

ARTHI 4005: American Design History: Research and Writing
Dr Bess Williamson
FALL 2019: Wednesdays 9-12
Maclean 920

COURSE DESCRIPTION

This class draws on local collections and archives to give students hands-on research experience with artifacts and documents of design practice in the 20th-21st centuries. We will track the rise of Modern design, in architecture, product design, and publishing/graphic design, with a particular interest in Chicago design as locally documented, and then turn to local design studios/galleries to document practices embedded in contemporary environments and economies. Previous design or design history experience a plus but not required.

OBJECTIVES

Upon completion of this class students will:

- Gain familiarity with materials of design history research
- Develop research plans and objectives for an independently researched project
- Write historical analyses based on primary and secondary research

REQUIREMENTS

Attendance: Attendance is mandatory in this class, which includes being on time, attentive, and participating in class discussions and giving your classmates feedback on written and presented work. More than 2 unexcused absences may result in No Credit. Please contact me in advance if you anticipate missing classes or assignment deadlines.

Reading responses: 20% On the Monday before class when readings are due, you will upload 1 page of notes for each assigned reading. These should include, **for each reading:**

THESIS: 1-2 sentences identifying the main message of the reading

Main points: summary of key points. Can be bullets/lists.

Questions: 2-3 comments or questions for discussion

These assignments are designed to help you prepare for class, and thus late analyses will not be accepted. I do not “grade” these in the same way I would a formal writing assignment, but rather will mark responses with full points (2), partial credit (1) or no points for both missing or unsatisfactory work.

Decorative Arts/Design Object Research: 30% For the first month of class, you will research an object of decorative arts/design from the Art Institute’s American Art department. This exercise will help you develop research and observation skills, and experiment with a few kinds of writing. The following steps are a part of this assignment:

1. 50 details. Once you choose the object, write a list of 50 details you observe about the object. Force yourself to stick to things you can observe (not things you feel/imagine) in your list. This will be challenging!

2. Bibliography & Notes. After a research session at the Ryerson and Burnham Libraries,
3. Presentation. You will present your object to the class in the museum.
4. Writing response. A historically informed description and critical response to the object, 2-3 pages.

Archives Research: 30% For the second month of class, we will explore archives at the Ryerson/Burnham Libraries relating to mid-century design practice in Chicago. Students will work in small groups to understand and analyze one of the archives, ultimately producing a collectively authored catalog of items from that archive. The finished catalog will contain the following:

1. Introduction identifying the scope and contents of the archive
2. Catalog of archive highlights. Each student will author two entries describing items in the catalog and their significance to understanding design practice in Chicago in their period.
3. Bibliography of primary and secondary sources relating to the archive

This group project includes some collectively authored items and some to be individually authored. This will require careful planning and collaboration so that you can respond to each others' work and incorporate key themes into the introduction and bibliography. I recommend that members share drafts of their entries by the second week of the assignment (Oct 23)

Design Writing: 20% In the last weeks of the semester, you will choose one object about which to write an extended reflection essay. We will discuss possible formats for this, including museum catalog entry, historical analysis, or critical review. You will propose a topic for this essay, which must focus on a **specific object** (not a general category of objects). This may be a historical object, such as an item in the Art Institute's collection or a work that you have discovered via archives work. Or, it may be a contemporary object, such as an item from the Architecture Biennial or in current circulation in stores, exhibitions, etc.

This paper should be 3-5 pages in length (800-1200 words) and include footnotes and citations of sources, and captioned images as appropriate.

CLASS POLICIES

When you are present in the classroom, I ask you to contribute to an atmosphere of open exchange and respect. This means listening to others speak, allowing space for others to speak, and thoughtfully responding to questions from students and the professor. If you feel that you speak a LOT in class, be sure that others have a chance to contribute before you jump in. If you are not a frequent participant, review your notes before class to consider what points you might bring up, and take notes during lecture or visits to help you speak up.

Laptops, phones, and other devices are a part of the learning environment and can be used for relevant class work. Please bring your attention into class and leave aside other communications or coursework during class. If you seem to be engaged in other online activities, I will ask you to refocus or put away your devices.

Disability Inclusion

This statement concerns accommodations for students with disabilities. After decades of activism on the part of disabled students and their communities, U.S. law requires that schools and colleges make adaptations to curriculum and classrooms to include students with disabilities (including physical, psychological, sensory, learning, and other disabilities). Please discuss any accommodations that you would find useful for approaching in- and out-of-class requirements with your professors as early in the semester as possible. If you think you might benefit from an accommodation, visit the Disability and Learning Resource Center: (DLRC): 312.499.4278 or email at www.dlrc.saic.edu ([Links to an external site.](#)). The DLRC can provide support for funding the right resources for learning, and can mediate with faculty if you need further support in securing access to class materials and other activities.

If you have a DLRC letter, come to me to discuss these accommodations and/or email me the letter that they provide you. I am open to accommodations and usually find them easy to adapt to my course flow.

Assessment

Credit in undergraduate classes at SAIC requires a grade of C (70%) or above. Grades are calculated using combined scores of the assignments, and can always be checked on Canvas. If you are concerned about your grade, see me to complete additional work (usually in the form of rewritten assignments).

Assignment due dates are firm unless you discuss an alternative date with me *before the deadline*. I am willing to grant reasonable extensions if you contact me before the paper is due. Otherwise, you will lose points for each late day.

