

Course Syllabus

I. Course Information

Course Name: Information Architecture

Course Number: RUCD130

Course Start & End Dates: March 30, 2022 – June 14, 2022

Instructor's Name and Contact Information

Candra K. Gill, M.A., M.S.I.

ckgill@brandeis.edu

Office hours by appointment

Document Overview

This syllabus contains all relevant information about the course: its objectives and outcomes, the grading criteria, the texts and other materials of instruction, and of weekly topics, outcomes, assignments, and due dates.

Consider this your roadmap for the course. Please read through the syllabus carefully and feel free to share any questions that you may have. Please print a copy of this syllabus for reference.

Course Description

Information Architecture (IA) is defined as “the art and science of organizing and labeling shared information environments (websites, intranets, online communities and software) to support usability and findability.” (source: iainsitute.org). This course balances theoretical grounding of IA with practical design work. We will cover principles of IA as a professional practice and how to design effective, research-supported, user-centered information systems. Students will understand and apply information organization concepts; design and apply appropriate assessment techniques for particular information environments; and develop strategies to effectively communicate design rationale and advocate for users.

Course Outcomes

Upon completion of this course, students will be able to:

1. Describe foundational Information Architecture (IA) and its place in User-Centered Design practice
2. Understand and explain IA concepts & principles
3. Evaluate the IA of existing designs and spaces
4. Conduct research in support of IA work, including card sorting and tree testing
5. Design and implement effective, research-based IA
6. Produce professional design artifacts and other documentation to communicate IA work
7. Assess the effectiveness of IA work

Relevant Programs: Master of Science in User-Centered Design

Prerequisites: None

Materials of Instruction

a. Textbooks:

Required: Rosenfeld, L., Morville, P., & Arango, J. (2015). Information Architecture For the Web and Beyond 4th Edition, ISBN: 9781491911686a

- O'Reilly books including your textbooks are available for free online access via the Brandeis Library (use the single sign on instructions with your Brandeis.edu email): <https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/information-architecture-4th/9781491913529>

Optional: Brown, D. M. (2011). Communicating Design: Developing Web Site Documentation for Design and Planning 2nd Edition, ISBN: 9780321712462

- <https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/communicating-design-developing/9780131385399/>

b. Recommended Software:

You may use any software you want to complete the assignments as long as

- 1) you are able to meet the requirements of the assignment and
- 2) you are able to share completed assignments with me as exported files uploaded to LATTE.

You should not have to pay for any software to complete this course. Please sign up for these platforms as soon as possible, as some take a few days to a week to approve academic licenses.

- **Axure RP**—You will be able to complete the work of the course using Axure without the need for plugins or additional software. Student licenses are available without cost at: <http://www.axure.com/edu>
 - Axure tutorials are available at: <https://docs.axure.com/>
- **Figma**—This popular design platform also has free student licenses. You may need to find plugins for flowcharts and other functionality needed to complete the assignments for this course. Free student licenses are available at <https://www.figma.com/education/>
 - Getting started with Figma: <https://help.figma.com>
 - Figma also has **FigJam**, a whiteboarding platform that has better flowcharting capabilities than base Figma: <https://www.figma.com/figjam/>
- **MURAL**—An online whiteboarding platform that offers a free student license. It's one of the options for the card sorting exercise we'll do in Week 2: <https://www.mural.co/education>

c. Online Course Content

This section of the course will be conducted completely online using Brandeis' LATTE site, available at <http://moodle2.brandeis.edu>. The site contains the course syllabus, assignments, discussion forums, links/resources to course-related professional organizations and sites, and weekly checklists, objectives, outcomes, topic notes, self-tests, and discussion questions. Access information is emailed to enrolled students before the start of the course. To begin participating in the course, review Week 1 and read the first Course Announcement.

You will be provided with PDF copies of additional course material and links to relevant material, if required.

Welcome Message from the Instructor

Welcome to Information Architecture (IA). Over the next ten weeks, we will explore the discipline and how it fits into User-Centered design. This class balances background on the subject with practical exercises and exploration designed to prepare you for work on a design team or as a consultant. Your required readings and work for this class were selected in service of this goal.

Please familiarize yourself with this syllabus and with the class materials on LATTE, and feel free to ask me any questions you may have. User-centered design is inherently collaborative, and I want this class to be as well. Your contributions and participation are an essential part of this class, and I look forward to your work and discussions.

Course Grading Criteria

Percent	Component	Week Due
30%	Discussions/Online Participation	Every week
10%	Assignment 1—Sitemap Exercise	Week 2
10%	Assignment 2—Mapping a User Flow	Week 3
10%	Assignment 3—Search & Metadata Report	Week 5
10%	Assignment 4—Tree Test Plan	Week 6
10%	Assignment 5—Wireframes	Week 8
20%	Final Project	Week 10

Online Discussions

Timing

Online discussions should be completed during the course week in which they are assigned. Your first post should be made by Saturday midnight of each course week; following posts should be made by Tuesday midnight.

