

CURRICULUM PROPOSAL FORM 2001-2002

NON-GENERAL EDUCATION PROCESS A

EADLINES: Deadline dates for 2001/2002 submissions: Regular proposals: October 19, 2001 to be implemented in Fall 2002; Short-Term proposals: December 7, 2001 to be implemented in Fall, 2002; Regular proposals February 15, 2002 to be implemented in Spring, 2003; March 22, 2002 for short-term courses to be implemented in Spring 2003.

PROPOSAL TITLE: Information Architecture
 Course Proposal and add to Required Courses in
 Managerial Communications track under
 M.A. in Writing

SPONSOR(S): Diane Perrod

DEPARTMENT: Composition and Rhetoric

COLLEGE: Communication

IF LAS CHECK ONE: History/Humanities Math/Sciences Social/Behavioral Sciences

Check one: Undergraduate Graduate

THE ATTACHED **NON-GEN-ED** PROPOSAL IS BEST DESCRIBED BY THE ITEM(S) CHECKED.

- New non-gen-ed course
- Short-term non-gen-ed course
- Minor curricular changes (fewer than three) to:
 - existing non-gen-ed course
 - non-gen-ed degree requirements
 - major
 - minor, specialization, concentration, track, certificate program

DEPARTMENT

(Signature indicates approval)

John Perrod 10/22/01

Dept. Curriculum Chair / Date

Dept. Chairperson / Date

ACADEMIC DEAN

Approved Not Approved Comments:

Dean's Signature/Date

John Perrod

COLLEGE CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

Date of open hearing (if necessary) _____ Approved Not Approved _____

Comments:

Signature of College Chair/Date: [Signature] 2/19/02

UNIVERSITY CURRICULUM COMMITTEE

Date Received/Processed _____

Comments:

Curriculum Chair Signature [Signature] Date Announced At Senate 1/29/02

EXECUTIVE VICE PRESIDENT/PROVOST

Approved Not Approved _____ If no, reasons are as follows:

Student Credit Hours _____ Faculty Load Hours _____ Equalized Credit Hours _____

Official Copy & Approval Sheet Filed (Date): _____ Executive VP/Provost Signature/Date [Signature] 7/11/02

REGISTRAR

Date Approved Course Description Received _____ Hegis Taxonomy & Course Number Assigned _____

Registrar Signature/Date [Signature] 7/17/02

NOTIFICATION FORWARD

Senate Curriculum Committee Chairperson Academic Dean(s) FRB
 Department Chairpersons Registrar CAP
nu 7/23/02 _____ Sponsor(s)

Course Proposal

1. Details:

- a) Course Title: Information Architecture
- b) Sponsor: Dr. Diane Penrod, Department of Composition and Rhetoric, College of Communication, Graduate Program Adviser for the M.A. in Writing
- c) Credit Hours: 3 credit hours
- d) Course Level: 500-level graduate
- e) Curricular Effect: Required course for candidates in the Managerial Communication track in the Master of Arts in Writing. Open to other graduate students across the University. Senior Privilege option available.
- f) Prerequisites: None.
- g) Suggested Time/
Scale of Implementation: Summer 2002
One section
- h) Resources: Teaching faculty are on staff consistent with the College of Communication budget. New library acquisitions will be required overtime.

2. Rationale:

For many writers in business and industry, knowing how to build a web page is not enough. Frequently technical writers or professional writers in small companies are asked to become what industry calls “information architects,” people who can troubleshoot usability, design, navigation, and security problems for the company web site. Information Architecture (IA) centers on the rhetorical, theoretical, and practical discussions of how web content “lives” on the World Wide Web. As the Internet continues to grow and to be a presence in our lives, information architecture is rising in importance.

The best definition of what “information architecture” is comes from Eric Reiss’s book, Practical Information Architecture. The arrangement of browser-based information, specifically the internal relationships between individual web pages to a larger site, so visitors can execute whatever activity they came to the site to do with as little effort and confusion as possible (2). In short, people trained in IA are skilled in the many facets of organizing written content for the Web and how that key content interacts with images and with the end users themselves.