Academic Misconduct

From the SAIC Student Handbook: Academic misconduct includes both plagiarism and cheating, and may consist of: the submission of the work of another as one's own; unauthorized assistance on a test or assignment; submission of the same work for more than one class without the knowledge and consent of all instructors; or the failure to properly cite texts or ideas from other sources.

Academic integrity is expected in all coursework. It is assumed that the person receiving the credit for the course is the person completing the work. SAIC has processes in place that protect student privacy and uses LDAP authentication to verify student identity.

Additional resources for students:

- Read [Plagiarism: How to Recognize It and Avoid It: a short guide](#). prepared by the Faculty Senate Student Life Subcommittee in 2004.
- Read the Flaxman Library's quick guide titled "[When to Give Credit.](#)"

COURSE SCHEDULE

WEEK 1 Aug 29 – Introduction to class and “What is Design History Research?”

Kjetil Fallan, “Introduction” and “The Heritage from Art History” from *Design History: Understanding Theory and Method* (Oxford: Berg, 2010).

Bring one object to class that you see as representative of current/recent design for in-class assignment.

WEEK 2 Sept 4 – Arts and Crafts, Modernism and Anti-Modernism

Assignment: Visit American Decorative Arts Galleries and select object for research this month. Complete 50 details exercise.

Frank Lloyd Wright, “The Art and Craft of the Machine”

Jane Addams, “Arts at Hull-House,” *Twenty Years at Hull-House: With Autobiographical Notes* / (New York: Macmillan Co., 1930).

Judith Barter and Monica Obniski, “Chicago: A Bridge to the Future”

Visit to Ryerson and Burnham Libraries

WEEK 3 Sept 11 – Chicago the Modern City

Louis Sullivan, “The Tall Office Building Aesthetically Considered”

Joanna Merwood-Salisbury, “Western Architecture: The Tall Building as Regional Type,” *Chicago 1890: The Skyscraper and the Modern City* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009)

In class: Loop Architecture

WEEK 4 Sept 18 – Writing about Design History

Alexandra Lange, “How to Be an Architecture Critic,” from *Writing About Architecture*

Alice Twemlow, “Introduction,” *Sifting the Trash: A History of Design Criticism* (MIT Press, 2017).

In class: Short presentations on objects (Group 1)

Due: Bibliography and Notes

WEEK 5 Sept 25 – History of Design at the Art Institute and SAIC

Barbara Jaffee, “Before the New Bauhaus: From Industrial Drawing to Art and Design Education in Chicago,” *Design Issues* 21, no. 1 (2005): 41–62.

In class: Short presentations on objects (Group 2)

Due: Decorative Arts/Design Writing Assignment

WEEK 6 Oct 2 – Modern Design and the Future: World’s Fairs

Norman Bel Geddes, “House of Tomorrow,” *Ladies’ Home Journal*, 1931

Caitlin Condell, “How Posters Are Made,” in *How Posters Work*, ed. Ellen Lupton (New York: Cooper-Hewitt, National Design Museum, Smithsonian Institution, 2015).

Art Deco in America

In Class: Century of Progress (1933) & New York World’s Fair (1939) at Ryerson/Burnham Libraries

WEEK 7 Oct 9 – Black and White in Chicago Graphic Design

Victor Margolin, “Graphic Design in Chicago,” in *Chicago Architecture and Design, 1923-1993: Reconfiguration of an American Metropolis*, ed. John Zukowsky and Mark Jansen Bouman (Munich, Germany : Chicago, Ill: Prestel ; Art Institute of Chicago, 1993).

Bill Mullen, “Artists in Uniform,” *Popular Fronts: Chicago and African-American Cultural Politics, 1935-46* (University of Illinois Press, 1999).

In class: Visit to Newberry Library

WEEK 8 Oct 16 – Modern Design in America (& Chicago)

Maggie Taft, “Better than Before: Lázló Moholy-Nagy and the New Bauhaus,” in *Chicago Makes Modern: How Creative Minds Changed Society*, ed. Mary Jane Jacob and Jacquelynn Baas (Chicago: School of the Art Institute of Chicago : University of Chicago Press, 2012).

Robert V. Sharp and Elizabeth Stepina, eds., *1945: Creativity and Crisis: Chicago Architecture and Design of the World War II Era*, (Chicago, Ill: Art Institute of Chicago, 2005).

In Class: Introduction to Mid-Century Design Archives at Ryerson/Burnham Libraries

WEEK 9 Oct 23 – Archives group work time (no class meeting); recommended that students circulate and discuss drafts of catalog entries.

WEEK 10 Oct 30 – Archives Project Reporting

Archives Reports due & Group Presentations

WEEK 11 Nov 6 – Design Criticism Now

WEEK 12 Nov 13 Thinking of Design Now: Chicago Architecture Biennial

“Editorial,” *decolonisingdesign.com* (2017)

Yesomi Umolu, Sepake Angiama, and Paulo Tavares, “Statement: ...and other such stories,” *Chicago Architectural Biennial 2019*, chicagoarchitecturebiennial.org

Design Writing proposals due

Week 13 Nov 20 Thinking about Art/Design in Chicago Now

Selections from Fo Wilson and Norman Teague / BLKHaus MCA Project

Nov 27 No Class – Thanksgiving Break

Dec 4 No Class - Crit Week

Dec 11 Last class

Papers due & in-class recap and project wall