



DES-104: DESIGN THEORY AND CULTURE

Effective Term

Fall 2025

BOT Approval Date

12/17/2024

Discipline

DES - Design

Course Number

104

Course Title

Design Theory and Culture

Short Title

Design Theory and Culture

Credit Status (CB 04)

D - Credit - Degree applicable

Units**Lecture Units**

3.00

Total Units

3.00

Hours**Lecture Contact Hours**

48-54

Out of Class Hours Lecture

96-108

Total Contact Hours

48 - 54

Total Out of Class Hours

96 - 108

Total Student Learning Hours

144 - 162

Distance Education

Yes

Distance Education**Distance Education Type**

Both Fully Online and Hybrid Online

Fully Online Delivery Requirements:

- a. Students must be notified via the college schedule of classes and the syllabus for the class if proctored tests are required for this course
- b. Any planned face-to-face meetings, such as an orientation or study session, must be optional

c. The MSJC curriculum committee requires the use of accessible, asynchronous discussion as a component of every fully online course

Are you using publisher content?

No

Regular Substantive Interaction

Instructor-to-student, student-to-student, and student-to-content contact shall be distributed in a manner that will ensure regular substantive interaction (RSI) is maintained not only weekly but also for the duration of the course. Instructor interactions should be equivalent in time, quality and consistency to the engagement students would receive in a face-to-face course—for example, through announcements, discussion participation, personalized feedback, video messages, or other instructional communications. Instructors are expected to be responsive to student inquiries within a 24-72 hour time frame excluding holidays. RSI will be maintained through a variety of methods:

- Orientation - Students must be oriented to the online and face-to-face portions at the start of the course.
- Announcements - Announcements using the course management system must be posted at least weekly to keep students current on course events, due dates, materials, etc.
- Discussion Forums - Content-related discussion forums within the designated CMS will include appropriate instructor participation and will be initiated and maintained, with timely feedback provided. Instructors are required to monitor the discussions and related activities to provide guidance and direction. Open-ended discussion boards may be used to further learning and interaction.
- MSJC Communication – Instructor will use MSJC-administered communication tools (such as email or the designated CMS communication tools) to regularly communicate with and provide ease of access to students.
- Timely Feedback - Timely feedback on student work will be provided by the instructor, which may include comments and/or rubrics, within the Grades area of the designated CMS.
- Scheduled Meetings – Hybrid and synchronous courses will meet at regularly scheduled times.

ADA Compliance - All course interactions and content must be designed with accessibility in mind and meet ADA requirements.

Catalog Description

This course is a survey of major design movements. Students will engage in critical insight of influential design forms, tendencies, and aesthetics from ancient to the present from a broad range of cultures across the globe. This course will also explore noteworthy design fields from graphic design, architecture, industrial design, fashion design, and sustainable design which show the lasting effects they have had on societies around the world.

Requisites

Recommended Preparation

Recommended Preparation (note that students can enroll in the class even if they haven't take the recommended course)

ENGL-C1000

Codes

TOP Code (CB 03)

1009.00* - *Applied Design

CIP Code

50.0701 - Art/Art Studies, General.

Repeatability Code

No

Grading Option

Letter grade OR P/NP

GE Information

Check GE Types Requested

AA/AS C - Humanities

Learning Objectives

Learning Objectives

Learning Objective

1. Examine the evolution of design practices, principles, and movements over time.
2. Investigate how design varies significantly across different parts of the world due to cultural, historical, social, and economic factors.
3. Develop design thinking as a problem-solving approach that emphasizes understanding users' needs.
4. Examine design through multiple fields of disciplines, each with its unique focus and approach.
5. Formulate opinions on the success of designs through intertwining form and function.
6. Appraise design from a perspective of sustainability for environmental impacts.
7. Weigh the application of technology on design.
8. Critique design applications using appropriate visual language.
9. Support design needs from perspectives of marginalized individuals, focusing on accessibility and inclusivity.

