web design and usability

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delivery and timing

We will meet once a week in person for two hours and forty minutes in the Art and Design Building. The classes are required and during our sessions we will discuss work, complete demos, and further our design knowledge. The class is scheduled to run for 16 weeks and you can expect to work for 6 hours outside of class each week.

prerequisites

AVT 217: Introduction to Web Design, AVT 311: Graphic Design Principles and Methods and AVT 313: Editorial Design, or permission of instructor.

course description

Building on existing skills and principles, this course delves deeper into web-related concepts and techniques. Students will gain knowledge about usability and build their design skills as they relate to the web. IMPORTANT: a foundational level of design knowledge is assumed to allow us more time to focus on the projects themselves.

objectives

→ Develop general design skills
→ Apply best practices for accessibility and usability as they relate to the designing and coding of websites
→ Analyze everyday interactions on the web from a critical perspective
→ Understand the use of frameworks and design systems

textbook

There is no specific textbook for this course but there are many digital resources we will use and reference throughout the semester. Those resources can be found on the class website.

required accounts

figma.com (using mason email)
github.com (any email)

programs

There are many different programs available to use for the work in this class. The programs I will be using are highlighted but alternatives are also listed.

DESIGN
Figma, Adobe XD, Sketch, Illustrator, Lunacy. No Photoshop as a design tool.
OTHER
Chrome, Safari, or Firefox

content

This course consists of exercises, projects, demos, discussions, and critiques. The exercises are to familiarize students with specific concepts and ideas and the projects are to synthesize the concepts and ideas we will cover.

PROJECT 1: TELL A STORY

Design and prototype a single page, responsive website that tells the history, process, or story of a selected topic. The page can be on any topic and will be built out to include six total sections to help explain the topic.

PROJECT 2: FOR SALE

Design and prototype a responsive, three page site for a fictional retail company focusing on usability. The site will include a home page, product page, and one additional page of your choice.

attendance

Four absenses, regardless of excuse, will be an automatic failure of the class. After the first absence, each class you miss will lower your engagement grade by 25 points unless you let me know you won't be in class before class and make an effort to cover what you missed in class. After the first late arrival, each class you are late to will lower your engagement grade by 10 points unless you let me know you are going to be late before class. Exceptions to this policy are for people actively communicating with me prior to the fourth absence.

engagement

Your engagement in this class will affect your final grade (and, by extension, the quality of your work) for this course. Your attendance is tied to this grade along with your ability to actively take part in this course in the following ways.

→ Attend class meetings and be on time
→ Create things and be prepared to show them on time.
→ Make things thoughtfully, intentionally, and with intensity.
→ Meet all deadlines for handing in work and process.
→ Actively participate in critiques both in class and out of class.
→ Be curious about making things and the things your classmates make.
→ Care about yourself & your work, your classmates & their work, and this class

communication

Your ability to communicate with me is of prime importance in this course. If you are going to be absent, late, or not have your work, it will be your best interest in communicating those things to me in advance. I do not need to know your reasons for being absent, late, or not having your work but I do need to know. A simple, short email will be fine.

The same goes for if you are struggling in this class or having other issues that are hindering your ability to complete work in this class. The more you keep me in the loop the more I can help you and adjust as needed.

discussion of work

You will need to take an active role in both the presentation and discussion of your work. We will review projects in a variety of ways and you are expected to be able to talk and write about your own work and give feedback to your peers about their work. The ability to discuss your work and other student's work is a very important part of your education. Use this class to improve on those skills.

grading

Grades will be based on engagement (25%), exercises (25%), and projects (50%).

ENGAGEMENT (25%)
This percentage will be based on your engagement in the class which is explained on previous page but will include attendance, discussion, critiques, and overall participation. Be engaged in this course and its content throughout the semester and this should be an easy 25%.

EXERCISES (25%)
Exercises are meant to be quicker, skill building tasks that improve your design knowledge.