Evaluation

Unless stated otherwise, you should expect to post substantive answers to each discussion question and at least two responses to other students' posts (totaling a minimum of 3 to 4 substantive posts per week). A substantive post is one that is at least 200 words which makes a useful point or asks a useful question. You should expect to appropriately cite references to course readings and external sources to support your points. Posts which are poorly written, which merely quote from external sources, or which merely echo agreement or disagreement with another post will not earn credit. Participation beyond these minimum requirements will earn additional credit.

Discussion rubric:

1. Posted substantive answers to each question and at least 2 substantive discussion replies
2. Comments are of an appropriate length
3. Comments integrate course readings, your experience, and your opinion
4. Well written
5. Additional resources were incorporated

Assignment Descriptions

There are 5 required assignments:

- Assignment 1—Sitemap Exercise
 - You will be creating a sitemap and will write a brief analysis of a site's organization and structure.
- Assignment 2—Mapping a User Flow
 - You will be mapping a specific process of the same site you used for Assignment 1.
- Assignment 3—Search & Metadata Report
 - You will be writing an analysis of the site's use of search & metadata.
- Assignment 4—Tree-Test Plan
 - You will be planning a tree test for user feedback on the information architecture of your final project.
- Assignment 5—Wireframes
 - You will be creating wireframes for your final project.

II. Weekly Information

Week 1	Introduction to Information Architecture
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define Information Architecture (IA) • Explain key principles & components of IA • Connect IA to inclusive design
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 1 Topic Notes • <i>Information Architecture for the Web and Beyond</i> Part I: pp 3-75 • Schmidt, A. (2015). “Privacy is UX”: https://alistapart.com/article/privacy-is-ux/ • [Please note that “My Year Was Tragic...” concerns the author discussing the death of his daughter] Meyer, E. (2015). “My Year Was Tragic. Facebook Ambushed Me With a Painful Reminder”: https://slate.com/technology/2014/12/facebook-year-in-review-my-tragic-year-was-the-wrong-fodder-for-facebook-s-latest-app.html • Horton, S. and Quesenbery, W. (2013). “Chapter 1: A Web for Everyone.” <i>A Web for Everyone: Designing Accessible Web Experiences</i>. pp 1-10.
Discussion Topic	Defining Information Architecture and IA in Larger Contexts
Assignments / Assessments	None

Week 2	Foundations and Assessments: Organization and Labels
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify different organizational themes • Recognize different labeling systems • Assess and analyze labels and organizational systems • Communicate structure by creating sitemaps
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 2 Topic Notes • <i>Information Architecture for the Web and Beyond</i>: Chapters 5-7: pp 79-174 • Jhang, J. (2020). “How to create a UX Sitemap: a simple guideline”: https://uxdesign.cc/how-to-create-a-ux-sitemap-a-simple-guideline-8786c16f85c1 • [OPTIONAL] <i>Communicating Design</i> “Chapter 5. Site Maps”
Discussion Topic	Card Sort Exercise and WCAG Standards
Assignments / Assessments	Assignment 1—Sitemap Exercise Final Project Proposal

Week 3	Navigation and Search; Cross-Channel Considerations
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognize types of navigation systems • Explain how search systems work • Evaluate appropriate search systems for specific content • Communicate a user flow via mapping diagrams
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 3 Topic Notes • Information Architecture for the Web and Beyond: Chapters 8 & 9: pp 175- 268 • Birch, D. (2020). “A UX designer’s guide to user flows”: https://uxdesign.cc/a-ux-designers-guide-to-user-flows-bbbc61f8b666 • [Optional] Communicating Design “Chapter 6. Flowcharts”
Discussion Topic	Cross-Channel
Assignments / Assessments	Assignment 2—Mapping a User Flow

Week 4	Vocabularies and Metadata
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain vocabularies and metadata in reference to website & related design • Develop vocabulary for a website, app, or similar platforms • Apply metadata to systems
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 4 Topic Notes • <i>Information Architecture for the Web and Beyond</i>: Chapter 10: pp 269-309
Discussion Topic	Personal Metadata
Assignments / Assessments	None, but you should be working on Assignment 3 at this point

Week 5	Research, Analytics, and Information-Seeking Behavior
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Apply user research to IA work • Explain basic uses of analytics • Recommend analytic tools
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 5 Topic Notes • <i>Information Architecture for the Web and Beyond</i>: Chapter 11: pp 313-354
Discussion Topic	Analytics Data & Platforms
Assignments / Assessments	Assignment 3—Search & Metadata Report

