

San Francisco State University: Liberal Studies
LS426.02 Thought & Image
Fall 2016

Class Meetings: M/W 9:35-10:50

Classroom: HUM 408

Instructor: Nick Sousanis sousanis@sfsu.edu

Office: HUM 581 Phone: 415-338-3166

Office Hours: Monday 2-3, Wednesday 11-12, or by appointment

Humans are highly visual creatures and we live in an increasingly visual culture. In this course, we will explore what visual thinking means, work to become visually literate, and engage with visual culture. We will look, read, analyze, critique – and we will make – draw, design, compose. This will be a highly hands-on experience – with no prior drawing or design experience expected or required. In engaging visually with our visual world, we expect to open new perspectives on the world around us previously outside our experience.

Regular in-class and at home ongoing assignments will be posed as opportunities for serious play – to engage with visual communication as maker, critic, respondent. You will be assessed on your exploring them and putting yourself into the work, rather than your existing skill, craftsmanship. These should be fun even as they are demanding in the ways you push yourself to think and work in ways you aren't accustomed. Ultimately, the course should get you to ask questions about what thinking looks like and prepare you to go on visual explorations of your own devising...

Required Readings (available at SFSU bookstore):

Asterios Polyp by David Mazzucchelli

The Politics of Design by Ruben Pater

Other short readings all supplied by instructor via iLearn

Required Materials: Since we will regularly be sketching, comics-making, designing, and more in this course, you will need to have a few simple and readily available materials on hand. You can of course get more than these if your interest allows, but here are some basics:

- A notebook/journal/sketchbook of some sort
- Drawing tool of your choice (pen, pencil, brush pen, etc.) (Color options are nice too)

Optional Recommended Materials: Construction paper, scissors, glue

Ongoing assignments: The heart of this class will consist of small exercises that we'll be doing on a regular basis in-class and at home that connect to the subject matter at hand. One day you may be drawing, the next you may be visually analyzing the way a comics page is constructed, or considering why a park bench is designed as it is. Though the assignments may vary widely, they are all intended to get you actively thinking about the visual world and ways in which you can engage with it. While I've dreamed up a lot of activities for the term, I welcome suggestions for new things to try from all of you. Student evaluation will be based primarily on *completion not skill*. Emphasis will be placed on inventiveness, curiosity, effort, and willingness to dive in and try with vigor something you haven't – we want to build a portfolio of your explorations that should be rich in its depth. [Please note that prior drawing experience is not necessary, and that every exercise can be done by anyone of any skill level or background in drawing.]

Response Gallery: Each Assignment posted to iLearn

You will be keeping a composition notebook or journal in which to take visual notes, do in-class exercises, sketch out ideas, and conduct the majority of your assignments. You will submit them by first taking a quick, clean digital photo of the work, and subsequently posting each assignment

to iLearn before the start of class on the day it is due. For each assignment you will enter your last name first, followed by your first, then post your image(s), add any reflective text required (I will specify for each assignment the particular requirements), or upload a PDF, PPT, or other composite file. This will serve as a gallery to share with your classmates, as well as a place for me to respond to your work over the term. For each assignment, I will specify by name where you should upload it to so everything ends up in the right place.

Final project – an intense examination of your choosing that addresses something with visual communication or visual culture. You are invited to do this in a visual form, but you may also do it as a traditional essay. Whether project or paper, *what matters most is that it incorporates what we've done over the term, that it demonstrates that you brought to bear your creative and critical attention to it, and is meaningful to you.* Topic and format will be discussed in class and approved in conversation with the instructor. To this end, before you begin the final project, you will be required to submit a formal proposal outlining your intent and the form the project will take.

Proposal/pitch: The proposal must be between 100-150 words long, can include any accompanying visual or other information to make clear what you have in mind, and should clearly state how your project relates to course material. Finally, it should indicate the working thesis or aims of your proposed project. Input from cohort and review by instructor will shape revisions – upon which student will receive approval to proceed.

