COMM 275 / WEB DESIGN AND USABILITY / FALL 2015

When and Where: Monday, Wednesday, & Friday + 10:25 – 11:15am + SoC 015
Instructor: Luke Strosnider + lstrosnider@luc.edu
Office: SoC 221 + Office Hours By Appointment
Class Website: www.lukestrosnider.com/loyola–comm275

REQUIRED TEXT AND TECHNOLOGY

- Readings will be provided via the course website, either as links to websites or PDF files.
- External hard drive / flash drive for storing and transporting files.

COURSE DESCRIPTION

Web design and usability are vital to clear and effective communication on the web. In the not too distant past, familiarity with web design and usability was limited to professional graphic designers and computer scientists. However, recent trends (social media, open source software, blogging, and more) have made web design and usability both a more common and more democratic activity.

This course will explore the design and usability of websites from several perspectives: how they look (aesthetics), how they work (navigability and usability), and how they are made (tools and software). Lectures, demonstrations, and in–class lab time will introduce students to the creative tools and software that power contemporary web design and usability. Emphasis will be on using a variety of tools and resources to meet one's own goals, rather than achieving the level of expert in any one piece of software. We'll also be looking at myriad sources to inspire our design and usability: compellingly–designed websites as well as the work of photographers, print designers, publishers, theorists, and artists.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

1.) Developing creative capacities (with regards to design).
2.) Learning how to find and use resources for answering questions and solving problems.
3.) Gaining factual knowledge (terminology, classifications, methods, trends).

KNOWLEDGE GOALS

- Good web design practice is good design practice. It applies to all media.
- "Good design is invisible." Design should never an obstacle to experience.
- Planning for audience, information organization, and communication goals are as important as the visual design of websites.
- Colors are pretty. They also mean things.
- Photographs and graphics are vital to effective communication; they need to be optimized for the web.
- Fonts can speak as loudly as the text itself.
- When it comes to tools and software, being malleable and nimble can trump expertise. (Technologies are ever–changing. Learn them, but – just as importantly - learn to adapt.)
- Contemporary web design culture is full of people willing to share their work. Build on the work of others. Use and adapt the tools that others have built. Learn to be a benevolent hacker. Hybridize. Integrate. But always give credit.
- Design inspiration is *everywhere, all the time*.

POLICIES

Attendance / Lateness
Missed work cannot be made up or excused except in the case of severe illness, death in the family, or religious holiday. These absences must be documented if you'd like to make up missed work. Documentation for a university–authorized absence must be cleared with the professor in advance.

Come to class on time. Coming in late disrupts the class, and you'll likely miss important information. It is your responsibility to ask classmates for announcements you may have missed by arriving late.

Illness
If you are ill, please do not come to class. Send me an email before class and contact the Wellness Center for advice … and get documentation!

Participation
In this class, you'll hear lectures, participate in discussion, and provide feedback to classmates. Your positive and substantive contribution to each of these class elements is expected for a passing grade doing the bare minimum will earn you a bare minimum grade. Your physical presence in the room is less than bare minimum participation; participation includes attendance, attention, and attitude as well as substantive contributions.

Leaving early, texting, checking Facebook, chatting, sleeping, eating meals, and doing other non–class related work are distractions to you, me, and your classmates and will bring down your participation grade. If you need to leave class early, please tell me before class starts and sit near the door.

Classroom Citizenship
Students are expected to respect each other. When you enter a classroom, you are a member of a community of learning. Your success depends on your neighbors' success. Treat each other with tolerance and understanding. The people you'll interact with in class are your peers and future colleagues. Strive to do better on your own, but also strive to help your classmates to elevate the level of conversation in the classroom. You are responsible for your own work, but you are also responsible to your teacher and your peers. Your positive substantive participation is a valuable aspect of the class.

Computers in the Classroom
Most class meetings will include a section of lab time where we use the classroom computers to learn software and explore web resources.

We'll be relying heavily on web resources to help expand our knowledge of contemporary web design culture as well as to help us answer questions / troubleshoot software and other tools. This is particularly true with regards to web design software: there are many forums, FAQs, tutorials, and other resources online that will help expand your knowledge of these tools. LEARN TO CONSULT THESE RESOURCES BEFORE YOU ASK FOR HELP.

If you would like to bring your own device (laptop, smartphone, etc.) to take notes, that is acceptable. However, you may need to use specific software (Dreamweaver, Photoshop, etc.) that is installed on the lab computers.