PROJECTS (50%)
Each project will generate two different grades. One grade will be based on your ability to submit the required, weekly checkpoints for the project. These weekly checkpoints use a simple rubric based on your effort, timeliness, improvement, and completion. The second grade will be based on the final project you submit and has a more extensive rubric. At the end of the semester you will have 4 total project grades that are all weighted equally for this 50%.

late work

Late work will be accepted for three weeks after a deadline with the exception of the final project which will be due at the end of the semester. There is a section on the rubrics showing how late work is factored into the assignment grade.

rubrics

Rubrics are used to grade exercises, projects, and checkpoints. The rubrics are on the following pages and tied to each submission on Canvas. The rubrics are here to allow you to understand how work is graded and to reference while working to self-evaluate.

schedule

Most days we will meet for the entire time but some weeks we will have individual meetings or end early. Some classes will be work days so make sure to bring things to work on each class. Unless otherwise specified, all work is due at the beginning of class.

A note—Time management is an important skill to master and should be worked on all your classes. Staying up all night working is not a badge of honor, it typically means you didn't budget your time correctly. Staying up all night isn't healthy and making sure you are keeping yourself healthy is your first priority.

The schedule on the following page is an outline of what we will be covering this fall. It is subject to additions, subtractions, and shift and the most current schedule is available on the class website.

WEEK 1	Course overview
	Demo: Figma Basics
	E1: A Little Background
	P1: Tell a Story
WEEK 2	Demo: Plugins and Prototyping in Figma
	Accessibility in Web Design
	E2: Linking in Figma
WEEK 3	Demo: More Figma Prototyping
	E3: Hover and Animations in Figma
WEEK 4	Review: Responsive Design
	E4: Landing Page
WEEK 5	Talk: Web Typography
	E5: Make it Responsive
WEEK 6	Talk: Forms
	E6: Form Redesign
	P2: For Sale
WEEK 7	Review: Wireframes
	E7: Reverse Wireframe
	P1: Due
WEEK 8	Spring Break
WEEK 9	Talk: Usability 1
	E8: Not So Usable
WEEK 10	Talk: Usability 2
	E9: 10 Usability Heuristics
WEEK 11	E10: CSS Drawing
WEEK 12	Talk: Design Thinking
WEEK 13	Workshop: Design Thinking
	E11: Design a Hat
WEEK 14	E11: Continued
WEEK 15	Work Day
WEEK 16	Final Critiques

project rubric (100 points total)

	UNSATISFACTORY (0)	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (4-6)	SATISFACTORY (7-9)	EXEMPLARY (10)
COMPLETION	Few or none of the requirements of the project are met	Some of the requirements of the project are met	Most of the requirements of the project are met.	All requirements of the project are met.
CONSISTENCY	Design is inconsistent across pages and/or on the same page.	Some parts of the design are consistent across pages and/or on the same page.	Design is generally consistent across all pages but has a few elements that appear inconsistent.	Designs are consistent across all pages and all elements fit into the design style.
CONTENT	No real care for the content with multiple pixelated images, places with placeholder text, and many typos.	Most images are pixelated, lots of placeholder text, and/or there are a many obvious typos.	Some images are pixelated, some placeholder text, and/or there are a few obvious typos.	All images are high enough resolution, text is real and considered, no typos present.
EXPLORATION	There is no evidence of exploration. Concept doesn't offer anything new.	Very little exploration is evident. The project doesn‚Äôt exhibit any exploration in concept, layout, or typographic choices.	Some exploration present. The design exhibits explorations in concept, layout, or typographic choices that could be pushed further.	Exploration of concept, layout, and typography are clear, innovative, and effective.
LAYOUT	General lack of organization of pages and no real relationship between elements on the page through alignment or space.	A grid does not seem to be present. Elements are spaced but inconsistently, use of white space is minimal.	A grid seems to be used with occasional elements not aligned. Spacing between elements is generally consistent. Use of white space is apparent.	The design uses a grid and all elements are aligned to it. Elements spaced consistently and appropriately. White space well integrated into the design.
OVERALL	Project is incomplete, hastily done, and missing requirements.	Project fulfills requirements but shows a lack of effort in the design.	Project fulfills requirements but the design could have been pushed further.	Project exceeds requirements and the design was pushed.
PROCESS	The project was completed without any real process from beginning to end. The project was submitted with little feedback given along the way.	Little process evident through the project. The initial ideas and designs were not pushed very far for the final submission.	Process is evident and minor improvements happened week to week.	Strong process with a commitment to improving and pushing the project throughout the duration.
PROTOTYPE/ USABILITY	No prototype is present. Designs for elements that aid in the usability of the site (hover states, active states, links, navigation, etc.) not present.	Not all links in prototype work. Places that should be accessible aren't and some elements that aid in the usability of the site are designed but not all. Designs interfere with usability.	All links in prototype work. Elements that aid in the usability of the site are designed but are basic and default.	All links in prototype work. Elements that aid in the usability of the site are designed and help guide the user through the site.
SUBMISSION	Over a week late.	Up to a week late.	Up to two days late.	Early or on time.
TYPOGRAPHY	Project shows no understanding of typographic hierarchy, how to choose and use typefaces, and the principles of typography (tracking, leading, type size, etc.). Multiple major and minor issues present.	Project shows a lack of understanding of typographic hierarchy, how to choose and use typefaces, and the principles of typography (tracking, leading, type size, etc.). Several major issues present with multiple minor issues visible.	Project shows a general understanding of typographic hierarchy, how to choose and use typefaces, and the principles of typography (tracking, leading, type size, etc.). One or two major issues present with multiple minor issues visible.	Project shows a clear understanding of typographic hierarchy, how to choose and use typefaces, and the principles of typography (tracking, leading, type size, etc.). No major issues present with one or two minor issues visible.

