 points)
For the midterm project, I would like you all to start planning and envisioning your personal/professional online presence via a website. Using wireframes, I want you to either submit the plans and proposal for your professional website or a specific website to showcase a story that you've written/produced (or, if you want to house your writing on your professional page you can do that too).

This will not only give you the opportunity to start building and planning well ahead of the final project – which is your web portfolio – but give you time and space to reflect on the principles we've learned so far and how you plan on applying them to your own website and how you'll advocate for these issues in your work.

For the midterm, you will not only need to submit wireframes (e.g. web-based drawings of how you plan on laying out everything on your website), but also a detailed proposal of what you plan on building, what service you will use (like a website builder), and the steps you'll take to make sure your website is accessible and equitable in terms of its content.

The proposal should be 3 to 4 double spaced pages, 1 inch margins, 12pt Times New Roman font, and include a timeline for how and when you'll build your website to ensure you have something to present and submit as your final.

Final Project (40 points)
The final project for this course will be your finished portfolio/website. ☺

Along with the actual project (a working link to your website), I want you to submit your own checklist and score for accessibility and a 4 to 6 page reflection on the process of building your website, conducting your own accessibility checks, and how you'll apply the principles we learned in class moving forward in your careers.

Students will also be required to present their projects in class the week before it is due to incorporate feedback from the professor and other students. Presentations should be 10 minutes with 5 minutes for feedback/Q&A.

More information will be given in class as the semester progresses.

E-MAIL/SAKAI POLICY
I will respond to emails within 24 hours during the week and 48 hours on weekends. If you have not received any feedback during this period, please feel free to reach out to me again to ensure your communication was received.

I expect students to use appropriate, professional, and considerate language when communicating with me and other students via email. If you are nervous or uncertain about how to go about this, check out this presentation on email etiquette: E-mail Etiquette for Students.

Students are responsible for checking Sakai and their LUC email accounts regularly to stay up-to-date on announcements.

If you don't check your LUC email account, you should forward it to an account that you do check. You may also forward your LUC mail to a non-LUC account. Students are responsible for any information distributed via email and/or Sakai.

LATE WORK POLICY

You will be expected to turn in and complete all assignments on their assigned due dates at the proper time. However, you will be given **two free passes** to ask for an extension, no questions asked, as long as the request is made the day the assignment is due. **This includes your final project**.

Anything beyond these freebies will require prior approval from the professor at least 48 hours before the due date.

LIMITS TO CONFIDENTIALITY

Under the Illinois Abused and Neglected Child Reporting Act, all personnel of institutions of higher education are classified as "mandated reporters" who must report to the Illinois Department of Children and Family Services (DCFS) if the reporter has reasonable cause to believe that a minor under 18 years of age known to the reporter in his or her official or professional capacity may be abused (physically or sexually) or neglected.

Essays, journals, and other materials submitted for this class are generally considered confidential pursuant to the University's student record policies. However, students should be aware that University employees, including instructors, may not be able to maintain confidentiality when it conflicts with their responsibility to report certain issues to protect the health and safety of Loyola University Chicago community members and others. As the instructor, I must report the following information to other University offices if you share it with me:

- Suspected child abuse/neglect, even if this maltreatment happened when you were a child
- Allegations of sexual assault or sexual harassment when they involve MSU students, faculty, or staff, and
- Credible threats of harm to oneself or to others.

These reports may trigger contact from a campus official who will want to talk with you about the incident that you have shared. In almost all cases, it will be your decision whether you wish to speak with that individual. If you would like to talk about these

events in a more confidential setting you are encouraged to make an appointment with the LUC Health Center.

ACCOMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

Any student with a disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from the Student Accessibility Center to the instructor.

The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of course content and processes. It is the student's responsibility to plan in advance in order to meet their own needs and assignment due dates.

PLAGIARISM AND ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

A basic mission of a university is to search for and to communicate truth as it is honestly perceived. A genuine learning community cannot exist unless this demanding standard is a fundamental tenet of the intellectual life of the community. Students of Loyola University Chicago are expected to know, to respect, and to practice this standard of personal honesty. Academic dishonesty can take several forms, including, but not limited to cheating, plagiarism, copying another student's work, and submitting false documents. Academic cheating is a serious act that violates academic integrity.

