

51-422 Visual Interface

Spring 2004

TTh 6:30-8:30ish

MM 227

<http://www.odannyboy.com/vid>

Dan Saffer, instructor

"Office:" MM 215

Hours: MW 4:30-5:30 or by appointment

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Official Course Description

Intended for HCI double majors, this is the spring offering of 51-421 Introduction to Visual Interface Design. This course highlights the role that visual interface designers play in the multi-disciplinary attempt to bridge the gap between functionality and usability and to introduce students to some of the unique challenges of designing within the realm of a digital, interactive medium.

Unofficial Course Description

The course title is a misnomer. This class isn't only about visual interface; in fact, it's not even primarily about visual interface. It's about interface and interaction design: how the features and functions of a product get translated into something humans find usable, useful, and desirable.

We will start by looking at how visual and interaction designers fit into what is currently called "experience design" and discuss the process designers use to develop products. We'll talk about what a product is and the types of products designers work on. We'll look at the types of documents ("deliverables") that designers produce.

The bulk of the class will be spent creating, critiquing, and refining a series of projects, creating the deliverables we're studying. We'll start with the smallest building block of interaction design: the widget. By the end of the class, you will be able to design complete applications, both visually and functionally.

This isn't a class on the basics of communication design. We will look at the elements of visual design (color, typography, composition, etc.) as they arise during the course of projects, but I don't predict we'll spend a lot of time on each *except as they relate to interface or interaction design*.

Although this is a class for HCI double majors, it is a Design class. While the tools and techniques of traditional human-computer interaction are important to the creation of successful digital products, we're going to be focused on the arts and methods of Design. Thus, research and usability testing, while encouraged, will play a less important role in this class than in an HCI class. Instead, we'll be looking at the design process as a mechanism for the creation of innovative solutions to complex problems.

Prerequisites

This class will require you to make several different kinds of documents: personae, conceptual and mental models, site maps, wire frames, task flows, and visual treatments. Additionally, you will need some method of presenting (digitally) your final two projects. To do this, you will need to know (or be willing to learn):

Visio OR OmniGraffle OR InDesign OR some sort of diagramming software

AND

Illustrator OR Freehand OR Photoshop OR some sort of drawing/illustration software

AND

PowerPoint OR Flash OR Keynote or some sort of presentation software

As stated previously, this isn't a class on the basics of communication design. That being said, no design background is required to take it. What is expected is an awareness of Design, which will hopefully grow over the course of the semester. Be deliberate in the choices you make in color, fonts, and placement of objects.

Course Objectives

By the end of this class, you should be able to:

- Understand the role of the interaction designer in creating products
- Understand the role of a visual designer in creating products
- Evaluate digital artifacts for interaction and visual design
- Create personae and user scenarios
- Create site maps
- Create conceptual and mental models
- Create task analyses
- Create task flows
- Create wire frames that detail interactivity
- Create style guides that detail look and feel

Your grade will be based on your mastery of these objectives.

Grading

Although half of life is just showing up, only a quarter of your grade will be based on that. Show up prepared with any assignments for that day ready to be posted on the wall or displayed onscreen for critiques and any assigned reading done. I'm not going to take attendance, but it's a small class and absences, especially frequent absences, will be duly noted.

I also expect you to actively participate in this class. This is much less a lecture course than it is a discussion and studio class. Your involvement in class discussions is essential to the success of this class. I also expect you to participate in the critiques of others' work; one of the best ways of learning about interface design is to critically look at existing work.

The other 75% of your grade will be based on the projects you do, broken down thusly:

Project 1, Reverse Engineering: 5%
Project 2, The Widget: 10%
Project 3, The Ecommerce Site: 30%
Project 4, The MP3 Player: 30%

Each project will be graded based on the following things: ideation (the concepts you come up with); appropriateness (how well your solution fits the constraints given); documentation (how thoroughly you document your idea); and presentation (how well you can talk about and defend your solution).