project checkpoint rubric (points vary project to project)

	UNSATISFACTORY (0%)	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (25%)	SATISFACTORY (50%)	EXEMPLARY (100%)
EXPLORATION (25%)	Submission not relevant to checkpoint or repeat submission.	No noticeable exploration.	Some exploration.	Noticeable exploration.
IMPROVEMENT (25%)	Submission not relevant to checkpoint or repeat submission.	No noticeable improvement from previous week.	Some improvement from previous week.	Noticeable improvement from previous week.
REQUIREMENTS (25%)	None met, submission not relevant to checkpoint, or repeat submission.	Few met.	Some met.	All met.
SUBMISSION (25%)	Over a week late.	Up to a week late.	Up to two days late.	On time.

exercise rubric (100 points total)

	NO POINTS (0)	NEEDS IMPROVEMENT (15)	SATISFACTORY (20)	EXEMPLARY (25)
EXPLORATION	Submission not relevant to exercise.	No.	Maybe?	Yes!
REQUIREMENTS	Submission not relevant to exercise.	Some met.	Most met.	All met.
SUBMISSION*	Over a week late.	Over two days late.	Up to two days late.	Submitted on time.

*SUBMISSION POINTS DOUBLED

mason exhibitions & visual voices lecture series

Visual Voices is a year-long series of lectures by artists, art historians and others about contemporary art and art practice. Visual Voices lectures are held on four Thursday evenings from 4:45–6:30 pm, more details at masonexhibitions.org.

school of art social media accounts

IG: @gmusoa / FB: gmu.soa

writing center and library resources

The University Writing Center supports writers at George Mason University through one-to-one consultations at any stage of the writing process, from brainstorming to the final phases of polishing. In these consultations, writers can try out ideas and approaches with a well-trained student staff comprised of attentive readers and listeners from a variety of disciplines. The Writing Center helps writers develop strategies and knowledge that make them stronger writers in the long term through both online and in-person sessions. For online sessions, writers can choose between meeting their tutor in real time on Zoom or uploading a draft for their tutor's written feedback. Please send your questions to wcenter@gmu.edu

Provisions Research Center for Art & Social Change is in Room L001 of the Art & Design Building. This student resource assists students in exploring and engaging new models for artmaking that lead to a more inclusive and connected society. Provisions is also a hub for developing art projects through Mason Exhibitions, the Mural Brigade, and art partners throughout the metropolitan area, and beyond. Contact Don Russell for more information: drusse10@gmu.edu

Art and Art History Librarian, Stephanie Grimm. Contact sgrimm@gmu.edu for appointments and virtual office hours.

official communications via mason e-mail

Students are responsible for the content of university communications sent to their George Mason University e-mail account and are required to activate their account and check it regularly. All communication from the university, college, school, and program will be sent to students solely through their Mason e-mail account.

students with disabilities and learning differences

Students with disabilities who need accommodations for a course must first speak to the George Mason University Office of Disability Services (ODS), then provide the Memorandum of Accommodations to their instructor, in writing, at the beginning of the semester. http://ods.gmu.edu

attendance policies

Students are expected to attend the class periods of the courses for which they register. In-class (including sections that meet online) participation is important not only to the individual student, but also to the entire class. Because class participation may be a factor in grading, instructors may use absence, tardiness, or early departure as de facto evidence of non-participation. Students who miss an exam without an acceptable excuse may be penalized according to the individual instructor's grading policy, as stated in the course syllabus.