A reminder: be respectful with your use of technology. Please do not use valuable class time to send text messages, use headphones to listen to music, watch wacky videos, look at Facebook, check email, chat, etc.

Students with Disabilities

Any student with a learning disability that needs special accommodation during exams or class periods should provide documentation from Services for Students with Disabilities confidentially to the instructor. The instructor will accommodate that student's needs in the best way possible, given the constraints of the 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.

Academic Dishonesty
Academic dishonesty of any kind will not be tolerated. Plagiarism in your work will result in a minimum of a failing grade for that assignment. The case may carry further sanctions from the School of Communication or the University, the most serious being permanent expulsion. Avoid turning in work that could be interpreted as plagiarism or academically dishonest (e.g., failing to properly credit a source or using someone else's ideas without clarifying that they are not yours).

This is an academic community; being uninformed or naïve is not an acceptable excuse for not properly referencing your sources.

It is dishonest to:
- turn in the same work for two classes;
- turn in a paper you have not written yourself; or
- copy from another student or use a "cheat sheet" during an exam.

Late Work / Lost Work
Late work will not be accepted. Extensions will not be granted. Incompletes will not be assigned. Make–up work will not be assigned unless pre–arranged, or due to an authorized documented absence. If you anticipate you will miss an assignment, please discuss it with the professor early in the semester to arrange an alternative. You must give at least one week notice to arrange alternative exam/quiz locations and times. Save early, save often, and archive your emails. If an assignment is lost or you discover a discrepancy later in the semester, email documentation will be required (e.g., if you are sure you handed in an assignment that I do not have a grade listed for, be prepared to show me your dated original files or dated emailed work). It is your responsibility to make sure I get your work –– it is not my responsibility to tell you your file was corrupted, or your email bounced, or to remind you to hand in work.

Grading
The grade given to average work on all assignments is a C. So, if you just complete the bare minimum for each assignment, expect to earn a C for your work. Grades of B or A indicate impressive achievement above the average. Grades of A in particular indicate especially exceptional work. Grades below C indicate inadequacies or errors in any or all of the grading criteria. The grading scale is as follows:

94% A
90% A–
87% B+
84% B
80% B–
77% C+
74% C
70% C–
67% D+
65% D
64% and below F

Percentage grades are not rounded up.

Students will receive comments and grades for each assignment unless otherwise noted in the syllabus. It is your responsibility to keep track of the grades you earn. I will not send you updates on cumulative grades. I will not send you warnings when you drop below some point value. I will not send you prompts to participate more or to work harder. Again, it is your responsibility to keep track of the grades you earn. The total points for the class and for the assignment are listed in the syllabus so at any point in the semester, you should be able to calculate an approximation of your grade easily. Students may meet with me during office hours throughout the semester to discuss their grades and comments.

If you would like to discuss a grade on an assignment you must make an appointment to visit me during office hours. Bring the assignment, my comments, and a written explanation of how your work met the requirements of the assignment, and showed impressive achievement above the average. You have two weeks from the day I return the assignment to dispute my assessment of that work. After two weeks, I will assume you are satisfied with my assessment, and I will not reconsider the assessment for any reason.

SPECIFIC NOTES ON GRADING: Presentations
Presentations will be graded based on clarity of concept and delivery, relationship of concept to ideas discussed in the course, sufficient use of media (images and video) and success of execution (engaging, well–delivered, able to respond thoughtfully to instructor and classmates feedback).

SPECIFIC NOTES ON GRADING: Websites and other Visual Design Assignments

A   True excellence in form and/or function, clarity, aesthetics, and usability. For websites, it goes **well beyond** the design of the initial template. For custom header, shows a **significant** investment of time, inclusion of class concepts, and seeking of knowledge beyond that given in class demos. Takes full advantage of the design flexibility of software tools being used (HTML, CSS, Wordpress, Photoshop, etc.) Careful and well–justified use of colors, fonts, division of space (use of tables or other methods of organization). Includes embedded images, video, or other media. Shows serious investment in time, use of class concepts and tools introduced by instructor, and **significant exploration of uses and software / tool possibilities beyond what was offered in–class**. No mistakes. Everything in it's right place.

B   Good work in form and/or function, clarity, aesthetics, and usability. Goes a bit beyond the basics. Exceeds the basic requirements of the assignment, all parts are included, and the student has clearly made some attempt at integrating course knowledge – although a few more connections could be made. Takes some advantage of the software tools and includes appropriate elements. More work could be done, but overall, the work is above average. Almost no errors.