Learning Outcome Information

Course Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcome

1. Students will identify the visual styles of major design movements across many fields.
2. Students will distinguish, compare and contrast designs in an appropriate and arguable context (e.g., historical, religious, political, economic, social, racial, and gender roles).
3. Students will describe and appreciate design works and theories using insight from economical, technological, and cultural perspectives.

Program Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcome

- Students will demonstrate a general awareness of artistic cultures and styles.
- Students will demonstrate the use of appropriate terminology in evaluating art and design.

Institutional Learning Outcomes

Aesthetic Awareness: The student will identify and evaluate how aesthetic expression leads to an appreciation of social and cultural context as well as the values of art and nature.

Critical Thinking: The student will analyze problems, gather and synthesize relevant information, evaluate ideas, information, and evaluate alternative points of view to create, innovate and implement effective solutions.

Cultural Awareness and Humility: The student will demonstrate knowledge of and sensitivity toward individuals of diverse ethnicity, age, gender, sexual orientation, and religious affiliations, as well as toward those individuals with diverse abilities and socio-economic classes to respectfully interact with individuals of diverse perspectives, beliefs and values while being mindful of the limitation of their own cultural frameworks.

Social Awareness: The student will recognize and analyze the interconnectedness of global, national, and local concerns, analyzing cultural, political, social, and environmental issues from multiple perspectives and appreciate similarities and differences among cultures.

Content

Course Lecture Content

1. Influence of Design within Historical Periods
 - a. Ancient Design
 - i. Early human artifacts, architecture, and crafts.
 - ii. aesthetics in ancient civilizations like Egypt, Greece, and Mesopotamia.
 - b. Medieval to Renaissance
 - i. advancements in architecture and decorative arts.
 - ii. revival of classical ideas, emphasizing harmony and proportion in design.
 - c. Industrial revolution

- i. mass production and new materials.
 - ii. focus on functionalism.
 - d. Arts and Crafts
 - i. handcrafted quality.
 - ii. response to industrial revolution.
 - e. Modernism (Bauhaus)
 - i. Functionality vs. Aesthetics
 - f. Postmodernism
 - g. Digital Revolution
 - h. Contemporary Design
- 2. Global Design
 - a. Cultural Influences
 - i. Local traditions and beliefs
 - b. Materials and Resources
 - c. Technological Adoption
 - d. Sustainability Practices
 - e. Market Needs
 - f. Urban vs. Rural
- 3. Design Thinking
 - a. Empathize
 - b. Define
 - c. Ideate
 - d. Prototype
 - e. Test
 - f. Iterate
- 4. Design Fields
 - a. Graphic Design
 - b. Industrial Design
 - c. Interior Design
 - d. Fashion Design
 - e. Interaction Design
 - f. Motion Design
 - g. Environmental Design
 - h. Architecture
 - i. Game Design
- 5. Design Forms
 - a. Gestalt
 - b. Semiotics
 - c. Color Theory
 - d. Typography
 - e. Visual Hierarchy
- 6. Design Ethics
 - a. Accessibility
 - b. Inclusivity
 - c. Sustainable Design
 - d. Diversity
- 7. Current Trends in Design
 - a. Artificial Intelligence
 - b. Augmented Reality
 - c. Corporate Powers
 - d. Social Media Influence

Methods of Instruction

Method

Discussion

Integration

Class discussions will use image analyses of design works and will include comparisons and contrasts between various aesthetics, styles, industries, and designers.

DE Adaptations for MOI

Discussions are held, on a weekly basis, by topic, via access to CMS. The discussions will be keyed to encourage critical analysis of design solutions, aesthetic concepts, and functionality. Make sure to keep the discussions in the college sanctioned CMS to ensure accessibility.

Method

Field Trips

Integration

Field trips will allow the study of design solutions in a physical setting in order to expose students' first-hand to the scale, and actual appearance design. Field trips will also show students how design applications function and aesthetically appear in relation to the surrounding environment.