For those doing a project in a creative format, your project needs to address course material in some fundamental way. That is, your project should indicate an advanced understanding of what we've explored over the term. In addition to your project itself, you are required to submit a short reflective essay 500-1000 words long that outlines your motivations and aims for the project in relation to the overall course content.

If you choose to do it as a traditional paper, you will draw on what we have learned to write a traditional analytical essay of 1500-2000 words. Your essay should have a clearly-outlined thesis—that is, it should have an argument, and be an attempt to convince the reader of something concerning the topic in visual communication/culture you are addressing.

Final Gallery Tour: On the final regular class period, December 14, everyone will showcase a visual summary – essentially a small poster – of their final projects. We will discuss specifics of this activity over the term. Final projects are due by noon on Wednesday December 21.

Grades

Ongoing Activities: 40% – graded as Complete/No Credit

Special Project 1 & 2: 30% Visual Analysis project; TBA

Final Project: 30%

Grading Criteria: You will produce a great deal of work over the term in the form of ongoing activities. These will be graded either as completed or no credit. There will be two Special Projects assigned over the term that will receive in-depth feedback and be assigned letter grades, as will the Final Project. As I emphasized above – all your work will be evaluated primarily on completion, your willingness and effort to try new approaches, your curiosity, along with an understanding of how the work we are doing relates to the course material.

Course Outline: Some changes to our outline may occur as we may end up devoting more time to some things than expected or make room for ideas I hadn't anticipated. You will be apprised in class via email and iLearn so that we all remain on the same page, and you are expected to regularly check iLearn and your sfsu.edu account to ensure you are on top of things.

- Class 1 8/24/16: Intro – overview
In-class exercise
- Class 2 8/29/16: “The privileging of text” & Visual Notetaking
HW: Sketchnote of class
- Class 3 8/31/16: “The Eyes Have it”: Perception – optics, cognition
HW: Drawing exercise
- Class 4 9/7/16: “Making before Matching” Drawing – Gombrich
In-Class: Drawing Exercise
- Class 5 9/12/16: “Drawing to See”
In-class: Drawing exercise
- Class 6 9/14/16: “Embodied Drawing” – Molly Bang, Gonyea,
In-class: Metaphorical drawing
- Class 7 9/19/16: “I See Faces Everywhere”
In-class: Boids
- Class 8 9/21/16: “Do you speak Emoji?”
HW: Emoji short story...
- Class 9 9/26/16: “Understanding Comics” – history & McCloud, sequential art...
In-class: Panel Lottery, comics collaborative exercise
HW: Sketchnote summaries
- Class 10 9/28/16: “Comics & The Fourth Dimension” Comics; time/space
In-class: Grids & Gestures comics making exercise
- Class 11 10/3/16: Comics: *Asterios Polyp* Pt 1 – multimodality
HW: Reading response
- Class 12 10/5/16: Comics: *Asterios Polyp* continued
HW: Reading response
HW: Shape of your thoughts – due in a week...
- Class 13 10/10/16: Comics analysis wrapped...
HW: Visual Analysis Project – Due in a week
- Class 14 10/12/16: The Shape of Our Thoughts
In-class discussion of What Your Thinking Looks Like...
- Class 15 10/17/16: Guest: Andrea Kantrowitz “Drawing as Thinking”
In-class: Drawing exercises
Visual Analysis Project Due
- Class 16 10/19/16: Guest: RJ Andrews “Data Stories” – Data Visualization
In-class: TBA
- Class 17 10/24/16: Data Visualization 2 – Mark Lombardi – network diagrams
HW: Data Viz project
- Class 18 10/26/16: Data Viz 3: Halloween stories??
Maps
HW: Read Kimmelman (iLearn)
- Class 19 10/31/16: Art criticism
HW: Response to art work
- Class 20 11/2/16: Visual Culture: Selfies 1
In-class: Small workshop on drafting a proposal/abstract
HW: Draft Proposal
- Class 21 11/7/16: Final Project Proposal DUE; Selfies 2
In-class: discussion of project proposals
- Class 22 11/9/16: Photoshopped...
Reading: excerpt from Politics of Design
- Class 23 11/14/16: Gender children clothing