C   Site is average and meets basic expectations of the assignment. May need work on content, clarity, and organization. May have a couple of noticeable errors. Takes average advantage of the software tools being used. Although basics are most likely are there, lacks elaboration.

D   Weak, unfocused work. Site is below average, with errors. Major requirements of the assignment are missing or incomplete. Takes minimal advantage of the software tools.

F   Not completed or turned in late.

ASSIGNMENTS

(NOTE: *More detailed instructions and discussion of assignments will be offered in–class.)*

1.)   **Website Design Evolution & Critique : Research + Presentation (100 points)**
DUE DATE: PRESENTATIONS WILL TAKE PLACE DURING WEEKS 12, 13, & 14

Students will be divided into small groups and will choose a well–known website. Using the Internet Archive (http://archive.org/web/web.php) and other sources, the group will research that site's design evolution using the Internet Archive and do a presentation to the class. The presentation will investigate and critique **both** how the design of the website has changed over the years, **as well as** the websites current design and usability.

To receive full credit, your research + presentation will provide:

>   1.) a description of the site, it's purpose, and how long it has existed,
>   2.) at least 10 screenshots documenting the design evolution of the site,
>   3.) a discussion of how technological innovations influenced the site's design,
>   4.) research (if available) of the site's growth,
>   5.) a brief look at a competitor / similar site: how does this site's design + usability compare?
>   6.) aesthetic criticism of the site's design evolution: is it better? worse? the same?
>   7.) a critique of how the current version of the website looks (design) and functions (usability)

2.)   **Codecademy Exercises (25 points each x 2 = 50 points total)**
DUE DATES: PART 1 - FRIDAY, SEPT. 11   +   PART 2 - FRIDAY, SEPT. 18
Students will create an account with Codecademy (http://www.codecademy.com), a website featuring interactive web design tutorials and complete two exercises on the Codecademy website.

3.)   **HTML Site on Artist, Designer, or Visual Topic (100 points)**
DUE DATE: FRIDAY, OCT. 2
Create a small website using only HTML and CSS. The subject of the site will be an artist, designer, photographer, or visual topic (font, color, or other design element) of your choice. To receive full credit for this assignment, your site will meet the following guidelines:

>   1.) Site will consist of at least 5 individual hand–coded HTML pages,

>   ◦   a "home" page that introduces the site,

>   ◦   a brief biography / history of your subject,

>   ◦   include a selection of visual examples (pictures, video) of your subject's work,

>   ◦   provide your own thoughts and reactions to the subject,

>   ◦   a page explaining your design decisions and providing links to your research sources.

>   AND ...

>   2.) will link to an external Cascading Style Sheet (CSS)

4.)   Proposal For Final Site (50 points)
DUE DATE: FRIDAY, OCT. 23
A proposal for your final site, addressing the following topic areas:

- type of site (personal portfolio? small business? your bottle cap collection?)
- what purpose it will serve,
- intended audience,
- your initial choices / ideas for typography, color, graphics (header, etc.), AND …
- how those choices are related to appealing to the intended audience.
- PLEASE INCLUDE A DIAGRAM OR FLOW CHART OF PAGES AND PAGE CONTENT

5.)   Custom Header for Final Site (50 points)
DUE DATE: FRIDAY, NOV. 13
A custom header designed in Photoshop. This graphic will replace the sites original header and will serve as your sites primary visual identity.

6.)   Final Site (150 points)
"Standalone" site created using WordPress, featuring custom elements (header) and major changes (colors, typography, etc.) to theme you've built out, plug–ins and widgets that automatically aggregate / integrate data from outside sources (news, social media, images / video), etc.

DUE DATE: Students will present work **WELL-IN-PROGRESS** during Week 15
You will have one week from the last class meeting to work on finishing touches.
Evaluation of Final Sites will begin on **FRIDAY, DEC. 11**

CLASS SCHEDULE
(**NOTE:** *Schedule is subject to change to fit the goals and needs of the class. If so, you will be notified ASAP.)*

WEEK 1 / AUGUST 24, 26, 28
Welcome, Syllabus, Policies + Web Design as Ideology

M – Welcome + Syllabus + Overview
W – State of Contemporary Web Design
F – CodeAcademy Sign Up + Workshop

WEEK 2 / AUGUST 31, SEPTEMBER 2, 4
Introducing Web Design via CodeAcademy + Origins, Internet vs. WWW, the Death (?) of the Web

M – Origins of WWW (Video + Lecture)
W – Introduce "History" Assignment
F – What are HTML & CSS and how do they work?