honor code

To promote a stronger sense of mutual responsibility, respect, trust, and fairness among all members of the George Mason University Community and with the desire for greater academic and personal achievement, we, the student members of the university community, have set forth this Academic Standard: Student Members of the George Mason University community pledge not to cheat, plagiarize, steal, or lie in matters related to academic work. See: Academic Standards - https://academicstandards.gmu.edu/

responsible employee disclosure

As a faculty member, I am designated as a "Responsible Employee," and must report all disclosures of sexual assault, interpersonal violence, and stalking to Mason's Title IX Coordinator per University Policy 1202. If you wish to speak with someone confidentially, please contact one of Mason's confidential resources, such as Student Support and Advocacy Center (SSAC) at 703-380-1434 or Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) at 703-993-2380. You may also seek assistance from Mason's Title IX Coordinator by calling 703-993-8730, or emailing titleix@gmu.edu

student support and advocacy center

The Student Support and Advocacy Center assists students who are encountering a life crisis or significant barriers that impact their academic and personal success and/or overall functioning. Their goal, through individual consultations, is to best understand the student's situation, answer questions, provide guidance, and make connections to appropriate on and off-campus resources.

For more information, please visit their website: https://ssac.gmu.edu/

counseling & psychological services (CAPS)

CAPS provides a wide range of free services to students. CAPS offers crisis, counseling, and psychiatric services virtually, and limited services in person. Services are provided by a staff of licensed clinical psychologists, licensed professional counselors, licensed social workers, doctoral-level trainees, and a board-certified psychiatrist. Their individual and group counseling, workshops, and community education programs are designed to enhance students' personal experience and academic performance. For distance learners, please see the Resources for Distance Learning page. They also provide consultation to faculty and staff who have concerns about a student.

CAPS provides short-term mental health services for enrolled students. When a student's needs require a different level of care, CAPS works with students to transition care to community providers. If a student is currently seeing a professional in the community for therapy and can continue to work with them, they will be encouraged to continue care with their current provider.

To begin services with CAPS, please call 703-993-2380 during business hours.

If you are experiencing a crisis after business hours or on weekends or holidays, please call 703-993-2380. Please select option 1 in the phone system to be connected to an after-hours crisis counselor.

If you are interested in connecting with a provider in the community for long term counseling, please visit the Find a Community Provider page for a database of community provider options and other options for connecting with a therapist. If you have student health insurance through Aetna, you may also choose to access services through TimelyCare.

school of art safety manual

George Mason University has developed the Art Safety Manual for the purpose of establishing mechanisms, methods, engineering controls, administrative controls and work practice controls that employees must use to safely create and display art. This document outlines George Mason University's Art Safety Program and describes specific policies and procedures designed to satisfy federal and state safety and health requirements. The components and information required by Virginia Occupational Safety and Health and federal Occupational Safety and Health Administration Standards as they relate to the hazards involved in creating art are contained within this document.

inclement weather university closure

See: universitypolicy.gmu.edu/policies/inclement-weatheremergency-closure/

ai policy

Generative AI tools may be used in this course with clear guidelines. Students must disclose when AI tools are used and how they contributed to the work. Misuse may be treated as a violation of academic standards.

land acknowledgment

At the place George Mason University occupies, we give greetings and thanksgivings to the recognized Virginia tribes who have lovingly stewarded these lands for millennia including the Rappahannock, Pamunkey, Upper Mattaponi, Chickahominy, Eastern Chickahominy, Nansemond, Monacan, Mattaponi, Patawomeck, and Nottaway, past, present, and future; and to the Piscataway tribes, who have lived on both sides of the river from time immemorial. The education offered here is a credit to the land that has received our students. The good they will do in this world is the harvest of the soil upon which they stand, sit, and live.

cultural inclusion & belonging

The School of Art plays an integral role in building an educational environment that is committed to creating inclusion for all of our members in both our classrooms and communities. An inclusive approach to higher education acknowledges the ways that individual, interpersonal, institutional, and structural manifestations of oppression contribute to inequality and injustice in our classrooms, on our campuses, and in our communities. It strives to provide our community members with resources to cultivate a more inclusive, and just environment for all of our students, staff, faculty, alumni, and friends, regardless of racial background. This approach is an active and ongoing, long-term process. In all our efforts, we uphold a commitment to creating honest, respectful, supportive, and healing spaces where members of our community can meaningfully dialogue and learn from each other's lived experiences for the betterment of our entire community.

