

# Politics of Design

## Course Syllabus

JUS 494 (91576) | IND 494 (37068) – Spring 2007

Tuesday & Thursday 12:15 – 1:30

Location: COOR L1-84

### Instructors

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### Course Description

The goal of this course is to explore the power of design in society. We will question how things are designed and the ways that social and material relations are shaped by the designed world. We will examine the processes of production, distribution, and consumption by which designed objects become a part of everyday life. Examples may range from products such as iPods to largely invisible database architectures, from the concrete highways that we travel upon to hospital systems where we go to be healed. Throughout the course, we will analyze designed artifacts and design processes through the lenses of justice, fairness, and equality. We will draw upon readings and individual experiences of the world as material for this course. No specialized expertise is required for students to take this course, but a willingness to experiment, play, and challenge one's perspective of the world is highly desired.

### Required Books

1. Heskett, John. 2005. *Design: A Very Short Introduction*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
2. Thackara, John. 2005. *In the Bubble: Designing in a Complex World*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
3. Whiteley, Nigel. 1993. *Design for Society*. London: Reaktion Books.
4. Course Reader. [Available from AlphaGraphics, 815 W. University Dr., (480) 968-7821]

### Recommended Books

1. McDonough, William, and Michael Braungart. 2002. *Cradle to Cradle: Remaking the Way We Make Things*. New York: North Point Press.

## **Grading**

Weekly Essays (12)	36%
Participation	20%
Library activity	5%
Product analysis	5%
City design project	14%
Workplace project	20%

## **Course Expectations**

*Attendance:* This class will be conducted with a focus on lectures, activities, and in-class discussions. Because of this format, you are strongly encouraged to attend all classes. Formal attendance will not be taken, but your participation grade will suffer if you are excessively absent or tardy. If you are going to be absent, you must turn in assignments ahead of time and arrange to get notes from a colleague. Finally, if you fail to show up for a scheduled meeting with the instructors without canceling 24 hours in advance, your participation grade will be docked 5 points.

*Reading:* Complete all readings (and other assignments) prior to the class meeting for which they are scheduled. Most of the readings will be drawn from the required texts for the course or from Internet web pages. You must bring readings (or copies of them) to class for the dates they are assigned. In some cases, we may distribute photocopied readings to you in class. See the course outline below for details.

*Participation:* Through communication, ideas are formed, revised, borrowed, and developed. It is through argument, description, explanation, and improvisation – within a community – that individual learning flourishes. This course requires full participation (including active listening, facilitating, note taking, and question asking) to create an environment of open and shared learning. An effective participant is not someone who simply talks frequently, but someone who reliably offers thoughtful insights that help others to learn.

*Writing:* Writing is one of the most productive forms of thinking. No late, emailed, or electronically delivered writing assignments will be accepted. Weekly papers will be submitted through Blackboard (see below for more information). For all other papers, please double-space lines, use 12-point font and 1" margins, and be certain to include a references section that documents all your sources. Papers must be stapled or they will not be accepted. The sociotechnical infrastructure is unreliable, so plan accordingly and print papers well in advance.

*Technology:* Laptop computers and other portable technologies should be used in class only as learning-facilitation tools. During class, it is not acceptable to play games, answer email, surf the web, answer cell phones, text message, or engage in other non-class-related activities. Your participation grade will be penalized if you break this rule. Why? Not only do these practices negatively affect your learning and participation, but they also distract others and create an environment of disrespect.

## Course Assignments

### 1. On-line Journal:

Starting in Week 1, on-line journal entries of approximately 750 words are due every Saturday by 5 PM. Journal entries should be based on the reading, discussion, and the lecture(s) from the previous week. You must show that you did the reading and listened attentively to the lectures, but not, for example, by listing your reactions in a series of unconnected paragraphs: you must write a short essay that develops them as a whole. We will look not only for your reactions, but more importantly why you had them. Try to give reasons for your reactions, but if you are not sure about your reasons, at least try to state the dilemma in which you find yourself.

We suggest, therefore, that you read the “Journal Prompts” at the beginning of each week. Then jot down ideas for your essays as you read or listen to the lectures, and afterwards step back for a moment to reflect on your overall reaction, that is, the theme for your essay. It is best to take a critical perspective for your theme. A critical perspective does not require that you be against the ideas expressed in the reading or lectures. It means simply that you have asked yourself some hard questions. What are the alternatives to your reaction? Why is your reaction better than the alternatives? It is always important to remember, especially when the issues in question concern how we should live, that your first reaction may well be defensive, often accompanied by some intense feelings. It is appropriate to explore these feelings in your essay, though it will not always be easy to get to the bottom of them. You will need patience and honesty if you wish to get beyond the level of gut reaction and opinion to the level of justified belief.