WEEK 3 / SEPTEMBER 9, 11

The Evolution of Web Aesthetics + Begin Building: HTML, CSS, and proper website file organization

      M – NO CLASS MEETING / LABOR DAY

      W – Tools + Template Set Up

      F – Web Aesthetics (Lecture + In-Class Exercise) **(CODEACADEMY PART I DUE)**

WEEK 4 / SEPTEMBER 14, 16, 18

Typography: In the World, on the Web + Color: In the World, on the Web

      M – Design Principles: Typography

      W – Design Principles: Color

      F – What is Wordpress? Why use it? How does it work? *(Introduce Final Assignment)*
(CODEACADEMY PART II DUE)

WEEK 5 / SEPTEMBER 21, 23, 25

Images + Media on the Web

      M – Wordpress Nuts and Bolts: Getting set-up with hosting, URLs, etc.

      W – Design Principles: Images & Media

      F – Beyond the Basics: Tools & Templates

WEEK 6 / SEPTEMBER 28, 30, OCTOBER 2

Midterm Workshop & Peer Feedback Week

      M - In-Class: Pair off and "test" someone's website-in-progress. Offer feedback and critique.

      W – Workshop (Midterm Project)

      F – **MIDTERM PROJECT DUE**

WEEK 7 / OCTOBER 7, 9

Introducing Wordpress: Why use it? How does it work? Getting set-up.

      M - NO CLASS MEETING / MIDSEMESTER BREAK

      W – Overview of WP themes, How to Find and Install, What to look (out) for

      F – Flex Day: Q&A, Special Topics, How To, Workshop, Etc

WEEK 8 / OCTOBER 12, 14, 16

Introducing Wordpress Themes

      M – Planning: Considering Site Organization and Usability

      W – Considering the Right Theme for the Job: Usability, Flexibility, Adaptability

      F – Flex Day: Q&A, Special Topics, How To, Workshop, Etc

WEEK 9 / OCTOBER 19, 21, 23

Tweaking and Adapting Wordpress Themes

      M – Anatomy of a Theme (PHP) + Adapting Wordpress Themes (Removing Page Elements), Etc.

      W – Theme Workshop

      F – Flex Day: Q&A, Special Topics, How To, Workshop, Etc. **(FINAL PROJECT PROPOSAL DUE)**

WEEK 10 / OCTOBER 26, 28, 30

Plugins, Widgets, Etc.

      M - Expanding Wordpress: Widgets
      W - Expanding Wordpress: Plugins
      F – Flex Day: Q&A, Special Topics, How To, Workshop, Etc.

WEEK 11 / NOVEMBER 2, 4, 6

Design Evolution Presentations + Using Photoshop to Create Custom Graphics for Your Site & Custom Header

      M – Graphic Identities + Introducing Photoshop
      W – **DESIGN EVOLUTION PRESENTATIONS #1-2**
      F – More Photoshop + Workshop

WEEK 12 / NOVEMBER 9, 11, 13

Design Evolution Presentations + Workshop + Custom Header Review

      M - In-Class: Pair off and look at someone's header-in-progress. Offer feedback & critique.
      W - **DESIGN EVOLUTION PRESENTATIONS #3-4**
      F – Presentations, Critique, Suggestions: Custom Header and/or Graphics **(CUSTOM HEADER DUE)**

WEEK 13 / NOVEMBER 16, 18, 20

Design Evolution + Peer Feedback + Workshop

      M - In-Class: Pair off and "test" someone's website-in-progress. Offer feedback & critique.
      W – **DESIGN EVOLUTION PRESENTATIONS #5-6**
      F - Flex Day: Q&A, Special Topics, How To, Workshop, Etc.

WEEK 14 / NOVEMBER 23

      M - Workshop / Special Topics
      W – NO CLASS MEETING / THANKSGIVING BREAK
      F – NO CLASS MEETING / THANKSGIVING BREAK

WEEK 15 / NOVEMBER 30, DECEMBER 2, 4

      M – Presentations, Critique, Suggestions: Final Site Work-in-Progress
      W - Presentations, Critique, Suggestions: Final Site Work-in-Progress
      F – Presentations, Critique, Suggestions: Final Site Work-in-Progress