

DSM 525 Web Strategies for Organizations

Spring 2025, Thursdays, 2 pm - 4:50 pm

Classroom: ANN L101 Section: 21871D Number of Units: 4

Instructor: Sarah Dzida Contact: dzida@usc.edu

Professor's Office Hours: Immediately after class or by virtual appointment only.

Catalogue Description

Assess organizations' online needs, to examine the use of the Internet in terms of electronic commerce and global pressures, and design Web page strategies.

EXPANDED COURSE DESCRIPTION

Websites and digital experiences permeate our daily lives, and often, we do not think about how they came into being. The truth is that there are many people involved in deciding what, how and why we experience things online. These people across all kinds of organizations utilize strategies, tactics, methodologies and processes to achieve goals specific to their businesses. They spend a lot of time thinking about how to get people to do things and persuading their bosses, executives and other teammates that their strategy is the right one. Then, they work at making those strategies an organizational and customer reality.

This course is an introduction into the UX design process and mindset for non-designers. We will explore how it is used to create the digital experiences that influence our lives through the creation of a website. We will also learn how a strategist uses the UX design process to make the persuasive arguments that transform their companies, teams and customers' lives.

Learning Outcomes

The topic of web strategies is vast and diverse; it is a lifelong endeavor. This course is an introduction to specific ideas, strategic tactics and professional expectations that students will most likely encounter and utilize regardless of their future career. These include:

- Building a product (web) strategy to present to stakeholders via the design process
- Doing strategic UX tactics to create a strong and validated roadmap for a digital product
- · Conducting user research on actual humans
- · Identifying and validating problems and hypotheses
- · Becoming accustomed to uncertainty and how to navigate it

- Practicing writing and design for the web and other professional documents
- Honing presentation, persuasion and storytelling skills
- · Learning new technologies as they arise
- Using a professional design tools to make their ideas a tangible reality.

About Your Instructor

Sarah Dzida is the brains behind the strategic studio Sarah Dzida Consulting. She aids businesses around the world in building useful, usable and delightful experiences through digital products. With over 75 projects in her portfolio, she's worked with all kinds of teams and across many different industries from real estate to martial arts and international enterprises to local startups. Her work for Lexus received recognition from the 47th Creativity International Awards and her interactive storytelling work for Walmart earned praise from the CommArts 2020 Interaction Awards. In addition to her professional work, Sarah writes articles, essays and poetry. They've been featured online, in print and at the Architecture + Design Museum in Los Angeles. Her UX and design writing appears in professional magazines and is used in curriculums around the country. She earned her masters degree in professional writing from USC.

Required & Recommended Reading

UX Strategy: Product Strategy Techniques for Devising Innovative Digital Solutions (2nd Edition) Jaime Levy. O'Reilly Media, 2021 (free via the USC library)

Recommended references:

- Annenberg Digital Lounge, http://annenbergdl.com
- Ellen Lupton & Jennifer Phillips, *Graphic Design: The New Basics* (free via USC library)
- Garr Reynolds, Presentation Zen, 3rd Edition, 2019 New Riders (free via USC library)
- Material Design / Google's Open Source Web Fundamentals, https://m3.material.io/
- How to Make Sense of Any Mess by Abby Covert (<u>free via Abby's website</u>)
- Figma et al (Support for your design program like Figma will not be taught in class; you
 must master them on your own).
 - o https://www.youtube.com/watch? v=Cx2dkpBxst8&list=PLXDU_eVOJTx7QHLShNqIXL1Cgbxj7HlN4
 - o https://www.figma.com/resource-library/design-basics/

In addition, various articles will be assigned and discussed for further reading. See the Lecture Schedule or Blackboard for details.

Methods of Teaching / Class Expectations & Policies

Your professor is here to teach but more so she **will** emulate the professional expectations you will actually encounter in the workplace.

This means students are expected to:

• **Meet deadlines and manage your time:** Keep up with and complete course work in order to meet project deadlines. Without an exceptional circumstance and the instructor's permission, late assignments will not be accepted.