Writers are often the first ones called to work with information architecture because most of the issues connected with usability, design, navigation, and security are grounded in the production of content — the writer’s primary focus. As Reiss explains, professional writers are generally the ones who are most familiar with preparing content for other media; therefore, these writers become the first to tackle the web site content (5). Unlike preparing key content for traditional linear media forms like newsletters, newspapers, or business reports, writers placed in the role of information

architect must discuss complex design and usability issues with the graphic designers, programmers, and supervisors on the team developing the non-linear web site. The course in Information Architecture provides students with the language and the strategies to talk with everyone involved with a web site to ensure that a strong Internet presence exists.

3. Essence of the Course:

a) Objectives:

This proposed course offers five objectives to students:

- (i) To introduce students to the language and ideas connected to the field of Information Architecture;
- (ii) To conduct inquiry into the problems inherent in Information Architecture through the use of case studies drawn from real situations found on the Internet;
- (iii) To underscore specific usability, navigation, design, and interactivity issues linked to users who are visually or otherwise physically impaired, concerns with translations and the use of Babblefish software, and the place of specialized software guards for children's use;
- (iv) To explore current and potential privacy issues on the Internet;
- (v) To synthesize these issues by learning how to conduct web audits.

b) Topical Outline:

Week-by-Week Overview of the Course**

Week 1: Introduction to the field of Information Architecture.

Weeks 2-3: Introduction to Usability. *Case studies are given each week to reinforce readings.*

Topics to be discussed in these sessions are how visitors perceive the functionality of a Web site; the ergonomic aspects of usability (i.e., can visitors find links and information easily); setting goals for what the Web site should do in relation to the audience; functional sites vs. topical sites; the purpose of "information chunking."

Weeks 3-4: Introduction to Navigation. *Case studies given to reinforce readings.*

Topics to be discussed in these sessions are methods for applying hierarchies to chunked content; learning to speak the audience's language in developing paths and keyword searches; choosing the best structure to fit your needs and the audience's needs; best menu lengths for easy navigation of the site; problems of screen size, content, and navigation.

Weeks 5-6: Introduction to Interactivity and Design. *Case studies given to reinforce readings.*

Topics to be discussed in these sessions are "mouseploration" vs. clean design, dynamic (changing) content sites, use of splash screens, tile sites, hobby sites, billboard sites, search sites, "unfriendly" design issues, and concerns when interactivity and design overtake the content.

** All students will be required to turn in either short formal papers or other regular written assignments (i.e., essay exams, case studies, or reports). The option of essay exams, short formal papers or other written assignments is at the discretion of the instructor teaching the course. The goal of every writing assignment is for students to demonstrate understanding of the content being presented in the classroom. The option exists in this class to create a web paper in which students' final project is uploaded.

Week 7: Webmonkey — the Information Architect’s Best Friend.

Topics addressed in this class will be an introduction to the Webmonkey web site. While the shell site suggests this is only for people building web sites, the deeper pages have much to do with IA material. Most information architects use Webmonkey as an on-line reference to keep current in the field.

Week 8: Information Anxiety — What it is, how to prevent it on the Web.

Topics presented during this week come from Richard Saul Wurman’s Information Anxiety 2, and include such subjects as “bit literacy,” landmines to understanding in the Information Age, and the influence of integrated messages on the Internet.

Week 9: The 6 Models for how People Read Web-based Material

Material here will be based on James Sosnoski’s articles on the six models for reading Web-based information.

Weeks 10-11: Major Privacy Issues (Denial of Service attacks, credit card breaches, site hacking, pinging) and how to monitor and prevent some of them.

Topics may change semester to semester based on what is current in the IA field. Presently, major privacy or security issues are Denial of Service attacks, credit card breaches, site hacking, and pinging. Material will be drawn from a number of sources, both in print and on-line.

Week 12: Alternative Audiences (visually or physically impaired, autistics, ESL) and who to accommodate them on the web site

One of the largest audiences to use the Internet is “alternative audiences,” or people with visual and/or physical disabilities, including autism. I have a 40-minute video from ENABLE that discusses advances in networked communication for alternative audiences and how information architects can advise programmers to construct user-friendly sites for these constituencies. Also included in this discussion is the use of Babblefish for translating sites or content blocks into other languages for non-English users.

Week 13: The Web Audit.