Cheating includes, but is not limited to, such acts as:
- Obtaining, distributing, or communicating examination materials prior to the scheduled examination without the consent of the teacher;
- Providing information to another student during an examination;
- Obtaining information from another student or any other person during an examination;
- Using any material or equipment during an examination without consent of the instructor, or in a manner which is not authorized by the instructor;
- Attempting to change answers after the examination has been submitted;
- Unauthorized collaboration, or the use in whole or part of another student's work, on homework, lab reports, programming assignments, and any other course work which is completed outside of the classroom;
- Falsifying medical or other documents to petition for excused absences or extensions of deadlines; or
- Any other action that, by omission or commission, compromises the integrity of the academic evaluation process.

Plagiarism is a serious violation of the standards of academic honesty. Plagiarism is the appropriation of ideas, language, work, or intellectual property of another, either by intent or by negligence, without sufficient public acknowledgement and appropriate citation that the material is not one's own. It is true that every thought probably has been influenced to some degree by the thoughts and actions of others. Such influences can be thought of as affecting the ways we see things and express all thoughts.

Plagiarism, however, involves the taking and use of specific words and ideas of others without proper acknowledgement of the sources, and includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- Submitting as one's own material copied from a published source, such as Internet, print, CD-ROM, audio, video, etc.;
- Submitting as one's own another person's unpublished work or examination material;
- Allowing another or paying another to write or research a paper for one's own benefit; or
- Purchasing, acquiring, and using for course credit a pre-written paper.

The above list is in no way intended to be exhaustive. Students should be guided by the principle that it is of utmost importance to give proper recognition to all sources. To do so is an act of personal and professional courtesy, as well as intellectual honesty. Any failure to do so, whether by intent or by neglect, whether by omission or commission, is an act of plagiarism. A more detailed description of this issue can be found at http://luc.edu/english/writing.

In addition, a student may not submit the same paper or other work for credit in two or more classes. A student who submits the same work for credit in two or more classes will be judged guilty of academic dishonesty, and will be subject to sanctions described below. This applies even if the student is enrolled in the classes during different semesters. If a student plans to submit work with similar or overlapping content for credit in two or more classes, the student should consult with all instructors prior to submission of the work to make certain that such submission will not violate this standard.

Plagiarism or any other act of academic dishonesty will result minimally in the instructor's assigning the grade of "F" for the assignment or examination. The instructor may impose a more severe sanction, including a grade of "F" in the course.

All instances of academic dishonesty must be reported by the instructor to the appropriate area head and to the office of the Dean of the School of Communication. The office of the Dean of the School of Communication may constitute a hearing board to consider the imposition of sanctions in addition to those imposed by the instructor, including a recommendation of expulsion, depending on the seriousness of the misconduct. In the case of multiple instances of academic dishonesty, the Dean's office may convene a separate hearing board to review these instances.

The student has the right to appeal the decision of the hearing board to the Dean of SOC. If the student is not a member of the SOC, the dean of the college in which the student is enrolled shall be part of the process. Students have the right to appeal the decision of any hearing board and the deans of the two schools will review the appeal together. Their decision is final in all cases except expulsion. The sanction of expulsion for academic dishonesty may be imposed only by the Provost upon recommendation of

the dean or deans. Students have a right to appeal any finding of academic dishonesty against them. The procedure for such an appeal can be found at: http://www.luc.edu/academics/catalog/undergrad/reg_academicgrievance.

The School of Communication maintains a permanent record of all instances of academic dishonesty. The information in that record is confidential. However, students may be asked to sign a waiver which releases that student's record of dishonesty as a part of the student's application to a graduate or professional school, to a potential employer, to a bar association, or to similar organizations. (The School of Communication policy is consistent with the Academic Integrity Policy of the College of Arts & Sciences.)

DETAILED COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1 August 30	**Do Artifacts Have Politics?** Reading: "Do Artifacts Have Politics?" by Winner (on Sakai) Chapter 1 of *Design for Real Life* **SYLLABUS QUIZ DUE SEPTEMBER 8 AT 11:00 P.M.**
Week 2 September 6	**NO CLASS – LABOR DAY**
Week 3 September 13	**The Digital Divide** Reading: "COVID-19 exposed the digital divide. Here's how we can close it" by Roese (on Sakai) "The Digital Divide as a Complex and Dynamic Phenomenon" by van Dijk and Hacker (on Sakai) "Digital inequalities and why they matter" by Robinson et al. (on Sakai) "Reconsidering Political and Popular Understandings of the Digital Divide" by Selwyn (on Sakai) Designing digital services for equitable access by McDonald (on Sakai)