- Feed your curiosity and set expectations: It is your responsibility to raise questions, concerns or other issues in a timely manner. Not asking is **NOT** an excuse. If you do not ask, then your instructor will assume you have all the information you need and the consequences will be of your making.
- Be an active learner and problem-solver: Make use of the professor's mentorship and expertise. Actively utilize the resources both at USC and elsewhere to produce great work. In class, engage in critical thinking and problem-solving to improve your work. Don't wait for the answer or way to be placed right in front of you. Seek it out!
- Be creative and original: A-level work features distinctive strategies and ideas that stand out from common practices, as well as inspired writing and production design. This work is also completely original; it is NOT plagiarized or goes against the academic code of conduct at USC. It WILL NOT be tolerated. See the Academic Conduct section for more information.
- **Be present and attentive:** Arrive to class on time AND stay for the entire period without being disruptive. Other distractive or disruptive behaviors **will NOT** be tolerated.
- **Be respectful:** Treat classmates, the instructor, and speakers with courtesy. You may certainly question and criticize ideas that is encouraged in the learning environment but never criticize the person. We are a community and each of us deserves respect. For this reason, respect the opinions of others, regardless of how much you disagree. In addition, respect means not using your phone at any time during class.
- Produce professional-caliber work:
 - Writing & presentations: All work should be treated as submissions to a client. All
 errors should be eliminated by proofreading meticulously, using Microsoft editing
 tools and/or Grammarly.com (strongly recommended). For help with fluency or simply
 polishing work, contact Annenberg's Graduate Writing Coach: http://cmgtwriting.uscannenberg.org/
 - Critical Thinking: In communication there are few right answers: so-called "best practices" for one entity might fail for another or even for the same entity at another time. Consequently, professional strategists and graduate students should not just answer the questions. They must describe "why" and "how," not just "what," and will be evaluated on the quality of that reasoning.
 - Research and References: No guessing, generalizations, or stereotypes (such as "Millennials" or "Chat GPT said so."). Support your work with research from authoritative sources, such as academic journals, major news publications, and credible experts.

This is by no means an exhaustive or complete list. The above criteria will be part of what determines whether you have "A" or "B" level work. The criteria is without a fixed percentage because unacceptable quality in one can undermine an entire project. If you have questions or concerns, then ask them. If you do not ask them, be prepared for any issues that arise to be handled in a manner similar to professional circumstances no matter what.

OTHER POLICIES

- A/Synchronous session recording notice: These are no longer offered or required by USC Policy. USC prohibits sharing of any synchronous or asynchronous content outside of this classroom or Blackboard learning environments.
- Virtual classes: Be aware that classes may take place online via Zoom in the event of illness, COVID or professional obligations that prevent the professor from being in the classroom. Should we have a virtual class, you must attend as you would an in-person session. You are not obligated to turn your camera on, but you are encouraged to do so to make yourself an active part of the class and enhance your networking. Wear appropriate clothing and use appropriate backgrounds. Keep your microphone off except for discussion or questions. Also, be present: all phones must be turned off