DE Adaptations for MOI

Field trips should still be taken but for online students who may not be able to visit an assigned local site, the students should be assigned a site close to them that is similar in content. In last case scenarios, virtual field trips – involving visits to locales through Google Maps or Websites – will be assigned. Virtual field trips will be used for students to identify and describe aesthetic and functional applications of the site itself. Choose platforms that meet WCAG 2.1 accessibility guidelines.

Method

Lecture

Integration

Oral lectures and slideshow presentations using slides/images of designs representative of specific topics related to field study, style, aesthetics, and designers.

DE Adaptations for MOI

Live lectures are replaced by recorded lectures in the CMS. To ensure accessibility, the lectures must be captioned. There is also the option for online readings including material written by the instructor, carefully chosen articles and relevant captioned videos. Readings that are not part of the CMS should be in readable PDF format for screen readers. All images should have detailed alt tags as well.

Method

Papers and Reports

Integration

Students will complete written assignments which require the evaluation of aesthetic approaches and materials, and which also require comparisons between key works and designers.

DE Adaptations for MOI

Written reports, including virtual field trip reports and research on significant design movements, styles, and disciplines. The research involved in these reports will require students to become acquainted with discussing design applications using appropriate terminology and arguments on design approaches. Make sure to assign websites that are accessible as well as PDF documents that use (Universal Design Language) UDL for learning.

Methods of Evaluation**Method**

Class Participation

Integration

Graded discussions on key topics will demonstrate critical thinking and analytical skills.

DE Adaptations for MOE

Students will regularly participate in online discussions and forums found in the CMS assignment module and will be graded on depth of commentary and participation. Feedback should be given within one week of the due date.

Method

Exams/Tests

Integration

Students will take a midterm and final exam, both of which will include a combination of identifying the title, medium, style and characteristics of projected images, and short answer questions concerning design vocabulary, styles, and characteristics of objects. The exams will also include a choice of essay questions asking students to discuss and describe the subject matter, characteristics and styles of significant designers or design works.

DE Adaptations for MOE

Tests on design vocabulary will be graded for accuracy and appropriate usage of terminology. Exams will be offered in the online exam feature of the CMS. Students should get feedback within one week and have comments embedded directly into the document from the instructor.

Method

Research Projects

Integration

Students will be investigating a multitude of systems (e.g. infographics, advertizing, architecture, etc.) and submitting reports discussing how design in those categories influences their understanding on critical analysis of design theory, history, or culture. These reports will demonstrate their ability to analyze and discuss design solutions, iconography, as well as to use design vocabulary.

DE Adaptations for MOE

Research papers on designers, styles, and disciplines will be uploaded as a text, document or web link directly into CMS assignment module and will be evaluated for accuracy of content and critical thinking. Grading will include feedback on clarity of thought and accuracy of language. That process should be completed within one week of the due date.

Method

Quizzes

Integration

Quizzes that test the students' ability to employ appropriate vocabulary and terminology, and which also test their ability to recognize examples of design styles.

DE Adaptations for MOE

Multiple choice quizzes on designers, styles, and disciplines will be submitted via CMS quiz modules and scored for accuracy on a point scale. Grading here should be instantaneous and there should be feedback on the correct answer and further explanation on why it is correct.

Assignments**Assignment Type**

Writing

In-class and/or outside of class

Outside of class

Formative or Summative

Summative

Assignment

Assignment: Comparative Analysis of Two Architectural Styles

Objective: To develop an understanding of architectural styles, techniques, and their cultural significance by comparing two distinct architectural designs.