HW: TBA
Class 24 11/16/16: Fonts/Semiotics?
Read excerpt from Politics of Design
Class 25 11/28/16: “Unpleasant Architecture”
99% Invisible
HW: Response to public architecture & suggestion for improvement
Class 26 11/30/16: Flag Design
99% Invisible
HW: Design a Flag
Class 27 12/5/16: Logo Evolution
HW: Analyze evolution of team or corporate mascot over time
Class 28 12/7/16: Disabilities: Blind; Deaf/signing
Class 29 12/12/16: TBA
Class 30 12/14/16: in-class Gallery tour

Final Exam Period: Wednesday, December 21, 10:45-1:15

iLearn

We will be using the iLearn website for this class. Those of you unfamiliar with iLearn can find resources and assistance online as well as with the office of Academic Technology. You are automatically enrolled in iLearn for all of your courses registered at SFSU.

Academic Technology website: <http://at.sfsu.edu>

iLearn log-in page: <https://ilearn.sfsu.edu/login/index.php>

Course Policies

Classroom approach: I consider learning as acquiring the tools to follow one’s own curiosity, and thus teaching means providing a framework, establishing an environment for participants to explore and thrive. Rather than being out in front, I see my role as accompanying students on a journey we all make together.

Classroom Policies: Because many of the ongoing activities will be done in-class, attendance is important and expected. Of course, sometimes obligations, illness, or other unforeseen events make attendance impossible. If you know of an upcoming obligation or ongoing health/personal challenges that that will preclude your attendance, let me know in advance and we will make alternative arrangements. In addition, repeatedly coming late to class is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. We want this classroom to be a great learning environment for everyone, so we need to all take care of each other to make it so. Laptops and smart devices, if used well, can complement discussion and so are permitted. If they are being used in a way that detracts from the overall environment, the instructor will address that.

Late Papers and Homework Assignments

An assignment is considered late if it is not turned in at the beginning of class on the day it is due. Assignments that are turned in up to a week late will be marked accordingly and receive a full-grade deduction. Medical or family emergencies are valid excuses and will be accepted with written documentation. Also, assignments will not be accepted over email unless special arrangements are made with me.

Contact and Feedback

You are encouraged to visit office hours or make an appointment to discuss the topics covered in class, and to clarify any questions you may have about assignments and requirements. When

sending emails to me, please use your “sfsu.edu” account when possible, and put “LS 426” followed by your subject in the subject line so I am sure to address it more quickly.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is a form of cheating or fraud; it occurs when a student misrepresents the work of another as his or her own. Plagiarism may consist of using the ideas, sentences, paragraphs, or the whole text of another without appropriate acknowledgment, but it also includes employing or allowing another person to write or substantially alter work that a student then submits as his or her own. Any assignment found to be plagiarized will be given an "F" grade. All instances of plagiarism in the College of Liberal & Creative Arts will be reported to the Dean of the College, and may be reported to the University Judicial Affairs Officer for further action.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

Students with disabilities who need reasonable accommodations are encouraged to contact the instructor. The Disability Programs and Resource Center (DPRC) is available to facilitate the reasonable accommodations process. The DPRC is located in the Student Service Building and can be reached by telephone (voice/TTY 415-338-2472) or by email dprc@sfsu.edu.

University Policy on Sexual Harassment & Violence

SF State fosters a campus free of sexual violence including sexual harassment, domestic violence, dating violence, stalking, and/or any form of sex or gender discrimination. If you disclose a personal experience as an SF State student, the course instructor is required to notify the Dean of Students. To disclose any such violence confidentially, contact:

The SAFE Place - (415) 338-2208; SAFE Place website http://www.sfsu.edu/~safe_plc/

Counseling and Psychological Services Center - (415) 338-2208; Counseling and Psychological Services Center website <http://psyservs.sfsu.edu>

For more information on your rights and available resources see: Title IX at SF State <http://titleix.sfsu.edu>