- and put away in class and team meetings. Try to avoid interactions with housemates during class. If such interactions are unavoidable, step away from your camera (or turn it off) to avoid distracting your instructor and classmates.
- Attendance: You should make every effort to attend all classes, arrive on time, and stay for the entire class. Should you need to miss a class, notify the instructor in advance (except, of course, in the case of emergencies). You are responsible for obtaining what you missed from classmates and Brightspace.
 - You are expected to attend class in person unless alternative arrangements have been made due to illness, medical reasons, or the need to isolate or quarantine due to COVID-19.
 - Should you experience COVID-19 symptoms, stay home. Do not come to an in-person class if you are feeling ill. Nothing is worth risking your health, your instructor's health, or the health or your peers.
- Computers: All Annenberg students must have a computer for accessing classes from home. However, computers and all other electronics may not be used in the classroom without permission of the instructor. Refer to the <u>Annenberg Digital Lounge</u> for more information. To connect to USC's Secure Wireless network, visit USC's <u>Information</u> Technology Services.
- Smartphones and other devices: These must be turned off/kept on vibrate and hidden from sight for the duration of class. If a student is expecting an urgent call, please inform the instructor.
- **Digital Programs and Design Program Support** None will not be taught in class; you must master them on your own. This is often what will happen in the real world.
 - Check out the Annenberg Digital Lounge to see if they are hosting any Figma workshops! http://www.annenbergdl.org/
- I expect you to use AI (e.g., LLMs and image generation tools) in this class. Learning to use AI is an emerging skill, and I welcome the opportunity to meet with you to provide guidance with these tools as the semester progresses. Keep in mind the following:
 - Al tools are permitted to help you brainstorm topics or revise work you have already written.
 - Proceed with caution when using Al tools and do not assume the information provided is accurate or trustworthy. If it gives you a number or fact, assume it is incorrect unless you either know the correct answer or can verify its accuracy with another source. You will be responsible for any errors or omissions provided by the tool. It works best for topics you understand. Do not assume the Al knows what to write better than you!!!
 - Al is a tool, but one that you need to acknowledge using. Please include a
 paragraph at the end of any assignment wherein you use Al explaining how
 (and why) you used Al and indicate/specify the prompts you used to obtain
 the results. Failure to do so is a violation of academic integrity policies. Please
 see https://libguides.usc.edu/generative-Al
 - Be thoughtful about when Al is useful. Consider its appropriateness for each assignment or circumstance. The use of Al tools requires attribution. You are expected to clearly attribute any material generated by the tool used.
 - If the professor suspects misuse of AI, the student will automatically be docked an entire letter grade at the end of the course.

Grading Scale and Assignments

This following is a breakdown of your grade:

	Component	Percentage
Participation	Adherence to Class Expectations & Policies	5%
	Week 1 Introduction/Syllabus Acknowledgement	1%
	Weekly Assignments	45%
	Partner Evaluation	4%
Project 1	Strategy Deck	17%
Discovery Phase	Peer Feedback	3%
Project 2	Strategy Deck	15%
Design Phase	Prototype	7%
	Peer Feedback	3%
Total		100%

Project 1: Discovery Phase (20%) + Weekly Assignments

A local Los Angeles-based small business hires you to help build out their digital audience engagement through their website. In the first half of class, we will build out a web strategy for our client. Using the UX design process, we will complete weekly assignments via UX tools that will build up to the strategy deck.

- Strategy Deck: This is the tangible deliverable of a discovery phase. It gets presented and then your clients/teams will refer to it. How persuasive are you in getting your recommendations across? In presenting your data? In articulating your findings? Is it clear what we will build in the design phase?
- Weekly Assignment (Participation Grade): Every week, we will practice a discovery tactic, and that will influence the quality of data you present mid-semester. Did you turn it in on time? Did you complete the assignment per instructions? Did you try to improve them as time passed? How was their quality? Your professor will check your progress weekly.
- Peer Feedback: Help your classmates grow by giving constructive criticism on Blackboard.

Project 2: Design Phase (25%) + Weekly Assignments

Once your discovery is complete, it's time to make your strategy a reality. In weekly assignments, you will build out a blueprint of the overall website. For the final project, you will zoom in on presenting your value innovation and how that comes to life via a clickable prototype.

- Strategy Deck: Your discovery strategy is the building block of your design deck. Do the
 designs accurately show how the strategy will be executed? Is it clear how the website will
 deliver on the RFP?
- **Prototype:** Your clickable prototype is a storytelling tool to help your client and team understand how the website will activate the value innovation of your strategy. Are you accurately and clearly showing it?
- Weekly Assignment (Participation Grade): Every week, we will practice a design tactic, and that will influence the quality of design you present at the end of class. Did you turn it

in on time? Did you complete the assignment per instructions? Did you try to improve them as time passed? How was their quality? Your professor will check your progress weekly.