Instructions:

Select Two Architectural Styles: Choose any two different architectural styles from the following options:

Gothic vs. Modernist
Baroque vs. Neoclassical
Traditional Japanese vs. Mid-Century Modern
Art Deco vs. Brutalism
Ancient Greek vs. Contemporary Sustainable Architecture
Research and Gather Information:

Find one representative building from each architectural style.
Gather information about the history, key characteristics, and cultural context of each style.
Key Points to Analyze:

Architectural Elements: Compare elements like structure, form, materials, and design principles used in each style.
Functionality and Purpose: Describe how the function of the building influenced its design in each case. Consider its intended use and how that shaped its architectural choices.
Cultural and Historical Context: Discuss how the time period and cultural background influenced each architectural style. How do these buildings reflect the priorities or values of their respective societies?
Visual Characteristics: Compare aesthetic aspects, such as decorative details, use of color, light, and spatial organization.
Deliverable:

Write a 4-5 page report (approximately 1,000–1,500 words) that includes:
An introduction to the chosen architectural styles and the buildings selected.
A detailed comparison and contrast, supported by images or diagrams where appropriate.
A conclusion summarizing the similarities, differences, and what you learned about the impact of architecture on culture and society.

Presentation (Optional/extra credit):

Prepare a brief presentation (5–10 minutes) summarizing your findings. You may use visuals like PowerPoint slides to help convey the differences and similarities effectively.

Evaluation Criteria:

Depth of analysis and understanding of architectural features (40%)
Quality and relevance of research (20%)
Organization and clarity of the report (20%)
Use of visuals and examples to support comparisons (10%)
Grammar, spelling, and overall presentation (10%)

Sign up for a time to give your presentation during class.

Feel free to get creative with the visuals and examples to make your report engaging and informative!

How assignment will be adapted in online format

Students can submit an oral presentation to the CMS using campus resources in video format. The submission of the paper will go to the CMS in both cases. Students will receive feedback within one week.

Assignment Type

Reading

In-class and/or outside of class

In-class

Formative or Summative

Formative

Assignment

Reading Assignment: Branding Design

Objective: To develop an understanding of branding design and its impact on consumer perception and brand identity.

Instructions:

Assigned Readings:

"Logo Design Love" by David Airey (Chapters 1 & 2): Focus on the role of logo design in building brand identity, the elements of a good logo, and real-world case studies.

"How Brands Grow" by Byron Sharp (Chapter 3): Learn about the importance of brand consistency, mental availability, and the ways visual branding helps maintain a brand's relevance.

Article: "The Psychology of Color in Branding and Marketing" (find online): Understand how color influences consumer perception and how brands utilize color strategically in their visual identity.

Discussion Points:

The Role of Visual Elements: What are the key elements of branding design that contribute to a memorable brand identity (e.g., logo, typography, colors)?

Case Studies: Based on the chapters from "Logo Design Love," what are the characteristics of a successful logo, and how do they connect with a brand's values?

Color Psychology: How does color affect consumer behavior, and how do brands choose colors to evoke specific emotions or associations? Provide examples of brands using color effectively.

Assignment Questions:

Question 1: Define branding design. Why is consistent branding important for companies, and how does it help build consumer loyalty?

Question 2: Choose a well-known brand logo that has evolved over time. Analyze the changes and discuss how each iteration has contributed to the brand's identity.

Question 3: Based on the article on color psychology, choose a brand and analyze its color scheme. How do the colors contribute to the brand's identity and consumer perception?

Deliverable:

Write a 2-3 page reflection (approximately 500-800 words) on your learnings from the readings. Be sure to include:

Your understanding of the importance of branding design elements.

An analysis of a brand logo or visual identity based on the readings.

Insights into how color influences branding, using examples discussed in the article.

Class Discussion:

Be prepared to share your thoughts in class regarding your favorite brand logo and why you think it's effective. Consider the elements of the logo and the emotions it evokes. Note: Feel free to look for additional branding examples and case studies online to enrich your understanding and analysis.

Evaluation Criteria:

Demonstration of understanding of branding design concepts (40%)

Use of examples to support arguments (30%)

Quality of analysis and reflections (20%)
Grammar, spelling, and overall presentation (10%)

Submission: Submit your summary to the discussion board. This will cover the last two of your grade criteria. You will be given the remainder of your grade from the top two criteria based on your presentation.