	Viewing: TEDxCollege Park: [Why I Fight To Close The Digital Divide? by Mignon Clyburn](#)
Week 4 September 20	**Users Aren't Us** Reading: Chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 of *Design for Real Life* Bird - Are we all produsers now? (on Sakai) [The Seven Principles of Universal Design](#) (by Rossetti, on Sakai)
Week 5 September 27	**The Dangers of Design Thinking** Reading: Chapters 6, 7, 8 and Conclusion of *Design for Real Life* [The Design Thinking Movement is Absurd by Lee Vinsel](#) (on Sakai) Manufacturing an Artificial Intelligence Revolution (by Katz, on Sakai) [Don't Call AI "Magic"](#) (by elish and boyd, on Sakai) WALKTHROUGH 1 DUE IN CLASS
Week 6 October 4	**What kinds of futures are we designing?** Reading: Introduction and Chapters 1 and 2 of *Race After Technology* [Defining Algorithmic Ideology: Using Ideology Critique to Scrutinize Corporate Search Engines](#) (by Mager, on Sakai) [Assessing Risk, Automating Racism](#) (by Benjamin, on Sakai)

	[Big Other: Surveillance Capitalism and the Prospects of an Information Civilization](#) (by Zuboff, on Sakai) [Silicon Valley Pretends that Algorithmic Bias is Accidental. It's Not.](#) (by Hamilton, on Sakai) Viewing: Ruha Benjamin [TEDxTalk - From park bench to lab bench - What kind of future are we designing?](#) (on Sakai) WALKTHROUGH 2 DUE IN CLASS
Week 7 October 11	**NO SCHOOL – FALL BREAK**
Week 8 October 18	**Reimagining Technology** Reading: Chapters 3, 4, and 5 of *Race After Technology* [Resisting Reduction: Designing our Complex Future with Machines](#) (Ito, on Sakai) [Defund Facial Recognition](#) (by Devich-Cyril, on Sakai) [Police surveillance of Black Lives Matter shows the danger technology poses to democracy](#) (by Shere and Nurse, on Sakai) [Defending Black Lives Means Banning Facial Recognition](#) (by Petty, on Sakai) BAD DESIGN CASE STUDY DUE IN CLASS
Week 9 October 25	**Beyond Disability** Reading: [People With Disabilities May Face Greater Challenges When Returning To In-Person Work](#) (NPR, on Sakai) Internet Accessibility: Beyond Disability by Hofstader (on Sakai)

Disability and Technology: A Critical Realist Perspective by Frauenberger (on Sakai)

Autism and new media: Disability between technology and society by Pinchevski and Durham Peters (on Sakai)

Disability and the promises of technology: Technology, subjectivity and embodiment within an order of the normal by Moser (on Sakai)

There's already a blueprint for a more accessible internet. If only designers would learn it (Quartz, on Sakai)

MIDTERM PROJECT DUE ON SAKAI AT 11:55 P.M. ON OCTOBER 27

Week 10 November 1	**Escaping the Matrix of Domination** Reading: Introduction and Chapter 1 of *Design Justice* AI bias is not just a data problem by Marda (on Sakai) ACCESSIBILITY CASE STUDY DUE IN CLASS
Week 11 November 8	**Communities and Design** Reading: Chapters 2 and 3 of *Design Justice* Digital Defense Playbook: Community Power Tools for Reclaiming Data (on Sakai) What is data justice? The case for connecting digital rights and freedoms globally (by Taylor, on Sakai) Research these organizations and resources before coming to class: Tactical Tech; Data 4 Black Lives; Detroit Community Technology Project; Invisible Institute; Lucy Parsons Labs; Civic Tech Field Guide

	WALKTHROUGH 3 DUE IN CLASS
Week 12 November 15	**Equity and Access** Reading: Chapters 4, 5 and Conclusion ("Directions for Future Work") in *Design Justice* [Want to Predict the Future of Surveillance? Ask Poor Communities.](#) (by Eubanks, on Sakai) [Digital Bill of Rights](#) (on Sakai) [Feminist Principles of the Internet](#) (on Sakai) WALKTHROUGH 4 DUE IN CLASS
Week 13 November 22	FINAL PROJECT/PRESENTATION WORK DAY (IN CLASS) You will sign up for a presentation day and slot in class (November 29 or December 6)
Week 14 November 29	PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PROJECTS
Week 15 December 6	PRESENTATIONS OF FINAL PROJECTS
Week 16 Finals Week	**FINAL PROJECT MATERIALS (LINK TO FINISHED SITE AND REFLECTION) DUE ON DECEMBER 16 AT 11:55 P.M.**