• Peer Feedback: Help your classmates grow by giving constructive criticism on Blackboard.

Participation (55%)

Attendance alone won't affect your grade. But participation is critical in this class. Here's how your professor will look at yours throughout the semester:

- Adherence to the Class Expectations: Does the professor see you contribute to discussions? Do you engage in the material and reading by asking questions? Is your feedback aiding your classmates? Are you doing more than the assignments asks? How well are you adhering to professional expectations and responsibilities as outlined in the Methods of Teaching/Class Rules section of this syllabus?
- Weekly Assignments: These are the backbone of your mid- and final projects. If you don't
 do them, you will not have a valuable strategy or design to present. Your professor will find
 all the gaps. Therefore, it's imperative that you keep up with weekly work, show how you
 are building up your strategy from week to week, and demonstrate how you are using it to
 solve problems and answer questions.
- Partner Evaluation: Digital user experiences depend on the cooperation and collaboration between teams. Your work is meant to serve teams not in this class (developers, leaders, marketers, etc). And your work is meant to serve your teammate(s) in class. You want to help, guide, rely and inspire your partner to achieve great work. Therefore this grade will come from them. They'll write a 1-page essay describing how your worked, and your professor will provide the appropriate letter grade based on their evaluation.

Grades

Grades will range from A through F; the class does not use number grades.

Letter Grade	Description
A	Excellent: A's are only earned by "going the extra mile" to produce professional-caliber work that could be presented to a client or investor. A-level work features high production quality that draws clear relationships between your research and creative thinking. It draws on your UX tools and authoritative sources, reflects strong understanding of course/program materials, and demonstrates high-level creativity, critical thinking, and communication skills. Recommendations will be provided on request only to students who earn a solid A in the course.
A-/B+	Good: These are awarded for graduate-caliber work acceptable to show your employer. They feature in-depth research of authoritative sources, critical thinking, and strong understanding of course/program materials. There are still gaps or critical questions that haven't been answered, and the professor will ask about them. This means the ideas and production quality would need to be stronger to succeed in a professional context with your client.
В	Fair: Solid B's are considered the base level grade of this course. The work is firmly graduate-caliber. The student demonstrates understanding of the material, but does not demonstrate strong relationships between the material and their thought process. Nor do they show how that evolves into a comprehensive and useful website strategy.
С	Below Expectations: C's are given to undergraduate-caliber work, reflecting rudimentary understanding of the design process, insufficient critical thinking, superficial research, and/or flawed production quality.

D	Marginal: D's and lower are given to amateurish work marked by insufficient research, many errors, incomplete sections, and/or superficial analysis.
F	Failing: F's are meted out to work that shows little understanding of course/program materials, little to no research, poor writing, incomplete sections, and/or plagiarism. Note that plagiarism may also be subject to disciplinary measures.

Statement on Academic Conduct and Support Systems

Academic Integrity:

The University of Southern California is foremost a learning community committed to fostering successful scholars and researchers dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and the transmission of ideas. Academic misconduct is in contrast to the university's mission to educate students through a broad array of first-rank academic, professional, and extracurricular programs and includes any act of dishonesty in the submission of academic work (either in draft or final form).

This course will follow the expectations for academic integrity as stated in the USC Student Handbook. All students are expected to submit assignments that are original work and prepared specifically for the course/section in this academic term. You may not submit work written by others or "recycle" work prepared for other courses without obtaining written permission from the instructor(s). Students suspected of engaging in academic misconduct will be reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

Other violations of academic misconduct include, but are not limited to, cheating, plagiarism, fabrication (e.g., falsifying data), knowingly assisting others in acts of academic dishonesty, and any act that gains or is intended to gain an unfair academic advantage.

The impact of academic dishonesty is far-reaching and is considered a serious offense against the university and could result in outcomes such as failure on the assignment, failure in the course, suspension, or even expulsion from the university.

For more information about academic integrity see the <u>student handbook</u> or the <u>Office of Academic Integrity</u>'s website, and university policies on <u>Research and Scholarship Misconduct</u>.