*Mechanics:* Post your entries to our course page on Blackboard (<https://myasucourses.asu.edu/>) under the proper week heading (e.g. “Week 1”) in the “discussion board” section. If you compose the entry in a word processing program, please cut-and-paste the text into Blackboard rather than attaching a file. These assignments will be graded on a pass / not-yet-pass / fail basis. If you receive a “not yet pass,” you will be given one chance to revise it (due one week after comments are made on your essay). If you don’t turn something substantive in for the week, you will receive a “fail” for that assignment and will not be allowed to make it up. Passed assignments will receive full credit; all others will receive 0. As with everything else, feel free to check with us at any time throughout the semester if you are concerned about your progress with journal entries.

### 2. Activities and Projects:

There will be several design-related research activities throughout the course. The primary ones will be a library scavenger hunt assignment (due February 6), a guided investigation into a particular product of your choice (Weeks 5-8), an analysis of city design and your experience of it (due April 5), and a research paper and presentation on workplace design (due May 1). More information about each of these activities will be provided in class.

We reserve the right to distribute unannounced quizzes on the reading or lecture material. Any missed points on these quizzes will be deducted from your participation grade. Quizzes may not be made-up if you are absent.

### **Academic Honesty**

In order to avoid plagiarism, your papers must provide full citations for all references: direct quotes, summaries, or ideas. While you are encouraged to develop your thinking with your peers, you cannot use their material without citing it. Work from other courses will not be accepted in this course. Allowing your writing to be copied by another student is also considered cheating. Please review the Student Code of Conduct for complete guidelines on academic honesty. Note: Any instance of plagiarism or cheating can be grounds for failure of the entire course or expulsion from the university.

### **Gender-Fair Language**

Language structures thought and action. Biases in language can (and do) naturalize inequities. Imprecise language also signifies uninterrogated values and sloppy thinking. For all of these reasons, the use of gender-fair language is expected in this course. For example, do not use words like "mankind" or "men" when referring to people in general; alternate between "she" and "he" instead of always using "he", or construct sentences in the plural instead of the singular so you can use "they" or "them" and avoid the problem altogether.

### **ESL/LD Students**

Course requirements can be adjusted to serve the needs and capabilities of ESL and LD students. Please speak with the instructors during the first two weeks of class to make arrangements. Students may be advised to attend additional sessions during the instructors' office hours so they can draw comparable value from the course.

**Course Schedule** (subject to revision)

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UNIT I: INFORMATION & COMMUNICATION

**Week 1      Introduction**

January 16      Course Introduction

January 18      *Design* Cht.1-2 (pp.1-23)

*Journal Prompt: What is design? What is its importance? How is it represented in advertisements or popular TV shows? How has design evolved over the past couple of centuries?*

**Week 2      Concepts**

January 23      Woodhouse, Edward, and Jason Patton. 2004. Design by Society: Science and Technology Studies and the Social Shaping of Design. *Design Issues* 20 (3):1-12. [Course Reader]

Nieusma, Dean. 2004. Alternative Design Scholarship: Working toward Appropriate Design. *Design Issues* 20 (3):13-24. [Course Reader]

January 25      *Design* Cht.3 (pp.24-36)

Fiorilli, Leonard & Richard Sclove. 1997. "Technology by the People." [Course Reader]

*Journal Prompt: Describe some of the different conceptual approaches to design. What are the merits of perceiving design as a process that isn't predetermined or inevitable? Which approach to design makes the most sense to you? Why?*

**Week 3      Information Design: Wayfinding**

January 30      *Design* Cht.5 (pp.55-67)

Passini, Romedi. 1999. Sign-Posting Information Design. In *Information Design*, edited by R. E. Jacobson. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 83-98. [Course Reader]

February 1      *In the Bubble* Cht.8 (pp.161-184)

*Journal Prompt: Why is good information design so important? Why is it so difficult? In what ways is information design a culturally specific activity? How might it dictate the ways that we experience the world?*

**Week 4      Information Design: Engagement**

February 6      **Library scavenger hunt assignment due**  
Present findings to class

February 8      Library field trip

*Journal Prompt: How is information ordered in the library? What assumptions are made? How do decisions about classification shape the way we see or experience the world? What about the classification of people? How is classification culturally constructed?*

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## UNIT II: OBJECT MEANINGS & RELATIONS

### **Week 5      Semiotics of Things**

February 13    *Design* Cht.4 (pp.37-54)

Pfaffenberger, Bryan. 1992. Social Anthropology of Technology. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 21:491-516. [Course Reader]

February 15    Hebdige, Dick. 1981. Object as Image: The Italian Scooter Cycle. [Course Reader]

*Journal Prompt: How do objects acquire meaning through historically and culturally situated practices? Provide some examples from the readings. What are the dominant values we currently look for in “good” designs?*