The web audit is a method for ensuring usability, navigation, interactivity, security, and good design principles occur on a selected site. Information architects use web audits to maintain success after the site is running. The course’s final project is a web audit of a major Internet site.

Week 14: Avoiding Technological Intoxication Zones on your Web Site.

John Naisbitt describes society’s over dependency upon technology as being rife with “technological intoxication zones.” Students will learn Naisbitt’s definition and criteria for these zones so students can recognize what these zones are and how to avoid them when advising programmers and designers during site construction.

Week 15: Final Project due.

Students will present their final projects either in a symposium or web presentation format.

c) Evaluation and Grading Procedures:

Final course grade will be determined based on the quality of the student assignments throughout the duration of the class.

d) Course Evaluation:

The proposed course will be evaluated using the College of Communication student evaluation forms and critical review by the Department of Composition and Rhetoric faculty. Student evaluation forms will assess effectiveness of content and content delivery, assignments, and texts. The critical review by the Department of Composition and Rhetoric faculty will determine whether the course meets the goal(s) outlined or whether additional courses are needed. Critical review by the department faculty can be met in several ways: classroom observation, syllabus review, faculty meetings at regular intervals to assess progress.

4. Results of Consultations:

a) Consulted Departments: Composition and Rhetoric, Public Relations.

b) Consultants and Consultant Statements: Janice Rowan (Chair, Composition and Rhetoric), Donald Bagin (Graduate Program Advisor, M.A. in Public Relations), Ed Moore (Interim Chair, Public Relations and Advertising).

c) Written Consultations: See attached.

5. Additional Supporting Information:

Possible texts that could serve as primary or supplemental references for this course:

- Benedikt, Michael. *Cyberspace: First Steps* (1994) MIT Press: Boston.
- Fleming, Jennifer. *Information Architecture*. (1998). O'Reilly Associates: Chicago.
- Locke, Christopher, Rick Levine, Doc Searls, and David Weinberger. *The Cluetrain Manifesto*.
- Moore, Richard. (2000). *Dust and Magic*. Prentice Hall: Upper Saddle River, NJ
- Naisbitt, John (1999) *High Tech, High Touch: Technology and Our Search for Meaning*. Anchor: New York
- Neilson, Jakob. (2000). *Web Usability*. Que Books: Indianapolis, IN.
- Reiss, Eric L. (2000). *Practical Information Architecture* Addison Wesley.
- Visual Language Workshop at MIT: <http://vlw.www.media.mit.edu/groups/vlw/>
- Webmonkey: <http://www.webmonkey.com>.
- Wurman, Richard Saul. (2001) *Information Anxiety 2* Que Books: Indianapolis, IN.
- _____. (1994) *Information Architects*. Graphis: San Francisco.

6.) Course Description

Information Architecture (0601.5XX)

Information Architecture explores the connections among web site usability, interactivity, design, and navigation principles as each relate to the written content. Students investigate how written content influences the look and user-friendliness of web sites. Specific issues addressed in the course include presenting content for audiences with disabilities or for non-English speakers; privacy and security concerns; and the rise of information anxiety in the general public.



October 16, 2001

Dr. Diane Penrod
M.A. in Writing Coordinator
Rowan University

Dear Diane:

Information Architecture appears to offer the critical works essential to building the solid understanding students will need to successfully serve the many complex and growing digital communication needs of today's private and public organizations.

Students need to understand and appreciate the diverse demands being made on internal writers and designers, who increasingly are being charged with applying new technology in cost-effective ways to meet traditional and emerging communication demands. The comprehensive design and characteristics of this course both work to accomplish this difficult task.

It also is vital that students become familiar with the associations between the theoretical base and practical applications affecting today's emerging, Internet-related new-media. This course appears to offer that introduction in a thorough way.

Sincerely,

Edward H. Moore
Chair
Public Relations/Advertising



TO: Dr. Diane Penrod
FROM: Dr. Don Bagin
DATE: October 16, 2001
RE: Proposed Course "Information Architecture"

We are pleased to support your course proposal for "Information Architecture." As described, this course should be useful to our students pursuing the M.A. in Public Relations. The objectives listed should help students prepare for the rapidly emerging responsibilities you have identified.

I'm looking forward to recommending this course to our students.

DB/jh