Week 6	Content Strategy
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Define content strategy • Examine the relationship between IA and content strategy • Address content considerations in IA work
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 6 Topic Notes • Halvorson, K. (2017). “What Is Content Strategy? Connecting the Dots Between Disciplines”: https://www.braintraffic.com/insights/what-is-content-strategy • Halvorson, K. (2021). “Content’s Defining Problem (and How To Solve It)”: https://www.braintraffic.com/insights/defining-content-terminology-to-build-community • “Content Strategy Basics”: https://www.usability.gov/what-and-why/content-strategy.html • Whitenton, K. (2017). “Tree Testing: Fast, Iterative Evaluation of Menu Labels and Categories”: https://www.nngroup.com/articles/tree-testing/ • (Optional) Kissane, E. (2011) <i>The Elements of Content Strategy</i>: http://elements-of-content-strategy.abookapart.com/ <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Also available through O’Reilly: https://learning.oreilly.com/library/view/the-elements-of/9780133053005/
Discussion Topic	Content Needs for Your Project; Forms
Assignments / Assessments	Assignment 4—Tree Test Plan

Week 7	Strategy and Implementation
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Explain elements of IA strategy • Develop strategy for a project • Draft a strategy report or project plan
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 7 Topic Notes • <i>Information Architecture for the Web and Beyond</i>: Chapter 12: pp 355-388
Discussion Topic	Peer Review Feedback on Your Final Project Outline
Assignments / Assessments	Final Project Outline for Peer Review

Week 8	Design Documentation
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Give examples of the range of IA documentation • Assess and recommend appropriate documentation approaches for a given project • Create wireframes
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 8 Topic Notes • <i>Information Architecture for the Web and Beyond</i>: Chapter 13 & Coda pp 389-445 • Suprunenko, A. (2020). “How to Succeed In Wireframe Design:” https://www.smashingmagazine.com/2020/04/wireframe-design-success/ • [OPTIONAL] <i>Communicating Design</i> “Chapter 7. Wireframes” • [OPTIONAL] <i>Communicating Design</i> “Chapter 8. Deliverable Basics”
Discussion Topic	Wireframes vs. Prototypes
Assignments / Assessments	Assignment 5—Wireframes

Week 9	The Future of IA: Emerging Technology & Speculative Design
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Devise strategies for applying IA to emerging technologies • Analyze fictional representations of technology to examine ways design continues to evolve
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 9 Topic Notes • Film from list for movie analysis discussion
Discussion Topic	Movie Analysis & Final Project Peer Review
Assignments / Assessments	Draft of final project for peer review

Week 10	Final Week
Objectives	By the end of this week, you will be able to: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Describe how IA processes work in real-world settings • Strategize how to work with or around business decisions that may interfere with or stall these processes
Learning Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Week 10 Topic Notes
Discussion Topic	Defining Information Architecture, Revisited
Assignments / Assessments	Final Project

III. Course Policies and Procedures

Late Policies

Because discussions depend upon timely participation to be valuable for all class participants, you are expected to meet the deadlines for weekly discussion. If you can't make a deadline, please contact me to let me know when you will make your posts.

Your assignments build upon each other and require timely completion for you to get the most out of the class. That said, we all have extenuating circumstances at times. It's your responsibility to let me know if you need to hand in an assignment late with the understanding that this would mean receiving your feedback on that assignment late as well. I will enter a grade of zero, which I will change once the work is submitted and graded. You should also contact me to let me know directly once you submit any makeup work as LATTE will not send me a notification. You must contact me by the due date if you cannot turn in an assignment or the final project on time.

Grading Standards

- Work expectations – Students are responsible to explore each week's materials and submit required work by their due dates. On average, a student can expect to spend approximately 3-5 hours per week reading and approximately 5-8 hours per week completing assignments and posting to discussions.
- How points and percentages equate to grades:

100-94	A	76-73	C
93-90	A-	72-70	C-
89-87	B+	69-67	D+
86-83	B	66-63	D
82-80	B-	62-60	D-
79-77	C+	59 or <	F

Feedback

My goal is to grade homework within 2 weeks of the due date. I will post an announcement if I am delayed in grading for some reason. If you submit an assignment late, I usually grade it after the following assignment is due so that my feedback is timely for the greatest number of students.

If you have questions about assignments, consider posting to the Ask the Class Forum. If you'd like to ask me privately, contact me via email or Private Forum. I normally respond within 24 hours.

Confidentiality

We can draw on the wealth of examples from our organizations in class discussions and in our written work. However, it is imperative that we not share information that is confidential, privileged, or proprietary in nature. We must be mindful of any contracts we have agreed to with our companies. In addition, we should respect our fellow classmates and work under the assumption that what is discussed here (as it pertains to the workings of particular organizations) stays within the confines of the classroom.