The School of Communication maintains a commitment to the highest standards of ethical conduct and academic excellence. Any student found responsible for plagiarism, fabrication, cheating on examinations, or purchasing papers or other assignments will be reported to the Office of Student Judicial Affairs and Community Standards and may be dismissed from the School of Communication. There are no exceptions to the school's policy.

In addition, it is assumed that the work you submit for this course is work you have produced entirely by yourself and has not been previously produced by you for submission in another course or Learning Lab, without approval of the instructor.

Please ask your instructor if you are unsure what constitutes unauthorized assistance on an exam or assignment, or what information requires citation and/or attribution.

Students and Disability Accommodations:

USC welcomes students with disabilities into all of the University's educational programs. The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) is responsible for the determination of appropriate accommodations for students who encounter disability-related barriers. Once a student has completed the OSAS process (registration, initial appointment, and submitted documentation) and accommodations are determined to be reasonable and appropriate, a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) will be available to generate for each course. The LOA must be given to each course instructor by the student and followed up with a discussion. This should be done as early in the semester as possible as accommodations are not retroactive. More information can be found at osas.usc.edu. You may contact OSAS at (213) 740-0776 or via email at osasfrontdesk@usc.edu.

Support Systems:

Counseling and Mental Health - (213) 740-9355 - 24/7 on call

Free and confidential mental health treatment for students, including short-term psychotherapy, group counseling, stress fitness workshops, and crisis intervention.

988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline - 988 for both calls and text messages – 24/7 on call
The 988 Suicide and Crisis Lifeline (formerly known as the National Suicide Prevention
Lifeline) provides free and confidential emotional support to people in suicidal crisis or
emotional distress 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, across the United States. The
Lifeline is comprised of a national network of over 200 local crisis centers, combining
custom local care and resources with national standards and best practices. The new,
shorter phone number makes it easier for people to remember and access mental
health crisis services (though the previous 1 (800) 273-8255 number will continue to
function indefinitely) and represents a continued commitment to those in crisis.

<u>Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP)</u> - (213) 740-9355(WELL) – 24/7 on call

Free and confidential therapy services, workshops, and training for situations related to gender- and power-based harm (including sexual assault, intimate partner violence, and stalking).

Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title IX (EEO-TIX) - (213) 740-5086

Information about how to get help or help someone affected by harassment or discrimination, rights of protected classes, reporting options, and additional resources for students, faculty, staff, visitors, and applicants.

Reporting Incidents of Bias or Harassment - (213) 740-5086 or (213) 821-8298

Avenue to report incidents of bias, hate crimes, and microaggressions to the Office for Equity, Equal Opportunity, and Title for appropriate investigation, supportive measures, and response.

The Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) - (213) 740-0776

OSAS ensures equal access for students with disabilities through providing academic accommodations and auxiliary aids in accordance with federal laws and university policy.

USC Campus Support and Intervention - (213) 740-0411

Assists students and families in resolving complex personal, financial, and academic issues adversely affecting their success as a student.

Diversity, Equity and Inclusion - (213) 740-2101

Information on events, programs and training, the Provost's Diversity and Inclusion Council, Diversity Liaisons for each academic school, chronology, participation, and various resources for students.

<u>USC Emergency</u> - UPC: (213) 740-4321, HSC: (323) 442-1000 – 24/7 on call

Emergency assistance and avenue to report a crime. Latest updates regarding safety, including ways in which instruction will be continued if an officially declared emergency makes travel to campus infeasible.

<u>USC Department of Public Safety</u> - UPC: (213) 740-6000, HSC: (323) 442-1200 – 24/7 on call Non-emergency assistance or information.

Office of the Ombuds - (213) 821-9556 (UPC) / (323-442-0382 (HSC)

A safe and confidential place to share your USC-related issues with a University Ombuds who will work with you to explore options or paths to manage your concern.

Occupational Therapy Faculty Practice - (323) 442-2850 or ottp@med.usc.edu

Confidential Lifestyle Redesign services for USC students to support health promoting habits and routines that enhance quality of life and academic performance.