How assignment will be adapted in online format

The assignment will be submitted to the CMS in the discussion board area but the presentation can be in text format as though the student is presenting to the class. Students will be asked to also do a survey giving private thoughts on ranking the logos and discussions. These will be released as results to the class. Students will receive feedback within one week.

Assignment Type

Other

Formative or Summative

Summative

Assignment

FIELD TRIP REPORT!

Assignment: Analysis of Information Design at a Local Zoo (You may use an amusement park or any large public venue with maps as a replacement)

Objective: To evaluate the effectiveness of information design used throughout a local zoo, focusing on how well the signage, maps, and displays communicate with visitors.

Instructions:

Visit a Local Zoo: Plan a visit to a local zoo and observe the various elements of information design used to guide and educate visitors. Bring a notebook or mobile device to take notes and capture photos of the different types of signage and displays.

Areas to Focus On:

Signage and Wayfinding: Analyze the design and placement of directional signs around the zoo. How easy is it to navigate between exhibits? Are the signs clear, consistent, and easy to follow?

Educational Displays: Look at the informational signs and graphics near animal enclosures. How effectively do they convey facts about the animals? Consider visual hierarchy, the use of images, typography, and the amount of text.

Maps and Guides: Review any maps provided by the zoo, whether printed or digital. How easy is it to find your location and plan your route? Are important landmarks clearly marked?

Key Points to Analyze:

Clarity: Is the information easy to understand? Does the language used make the content accessible to visitors of all ages?

Visual Appeal: Evaluate the use of colors, icons, images, and typography. Are they engaging and appropriate for a family-friendly setting?

Effectiveness of Communication: How well do the signs and displays fulfill their purpose? For example, do wayfinding signs make navigation straightforward, and do educational displays convey interesting, useful information in a compelling way?

Accessibility: Consider whether the information is accessible to everyone, including people with disabilities. Are there braille signs, clear font choices, or multilingual options?

Deliverable:

Write a 3-4 page report (approximately 800-1,200 words) that includes:

An introduction summarizing your visit and the purpose of your analysis.

Detailed observations of the different aspects of information design (signage, educational displays, maps).

Examples of effective and ineffective information design, supported by photos or diagrams.

Suggestions for improvement, based on your observations.

Presentation (Optional):



Prepare a brief slideshow presentation (5-10 minutes) summarizing your analysis. Use visuals like photos or illustrations to demonstrate examples of effective or ineffective design.

Evaluation Criteria:

Depth of analysis and understanding of information design principles (40%)
Quality of examples and observations (20%)
Clarity of writing and organization of the report (20%)
Use of visuals to support arguments (10%)
Grammar, spelling, and overall presentation (10%)

Submit the assignment to the CMS assignment area as a PDF.

Note: If you cannot visit a zoo in person, you may use online resources, including zoo websites and virtual tours, to complete this assignment.

How assignment will be adapted in online format

Students who are not local to a zoo may choose to visit somewhere else or use virtual resources to develop a presentation. The field trip assignment in both cases will be submitted to the same area of the CMS in document (doc or pdf) format. Students will receive feedback within one week.

Course Materials

Textbooks

Adams, Sean. (2021) How Design Makes us Think: And Feel and Do Things. Princeton Press. B08Q6K1BM2

Norman, Don (2024) Design for a Better World: Meaningful, Sustainable, Humanity Centered. The MIT Press 0262047950

Norman, Don. (2013) The Design of Everyday Things. Basic Books. 9780465050659

Sarah Lichtman. (2024). Design, Displacement, Migration: Spatial and Material Histories. (Routledge Research in Design History). ISBN 1032046945

Class Size Information

Class Size

40

Class Size Category

A - Lecture/discussion 40

Diversity and Inclusion

Explain how diversity and inclusion(e.g., gender, culture/race, sexuality, etc.) is infused into the course.