Textbook

There is one required textbook for the class, which I will supplement with other articles. The textbook is *Information Architecture: Blueprints for the Web* by Christina Wodtke. New Riders Press, ISBN 0-7357-1250-6. \$20.99 on Amazon.
www.blueprintsfortheweb.com

Schedule

I've tried to take into consideration things like Presidents' Day Weekend and Spring Break when setting up this schedule. Hopefully, if we stick to this schedule, there won't be assignments due over those weekends.

Tuesday, January 13, 2004

Syllabus Review

What is an interface? What is interaction design? What is visual design?

Why study interface design?

Thursday, January 15, 2004

The Elements of User Experience

- "Meet the Elements" by Jesse James Garrett from *The Elements of User Experience*
- "Good Design in the Digital Age" by Richard Buchanan

Project 1 assigned

Tuesday, January 20, 2004

Project 1 Critique

Thursday, January 22, 2004

The Basics of Interaction Design: Affordances, Feedback, and Feedforward

- "Chapter 2: First Principles" from *IA: Blueprints for the Web*
- "Knowing What to Do" by Donald Norman from *The Design of Everyday Things*
- "But How, Donald, Tell Us How?" by Tom Djajadiningrat, et al.

Project 2 assigned

Tuesday, January 27, 2004

The Basics of Interaction Design, Part Deux: The Elements of Interaction Design

- "Chapter 8: Eat Me, Drink Me, Push Me" from *IA: Blueprints for the Web*

Thursday, January 29, 2004

Project 2 Critique

Tuesday, February 3, 2004

The Environment of the Interaction Designer
Introduction to the Design Process

- “Chapter 3: Balancing Acts—Users, Technology, and Business” from *Information Architecture: Blueprints for the Web*

Thursday, February 5, 2004

User Research

- “Chapter 4: Those People” from *IA: Blueprints for the Web*

Project 3 assigned

Tuesday, February 10, 2004

Personae, User Scenarios, and Task Analysis

- “Chapter 7: From A to C by Way of B” from *IA: Blueprints for the Web*

Thursday, February 12, 2004

Project 3 Personae due

Tuesday, February 17, 2004

Site Maps and Wire Frames

- Pages 271-290 from “Chapter 9: Making It All Up, Writing It All Down” from *Information Architecture: Blueprints for the Web*

Project 3 User Scenarios and Task Analysis due

Thursday, February 19, 2004

Project 3 Site Map and Task Flows due

Tuesday, February 24, 2004

Worksession
Individual meetings as needed

Thursday, February 26, 2004

Project 3 Top Level Wire Frames due

Tuesday, March 2, 2004

Worksession

Individual meetings as needed

Thursday, March 4, 2004

Project 3 All Wire Frames Due

Tuesday and Thursday, March 9 and 11

Spring break. No class. Party.

Tuesday, March 16, 2004

The Elements of Visual Design

Style Guides

- “Designing Look and Feel” by Alan Cooper from *About Face 2.0*

Thursday, March 18, 2004

Worksession

Individual meetings as needed

Tuesday, March 23, 2004

Project 3 Visual Treatments due

Thursday, March 25, 2004

Project 3 Style Guide due

Tuesday, March 30, 2004

Project 3 Critique

Thursday, April 1, 2004

No class. April fools! We do have class.

Project 4 assigned

Tuesday, April 6, 2004

Project 4 Personae due

Thursday, April 8, 2004

Project 4 User Scenarios and Task Analysis due

Tuesday, April 13, 2004

Project 4 Site Map, Task Flows due

Thursday, April 15, 2004

Spring Carnival. No class. Party.

Tuesday, April 20, 2004

Worksession

Individual meetings

Thursday, April 22, 2004

Project 4 Wire Frames due

Tuesday, April 27, 2004

Worksession

Individual meetings

Thursday, April 29, 2004

Last day of classes

Project 4 Visual Treatments due

Thursday, May 6, 2004

Final

Project 4 Critique