Annenberg Student Success Fund

https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards The Annenberg Student Success Fund is a donor-funded financial aid account available to USC Annenberg undergraduate and graduate students for non-tuition expenses related to extra- and co-curricular programs and opportunities.

Annenberg Student Emergency Aid Fund

https://annenberg.usc.edu/current-students/resources/annenberg-scholarships-and-awards Awards are distributed to students experiencing unforeseen circumstances and emergencies impacting their ability to pay tuition or cover everyday living expenses. These awards are not intended to cover full-tuition expenses, but rather serve as bridge funding to guarantee students' continued enrollment at USC until other resources, such as scholarships or loans, become available. Students are encouraged to provide as much information in their application, as well as contact their academic advisor directly with questions about additional resources available to them.

Class Structure & Schedule

Class sequence, dates, topics and guest speakers are subject to change as the semester proceeds. Any major revisions will be promptly announced in class and/or by email.

	Topics/Activities	Readings	Homework		
Wk 1 Aug 29	IntroductionWhat is a user experience?What is the design process?	 UX Strategy, Chapters 1-2 "The Golden Rules of UX" by Sarah Dzida 	 Introduce self on Blackboard Read & acknowledge syllabus Choose your partner Submit business for professor's approval. 		
Wk 2 Sept 5	Research Your Business Solidify partners and projects before EoC	 UX Strategy, Chapter 3 & Chapter 8 "How to Find and Do Things in a Discovery Phase" by Sarah Dzida 	Do a content inventory and audit of all business assets.		
Wk 3 Sept 12	Research Your Users Pt 1	 "The Tricky Business of Close vs Open Ended Questions" by Sarah Dzida "The Art of Asking Questions" by Sarah Dzida 	Create a provisional persona		
Wk 4 Sept 19	Research Your Users Pt 2	UX Strategy, Chapters 4-5	Create a user Interview; interview 5-6+ people		
Wk 5 Sept 26	Research Your Competition	UX Strategy, Chapter 6	Conduct a competitive audit and analysis		
Wk 6 Oct 3	Define Your Brand & Features	Review selected style guidesRe-review Chapter 2	Create a brand identityCreate a prioritized feature list		
Wk 7 Oct 10	FALL RECESS				
Wk 8 Oct 17	Storytelling and Presentations		Finish up presentations and post to Blackboard		
Wk 9 Oct 24	• CLASS TBD		Post presentation comments on Blackboard for each project		
	DESIGN PHASE				

	Topics/Activities	Readings	Homework
Wk 10 Oct 31	Information Architecture	 Material Design https://abbycovert.com/ writing/sitemaps/ https://abbycovert.com/ make-sense/ 	• Sitemap
Wk 11 Nov 7	Designing for Conversion & Success (Prototypes, ROIs, KPIs, Funnels, etc)	https://www.nngroup.com/ articles/ux-and-marketing/	Funnel work/flows
Wk 12 Nov 14	Layout Design & Wireframes	 https:// www.smashingmagazine.co m/2012/08/content- strategy-storytelling/ https:// blog.marketmuse.com/ what-is-content-strategy/ 	• Lo-fi Wires
Wk 13 Nov 21	Visual Design and Design SystemsWriting for Online Consumption	UX Strategy, Chapter 7 & 9	High-fi Wires
Wk 14 Nov 28	Thanksgiving Break		
Wk 15 Dec 5	Make your clickable prototype Final Project Notes & Final Teacher Feedback Session	 UX Strategy Chapter 10 "Should You Be a UX Designer?" by Sarah Dzida "Hot Networking Tips Every New Professional Should Know" by Sarah Dzida 	 Post Figma/Prototype & Presentation Link Post presentation comments on Blackboard for each classmate.
Wk 16 Dec 12	Final Strategy Decks and Prototypes Posted to Blackboard		Post Figma/Prototype Link with Hi-Fi wireframes, sitemap and with any annotations