Students will gain knowledge of the evolution of design across different historical periods and cultures, recognizing how cultural and historical contexts influence design styles and practices. We will discuss and explore various design solutions for marginalized groups as well from the perspective of human need. Students will be asked to compare design solutions in a multitude of fields to their own culture and experiences. Students will also gain an appreciation for how designers must build sustainable design for disadvantaged communities.

Describe how assignments, instruction, evaluation, course content, and interactions are contextualized for diverse learners promoting an equitable course.

This course involves formative and summative assignments that support multiple learning styles and approaches to evaluation. This includes essays and written work that emphasize visual analysis and papers that encourage a student's perspective and agency through their own thesis or critical thought about the work.

In addition to the diversity emphasized through the course assignments, equity and inclusion are considerations of this class. This is addressed through instruction that emphasizes Open Educational Resources (OER) as free and accessible for our students. This approach eliminates costs and financial barriers to material that traditional textbooks have sometimes created. OER also provides a variety of content through essays, texts, videos, recorded lectures, and media that are available in engaging and interactive technological formats and meet accessibility standards through the course management system.

Interactions

Explain how the course will incorporate student-to-student interaction.

In Face to Face courses, students will discuss with each other lecture content through the use of break out groups. Also some assignments will require students to work together to formulate different ideas of design approaches and thinking.

In online courses, students will interact with each other through responses to discussions boards and replies to each other's ideas. These assignments require students to post responses to prompts that encourage dialogue, critical ideas about the work, and invite further contributions and replies.

In both face-to-face and Online classes, the instructor should facilitate student-to-student peer reviews of papers encourage support of each other's ideas and collaboration in developing critical perspectives and following assignment guidelines. Students may also arrange optional communication that involves direct emails through Outlook or messaging online through the CMS. These opportunities to interact will be available through the CMS and follow accessibility standards.

Explain how the course will incorporate instructor-to-student interaction.

Instructor-to-student interaction in design history fosters a deep, multifaceted understanding of how design has shaped—and been shaped by—human culture over time. It encourages critical analysis, historical contextualization, and practical application. The instructor presents key historical periods, influential designers, styles, movements (like Bauhaus, Art Nouveau, Modernism), and the impact of design on society. Students listen, take notes, and are encouraged to ask questions and provide insights.

The instructor might pose reflective questions to stimulate critical thinking. Instructors will facilitate discussions on the evolution of design, comparing past and present trends, and encouraging students to critique design works from different eras. Students will engage in debates, offer perspectives, and connect design ideas to contemporary practices.

Instructors should collect analytical data for quizzes to see where students are lacking in knowledge and host discussions to supplement class content. Also, for papers and projects the instructor should provide feedback using paper markups and written comments on student synthesis.

In online courses weekly announcements will also reinforce communication and key concerns about the class through the CMS. The instructor will also contact the student directly as needed through email and leave comments for the student about their progress through grading platforms in the CMS.

Explain how the course will incorporate student-to-content interaction.

In both face-to-face and online classes, students will interact with content through completing the weekly readings and videos that are available in the CMS. Recorded video presentations and lectures, images, links to external content, and virtual environments give students access to the work in a variety of ways that enable the student to engage with the content. These resources will incorporate different learning styles while encouraging visual observation, listening, interacting through current technology, and analyzing design works and ideas.

Explain how the course will incorporate student-to-self interaction (metacognitive).

This course involves the observation of design solutions with the awareness of formal elements that increase visual design literacy. These skills also promote awareness of the relevance of these principles through daily advertisements and tools of persuasion as students navigate visual saturation around them. Students will also gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between visual forms and the expression of social, historical, and political contexts and cultural ideals. Through this class, students will also practice developing critical ideas and informed theses about art through research and analysis.

What makes this course special is the analysis of designs through personal circumstances. Each student will be part of a self-identified class or demographic and can compare and contrast their preferences and needs amongst other cultures or time periods. This will form an understanding on how complex and personal design can be.