Finally, for your awareness, members of the University's technical staff have access to all course sites to aid in course setup and technical troubleshooting. Program Chairs and a small number of Graduate Professional Studies (GPS) staff have access to all GPS courses for oversight purposes. Students enrolled in GPS courses can expect that individuals other than their fellow classmates and the course instructor(s) may visit their course for various purposes. Their intentions are to aid in technical troubleshooting and to ensure that quality course delivery standards are met. Strict confidentiality of student information is maintained.

Time Management

Students sometimes run into problems related to managing their time, especially in distance learning courses. I hope these ideas will help you to succeed in the class:

- If you are employed full-time, do not take more than two courses at a time. I have never yet met a student who could successfully manage this, especially toward the end of the term as finals and projects come due.
- Keep up with the course week-to-week. Don't let yourself fall behind on readings, discussion posts, etc. Brandeis courses are not self-paced, and they depend on the collaboration of everyone. Participating late, or "trying to get ahead" is very disruptive.
- Take a look at course assignments early in the week and consider how you will approach the solutions. Ask questions early, so I have time to answer them. Don't wait until Tuesday night to begin work.
- If you are planning a vacation, plan to continue participating in the class. Thanks to LATTE, you can post discussions and submit homework from virtually anywhere in the world. I will not be able to accept homework late because of a scheduled vacation.
- If you do find yourself short of time, remember that discussion posts count for 30% of your grade. Do not forgo discussions, because it's impossible to complete the course successfully without them.
- If you experience a serious situation, such as a severe illness, contact me as soon as you can, or contact the GPS office.

Find out where to get help.

For questions or problems with your LATTE course, contact the [24/7 Help Desk](#). You can email, call, or text your questions using the LATTE Support Channels listed on this webpage. Please also bookmark this resource so you have easy access to these support services moving forward. To search our library materials use our [OneSearch](#) database or contact Library Resources using [Find Your Librarian](#).

IV. University and Division of Graduate Professional Studies Standards

Please review the policies and procedures of Graduate Professional Studies, found at <https://www.brandeis.edu/gps/student-services/academic-resources/index.html>. We would like to highlight the following.

Student Accessibility Support

Brandeis University is committed to providing reasonable accommodations to individuals with appropriately documented physical, learning, or psychological disabilities; short-term and long-term.

Disclosing a disability and requesting accommodations are personal decisions. Brandeis does not require you to disclose the existence of a disability, but requesting accommodations does require that you disclose your disability. Be sure to contact Student Accessibility Support (SAS) as soon as possible to ensure all your accommodations are delivered in a timely manner.

Please refer to www.brandeis.edu/academic-services/accessibility for more information. For any questions regarding the accommodation request process, please contact Jaspreet Mahal, Accessibility Specialist for Graduate Students, at 781-736-3470 or jaspreet26@brandeis.edu.

Academic Honesty and Student Integrity

Academic honesty and student integrity are of fundamental importance at Brandeis University and we want students to understand this clearly at the start of the term. As stated in the Brandeis Rights and Responsibilities handbook, "Every member of the University Community is expected to maintain the highest standards of academic honesty. A student shall not receive credit for work that is not the product of the student's own effort. A student's name on any written exercise constitutes a statement that the work is the result of the student's own thought and study, stated in the student's own words, and produced without the assistance of others, except in quotes, footnotes or references with appropriate acknowledgement of the source." In particular, students must be aware that material (including ideas, phrases, sentences, etc.) taken from the Internet and other sources MUST be appropriately cited if quoted, and footnoted in any written work turned in for this, or any, Brandeis class. Also, students will not be allowed to collaborate on work except by the specific permission of the instructor. Failure to properly cite resources may result in a referral being made to the Office of Student Development and Judicial Education. The outcome of this action may involve academic and disciplinary sanctions, which could include (but are not limited to) such penalties as receiving no credit for the assignment in question, receiving no credit for the related course, or suspension or dismissal from the University.

Further information regarding academic integrity may be found in the following publications: "In Pursuit of Excellence - A Guide to Academic Integrity for the Brandeis Community", "(Students') Rights and Responsibilities Handbook", AND "Graduate Professional Studies Student Handbook". You should read these publications, which all can be accessed from the Graduate Professional Studies Web site. A student that is in doubt about standards of academic honesty (regarding plagiarism, multiple submissions of written work, unacknowledged or unauthorized collaborative effort, false citation or false data) should consult either the course instructor or other staff of the Rabb School Graduate Professional Studies.

University Caveat

The above schedule, content, and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of extenuating circumstances. If you have questions or concerns about course content before the start of the course, please contact the instructor.