supporting an inclusive community

This class will be conducted as an intentionally inclusive community that celebrates diversity and welcomes the participation in the life of the university of faculty, staff and students who reflect the diversity of our plural society. All may feel free to speak and to be heard without fear that the content of the opinions they express will bias the evaluation of their academic performance or hinder their opportunities for participation in class activities. In turn, all are expected to be respectful of each other without regard to race, class, linguistic background, religion, political beliefs, gender identity, sex, sexual orientation, ethnicity, age, veteran's status, or physical ability.

The School of Art is committed to fostering and supporting our diverse community of students, staff, and faculty. We are a community of diverse perspectives and experiences, which contribute to varied approaches to artistic and creative expression. We know that excellence in art education and creative practices is strengthened by the inclusion of varied cultural traditions, identities, and ways of knowing. As such, students are encouraged to connect with university resources as they develop and deepen in their studies within our supportive and inclusive community.

→ Disability Services: https://ds.gmu.edu/
→ Academic Advising Services: https://plan.connect.gmu.edu/
→ Connect with School of Art Administrator, Director of Art Education, Director of Studio Art, Director of Graphic Design: avt@gmu.edu

technology requirements

We do not have any Enterprise Adobe Creative Cloud licenses available for students. However, Adobe Creative Cloud can be found in many computer labs available for student use. Adobe Software is available in our labs and can be used for free by students. Please create an Adobe account using your personal email address. Please do not use your Mason email to create your Adobe account unless you are purchasing a student subscription.

Students may also purchase Adobe Creative Cloud subscriptions for personal use with student discounts directly from Adobe. Details for student pricing can be found on Adobe's Creative Cloud for Students page. Eligibility for student pricing requires proof. If a student provides a school-issued email address during the purchase, they are instantly verified.

The School of Art, Digital Design Studio (Room 1023) has open studio hours each semester. Our lab offers computers (with Adobe Creative Suite), scanners, photo printers, and 2 risograph machines with 14 colors. Our open studio is available to all active AVT students. We also have large surfaces to assemble work. Please check our website for open hours each semester.

The Collaborative Learning Hub (CLUB) supports effective teaching and learning with technology to enhance learning experiences and the quality of work-life at the university for current students, teaching faculty, instructional support staff, and academic units seeking to improve instruction. The CLUB provides training and support for instructional improvement and technology to enhance student

learning, to support the use of technology-based courseware in classrooms, and to support instructional initiatives university-wide. Reservations are strongly encouraged, but walk-ins will still be accepted. To reserve collaborative space or the sound space online, select the Reserve Resources button or visit the web checkout portal and log in with your NetID and Patriot Pass Password. Alternatively, you may call the CLUB during open hours to make a reservation. At this time, email reservation requests will not be accepted. Upon entering the lab, guests are required to sign in. The information you supply helps provide the best service possible.

important deadlines

Once the add and drop deadlines have passed, instructors can approve a Late Schedule Adjustment, but students need the permission of the instructor, or the office of the department offering the course for classes for some departments, before completing the form. There is also a late fee associated with adding a course after the add deadline.   Requests for non-selective withdrawals and retroactive adds (adds after the last day of classes) should be discussed with an advisor first and must be approved by the college of the student's major

JAN 20 First Day of Spring Classes
JAN 27 Last Day to Add: All Individual Sections Forms Due
FEB 3 Last Day to Drop: With 100% Tuition Refund
FEB 10 Last Day to Drop: With 50% Tuition Refund
FEB 11–24 Unrestricted Withdrawal Period: 100% Tuition Liability
FEB 16–MAR 20 Mid-Term Evaluation Period: 100-200 level classes. Grades Available via patriotweb
FEB 25–MAR 30 Selective Withdrawal Period - Undergraduate Students Only (100% Tuition Liability)
MAR 9–15 Spring Recess (No Classes)
MAR 27 Incomplete Work from Fall 2025 Due to Instructor
APR 3 Incomplete Grade Changes from Fall 2025 Due to Registrar
MAY 4 Last Day of Class
MAY 5 & 10 Reading Days
MAY 6–13 Examination Period
MAY 14 Spring Commencement
MAY 15 Degree Conferral