### **Week 6      Objects in Contexts**

February 20    *In the Bubble* Introduction & Cht.1 (pp.1-27)

February 22    *Design* Cht.6 (pp.68-83)

**Bring YOUR Object to Class** (What does it mean / signify?)

*Journal Prompt: How are designed things and their contexts interrelated? How do they influence each other? How do designed things make their weight or presence known? Discuss several examples from the In the Bubble book.*

### **Week 7      Mass Consumption**

February 27    *Design for Society* Introduction & Cht.1 (pp.1-25)

March 1        *Design for Society* Cht.1 (pp.25-46)

What are the “reaches” of your object? What systems does it depend upon?

*Journal Prompt: What is the relationship between consumer culture and design? What does this relationship indicate about our dominant social values and priorities? In what ways are such relationships naturalized so that we fail to see them as socially constructed? What are the implications for justice?*

### **Week 8      Design Constraints & Alternatives**

March 6        *Design* Cht.9-10 (pp.112-136)

March 8      *Design for Society* Cht.3 (pp.94-133)

How might your object be alternatively produced (or what might be an alternative to it?)

*Journal Prompt: How are designers and design processes constrained? What kinds of designs emerge, more often than not, from these constrained contexts? Discuss the alternative criteria introduced in Design for Society for socially responsible and “appropriate” designs. If incentives were provided for such designs, how might mainstream design practices change? To what effect?*

**Week 9      SPRING BREAK**

March 13      No class.

March 15      No class.

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UNIT III: SPACE, PLACE, & MOBILITY

**Week 10      Speed, Mobility, Locality**

March 20      *In the Bubble* Cht.2-3 (pp.29-72)

March 22      *In the Bubble* Cht.4 (pp.73-96)

*Journal Prompt: Drawing from the reading, explain how “quality time” and sustainability are threatened by the ways most of us experience places? How does the design of transportation systems, residential neighborhoods, and shopping centers shape (or constrain) these experiences? Provide several examples.*

**Week 11      Urban Design**

March 27      Lynch, Kevin. 1984. *Good City Form*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (pp.109-150).  
[Course Reader]

March 29      Lynch, Kevin. 1984. *Good City Form*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press (pp.151-204).  
[Course Reader]

*Journal Prompt: Explain Lynch’s criteria for good city form and provide an example for each. How do these dimensions interrelate? How can the adaptive capacity of individuals obscure the poor design of cities? Analyze the degree to which Phoenix lives up to each of these criteria.*

**Week 12      Transportation**

April 3      *Design* Cht.8 (pp.97-111)

Patton, Jason. 2004. Multiple Worlds on Oakland's Streets. [Course Reader]

April 5      **Report due on your experience of city design**

*No Journal Assignment Due*

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UNIT IV: WORKPLACES / TECHNOLOGIES

**Week 13      Workplaces**

April 10      *In the Bubble* Cht.5 (pp.97-111)

Blomberg, J., J. Giacomini, A. Mosher, and P. Swenton-Wall. 1993. Ethnographic Field Methods and Their Relation to Design. [Course Reader]

April 12      Sclove, Richard E. Democratic Work. In *Democracy and Technology* (pp.83-99) [Course Reader]

*Journal Prompt: According to In the Bubble, what are the disembodied tendencies of modern spaces? How should we design spaces so that they celebrate embodiment, presence, and social interaction? How could Sclove's democratic criteria change the nature of workplaces if they were followed? How could "ethnographic field methods" assist with identifying work spaces or functions in need of re-design to meet their democratic potential?*

**Week 14      Healthcare Geographies**

April 17      *In the Bubble* Cht.6 (pp.113-134)

Martin, Colin. 2000. Putting Patients First: Integrating Hospital Design and Care. *The Lancet* 356: 518. [Course Reader]

Andrews, Gavin J. and Rob Kitchin. 2005. Geography and nursing: convergence in cyberspace? *Nursing Inquiry* 12(4): 316-324. [Course Reader]

April 19      Lindsay, Prior. 1988. The Architecture of the Hospital: A Study of Spatial Organization and Medical Knowledge. *The British Journal of Sociology* 39(1): 86-113. [Course Reader]

*Journal Prompt: What does Thackara mean by the term conviviality? How could organizations like hospitals be designed to maximize conviviality and minimize stress? Drawing from the readings, discuss how could hospitals be better designed for patients and staff. How could thinking about hospitals as "spaces" assist designers in augmenting conviviality?*

**Week 15**

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April 24 Presentations on workplace design: actual and ideal

April 26 Presentations on workplace design: actual and ideal

**Week 16** **Conclusions...**

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May 1 **Last Day of Class**

**Final Papers Due**