

The Metaphysical Room

UH 3004 · Spring 2016

Instructor: Kenneth Black

CRN 20083

COURSE OVERVIEW AND GOALS

This course offers an introduction to various design methods applicable to the discipline of design and related fields as well as an introduction to design frameworks. Overviews and examples of a range of strategies will be discussed. Techniques for organizing and efficiently conducting research will be presented.

Through the work of this course you will be expected to successfully:

- Summarize literature related to a research topic in your own words while avoiding plagiarism and other violations of the Honor Code,

- Critically evaluate existing research and exhibit proper use of professional conventions in citation of existing research and scholarship,

- Formulate a proposed research topic, hypotheses or research questions, and methodology, and present these in written and oral form, and

- Demonstrate clear comprehension of course content through class discussions and exercises.

- Begin to understand design representation and visual processes as a method for sharing ideas and concepts to others.

- Demonstrate the ability to not only research and understand a topic of interest, but also begin to infuse ideas into your own work.

You will also be expected to participate in class sessions addressing the following topics:

- Accurate reporting and ownership of findings, and acknowledgement of contributions to the work,

- Understand co-learning, peer-mentoring, and other methods for positive group dynamics

CLASS HOURS AND LOCATION

Class will meet on Saturdays from 9am to 12noon in Hillcrest 132. The Fishbowl.

OFFICE

My office is in Cowgill 4th Floor. I encourage you to come to me with your questions and concerns (email first so we can set an appointment). If you would like to make an appointment to see me, the best ways to reach me is to email me at kenblack@vt.edu.

REQUIRED TEXT

Personal Sketchbook for recording weekly writings and sketches, ideas, and thoughts
The Eyes of the Skin by Pallasmaa

RECOMMENDED TEXTS

None

CANVAS

I will use CANVAS to post lectures, assignments, and other important information during the semester.

REQUIRED READING

As we will address and discuss content covered in the readings in each class, complete all required reading prior to the class for which it is assigned. Supplemental readings, including but not limited to those listed in the course schedule, will be posted in Canvas or on the library website's electronic reserves during the semester to support the lectures and discussions.

ASSIGNMENTS AND ENGAGEMENT/PARTICIPATION

There are six assignments due on the dates shown in the course schedule. Assignments will be due by the beginning of class on the day listed in the course schedule.

Assignments will be graded based on the clarity of your presentation and your ability to demonstrate comprehension of the concepts learned in class and in the readings. The list below is an overview of the assignments; more detail will be provided in class.

Assignment #1 - 10% of grade

Maintain a journal/sketchbook in relation to the prompts (see list at end) and design projects

Assignment #2a - 10% of grade

Review of *The Eyes of the Skin* and its relation to the metaphysical room

Assignment #2b - 10% of grade

Review of a topic of interest and its relation to the metaphysical room

Assignment #3 - 20% of grade

Individual Design Project: A Metaphysical Room

Assignment #4 - 20% of grade

Group Design Project: The Vege-Train

Assignment #5 - 20% of grade

Individual Design Project: A Design Framework

Engagement/Participation - 10% of grade

An evaluation of your meaningful participation in class discussions and exercises

ATTENDANCE

Your attendance in class will enhance your understanding of the course material, the quality of your assignments, and your engagement/participation grade. Please speak to me if you have any special needs of which I should be made aware.

HONOR SYSTEM

This course will be conducted according to the rules of the Virginia Tech Honor System. Please refer to <http://ghs.grads.vt.edu/> or <http://www.honorsystem.vt.edu/> for more information.

Plagiarism, which includes copying from sources or other students, is not acceptable in any form for any assignment. If plagiarism appears in any assignment, you will not receive credit for that assignment.

ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGN RESEARCH

Course Schedule

(Updated 05 January 2016, subject to change)

Week	Date	Topic	Required Reading	Due
1	1-23	Creating Knowledge: Introduction to Research	Lectures 1-2	
		Design Basics: Sketching and Ideation		
2	1-30	Topic & Literature Review	Lecture 3-4	A
		Design Basics: Response to Context	Eyes Pt. 1	
3	2-6	Writing and Documentation	Lecture 5-6	B
		Design Basics: Joint, Cube, Room	Eyes Pt. 2	
4	2-13	Theory in Research Method: Phenomenology	Lecture 7-9	C
		Design Basics: Composition of Boards		2a/2b
5	2-20	Logical Argumentation + Case Studies	Lecture 10-11	D
		Design Basics: Precedents		
6	2-27	Communication	Lecture 11-13	E
		Design Basics: Presentation		3
7	3-5	Spring Break: No Class		F
8	3-12	Spring Break: No Class		G
9	3-19	Materials and Measure	Lecture 14-16	H
		Design Basics: Preconception and Design		
10	3-26	The Metaphysical Room	Lecture 17-19	I
		What? Groups? Don't Wanna...		4
11	4-2	Cognition and Thought	Lecture 20-21	J
		Normative Theory		
12	4-9	Design Frameworks	Lecture 22-24	K
		Starting From End to Beginning		
13	4-16	Topics and Ideation	Lecture 25-27	L
		Combining different methods of Thought		
14	4-23	How do we choose iterations	Lecture 28	M
		Design Thinking		5
15	4-30	Final Presentations		1,N,O

Numbers under the required reading column refer to chapters in the Groat & Wang text.

Assignment #1 - 10% of grade

Maintain a journal/sketchbook in relation to the prompts and design projects. These questions will also support your work with the other assignments so please do these timely and in conjunction with the other assignments.

List of course weekly prompts to be completed as indicated in the syllabus above.

- A. Who do you want to be as a designer? What topic interests you that you might bring to your design? What, how, and why should senses (sight, sound, touch, etc.) be used for design?
- B. Describe phenomenology to the best of your ability. How have you used this in your life or work previously to this class? What are your thoughts on knowledge and experience?
- C. What does nature have to do with design and how can we begin to look to it for inspiration? Give a number of examples (written and visual) of how this could be used in your topic or your design work.
- D. What is order and system as a design concept? How does this influence our design methodology and phenomena we choose to design?
- E. How have you begun to organize your design thoughts? Is there a pattern of how you approach design and topics you consistently return to a line of inquiry? Show it written and visually.
- F. Define cognition and meta-cognition. How does the study of phenomena play into these? How could thought and the topic of your line of inquiry be included in a metaphysical room?
- G. What is perception? How does our pre-conceived understanding of phenomena, change or limit our ability to think on an issue or topic? How do we move past what we think we understand to discovering what ought to be (normative) and what might be?
- H. Is the topic of research something that is primary to the project or secondary? For example is the line of inquiry changed with every project, or is it informed with each iteration or a project or design? How and why?
- I. Which design drawings or combination will help you to show your process and make a composition for representation? Draw out a number of compositions you could use and identify what drawings would be used.
- J. Reflect on the last two projects and try to understand what your thought process is, what your central questions are, and why these seem to interest you in design. These may not be the same questions you started with at the beginning of the semester. Try to map these out visually.
- K. What is a design framework? What do you think is the purpose of a framework: to make decisions for us or to make decisions with supporting information? Try to draw out your general thought framework in relation to this class and your design process.
- L. Try to combine your general thought framework with the thought framework of your semester research line of inquiry. Do they seem to have places they overlap or can begin to inform each other? Is your combined framework linear or circular/iterative?
- M. How do you begin to make decisions using the framework you have designed? Do you look at advantages or disadvantages? Do you combine ideas for a final result? Draw out this process making a decision according to your current framework more than once.
- N. What was it like making the framework combined with a topic of interest? Did you find something unique in the possibilities of combining design with your thought on a topic?
- O. What do you learn from the course? What would you recommend as improvements? What was done well? Any other thoughts on the semester?

Assignment #2a - 10% of grade

Review of The Eyes of the Skin and its relation to the metaphysical room

Overview: What is your understanding about how the senses can be used in design?

Tasks: Read the book: The Eyes of the Skin by Pallasmaa, parts 1 and 2 and write a 3-4 page paper on what you understand phenomena to be and how sight is not the only way to interact with the process of design and the designed object.

Assignment #2b - 10% of grade

Review of a topic of interest and its relation to the metaphysical room

Overview: How can we use the physical senses to create a metaphysical space through design?

Tasks: Consider the following in a 3-4 page paper:

How do phenomena make a multi-sensory space?

Why is it important to develop design not solely based on the visual?

How do we interact with phenomena?

Describe your topic of interest as a phenomenon.

How does all of this translate into a metaphysical room?

What is your metaphysical room?

Assignment #3 - 20% of grade

Individual Design Project: A Metaphysical Room

Overview: Design a Metaphysical Room

Tasks: Using what you have learned from the course so far, design an 8 foot by 12 foot multi-sensory space aimed at giving some sort of metaphysical experience. Use standard design drawings such as plans, sections, and elevations to describe the space as well as a short description. As we have been reviewing, how do material and vegetation (nature) become a part of this experience?

Assignment #4 - 20% of grade

Group Design Project: The Vege-Train

Overview: Design a train or railcar that uses vegetated assemblies.

Tasks: Pair up with another classmate and design a vegetation-inspired train or railcar. Use the previous discussions on phenomena and the metaphysical room to inform your designs. Use standard design drawings such as plans, sections, and elevations to describe the space as well as a short description. As we have been reviewing, how do material and vegetation (nature) become a part of this experience?

Assignment #5 - 20% of grade

Individual Design Project: A Design Framework

Overview: After completing two projects it is important to think back and understand how and why processes are done.

Tasks: This is to develop your own visual representation of a design framework that reflects your method of design. It will bring together both your research topic and the way that you order design.

Consider: The design process, your topic and its necessary considerations, phenomena of the senses and any parts of vegetation and nature you wish to include. Use the BPM notation style that we covered in class to show how ideas interact and relate with each other. An example is below:

