BFA DESIGN THESIS A: DES 494A/B
Senior Thesis
Units: 2
Fall 2024
Tuesdays 9-11:40 pm

Location: IFT 110

Instructor: Brian O'Connell
Office: IFT Offices
Office Hours: By appointment
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Catalog Description
Research and writing of a senior-level thesis or thesis project under the supervision of a faculty committee.

Course Description
This course allows BFA students to prepare for, research, and write a senior-level thesis. Meeting in a series of group and individual sessions, students will reach the following benchmarks over two semesters (A & B):

A 1. Identify areas of interest
2. Research and identify a question within the field
3. Develop and propose possible design responses/"solutions"
4. Critically examine proposals through applied research
5. Propose and refine a final project in written form.

B 1. Present Thesis Project research and proposal from (A) for critique
2. Iteratively work through concrete designs while
   developing documentation of process
3. Present a final design prototype
4. Test prototype with intended audience samples
5. Self-critically refine design
6. Present final design and paper detailing research,
   development, and response as case study in archivable form

Learning Objectives
Students will learn how to identify areas of interest for themselves and to apply advanced design processes to real-world concerns. Design solutions will address practical or speculative problems through extensive research and testing in multiple iterations and will result in an archivable and shareable outcome.

Prerequisite:
Open only to senior Design BFA students. Required for BFA degree.

Course Notes
This course depends exclusively on students' work and their ability to develop it. At the beginning of each term, students will draft a written plan outlining their objectives for the semester. This plan will be approved

or amended within the first three weeks of semester. Grading will be based on hitting the benchmarks outlined in the *Course Description* above and according to students' approved plans.

The quality of projects will depend on student enthusiasm for their own work. Theses will be the students' work from beginning to end. At the end of the semester each student must: submit proof of having achieved each of the benchmarks outlined above and turn in an 8-10 page thesis draft ready to be submitted at the beginning of the following semester as the basis for beginning Thesis B.

Technological Proficiency and Hardware/Software Required
Appropriate to project needs.

Required Readings and Supplementary Materials
Readings and class handouts provided as PDFs on Brightspace.

Description and Assessment of Assignments
See *Course Notes* above

Participation
Participation is crucial to the completion of Thesis. This included individual and group participation in crits, discussion and collaborative work. See *Course Notes* above

Grading Breakdown

1. Participation in group meetings	15%
2. Written proposals	25%
3. Process Documentation	30%
4. Project Development/Paper	30%

Grading Scale
This class is based on an "In Progress to Credit/No Credit" model. This means students are accountable for all aspects of projects and participation.

Grading Timeline
See above

Attendance
Attendance will be taken at all meetings and is mandatory. The beginning 15-20 minutes of class will be an open work period followed by presentations, group discussions and individual meetings.

Classroom norms
Be mindful, considerate and supportive of yourself and your classmates in this process. Consider the group as small design firm, with a commitment to the success of all members of the cohort. In practical terms this includes honest feedback, listening, research and potential collaboration.

Zoom etiquette
Mute your microphone when you are not speaking. Keep your camera on as much as possible. Do not use other technology during synchronous class sessions unless it pertains to class discussion. Be attentive and

respectful.

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.

Academic dishonesty has a far-reaching impact and is considered a serious offense against the university. Violations will result in a grade penalty, such as a failing grade on the assignment or in the course, and disciplinary action from the university itself, such as suspension or even expulsion.

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

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.

Use of AI for project work

In this course, I encourage you to use artificial intelligence (AI)-powered programs to help you with project outcomes that will benefit from use of AI. We will have open and frank discussions about when and why to use AI assistance in project work. You should also be aware that AI text generation tools may present incorrect information, biased responses, and incomplete analyses; thus they are not yet prepared to produce text that meets the standards of this course. To adhere to our university values, you must cite any AI-generated material (e.g., text, images, etc.) included or referenced in your work and provide the prompts used to generate the content. Using an AI tool to generate content without proper attribution will be treated as plagiarism and reported to the Office of Academic Integrity.

• AI image generators are permitted for image generation in this class and can become an integral conceptual and technical component of the design work. Be explicit about how and why you have chosen to use AI to assist you in making images/videos. For example, write about your plans to use AI in your project proposal and/or explain in class critiques/discussions.

• Be thoughtful about when AI is useful. Consider its appropriateness for each assignment or circumstance. The use of AI tools requires attribution. You are expected to clearly attribute any material generated by the tool used.

• AI text generators are not permitted for written assignments such as project proposals, reading responses and critique discussion.

• If found responsible for an academic violation, students may be assigned university outcomes, such as suspension or expulsion from the university, and grade penalties, such as an "F" grade on the assignment, exam, and/or in the course.

Course Content Distribution and Synchronous Session Recordings Policies

USC has policies that prohibit recording and distribution of any synchronous and asynchronous course content outside of the learning environment.

Recording a university class without the express permission of the instructor and announcement to the class, or unless conducted pursuant to an Office of Student Accessibility Services (OSAS) accommodation. Recording can inhibit free discussion in the future, and thus infringe on the academic freedom of other students as well as the instructor. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Distribution or use of notes, recordings, exams, or other intellectual property, based on university classes or lectures without the express permission of the instructor for purposes other than individual or group study. This includes but is not limited to providing materials for distribution by services publishing course materials. This restriction on unauthorized use also applies to all information, which had been distributed to students or in any way had been displayed for use in relation to the class, whether obtained in class, via email, on the internet, or via any other media. Distributing course material without the instructor's permission will be presumed to be an intentional act to facilitate or enable academic dishonestly and is strictly prohibited. (Living our Unifying Values: The USC Student Handbook, page 13).

Course Evaluations

Course evaluation occurs at the end of the semester university-wide. It is an important review of students' experience in the class. In addition, a mid-semester evaluation will take place for early course correction.

Course Schedule

	Topics/Daily Activities	Readings/Preparation	Deliverables
Week 1	Course overview, introductions, organize groups		
Week 2	Present semester /project plan for discussion	*DISCURSIVE DESIGN BASICS: MODE AND AUDIENCE,* Tharp & Tharp, 2013	Semester Plan for research and project
Week 3	Plan finalization Individual meetings		Semester Plan for approval
Week 4	Individual Work, Meetings, and Exercises		Documented Progress
Week 5	Individual Work, Meetings, and Exercises		Documented Progress
Week 6	Individual Work, Meetings, and Exercises		Documented Progress
Week 7	**Research Presentations 1**		**5-10 min. decks**
Week 8	Individual Work, Meetings, and Exercises		Documented Progress
Week 9	Individual Work, Meetings, and Exercises		Documented Progress
Week 10	Individual Work, Meetings, and Exercises		Documented Progress
Week 11	Individual Work, Meetings, and Exercises		Documented Progress
Week 12	Individual Work, Meetings, and Exercises		Documented Progress
Week 13	**Research & Outline Presentation 2**		**5-10 min. decks**
Week 14	**Thanksgiving**	**Thanksgiving**	**Thanksgiving**
Week 15	**Present Drafts**		**Draft Papers**
FINAL	**Revised Final Paper**		Final Papers Refer to the final exam schedule in the USC *Schedule of Classes* at classes.usc.edu.

Statement on University Academic and Support Systems

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.

Student Financial Aid and Satisfactory Academic Progress:
To be eligible for certain kinds of financial aid, students are required to maintain Satisfactory Academic Progress (SAP) toward their degree objectives. Visit the Financial Aid Office webpage for undergraduate- and graduate-level SAP eligibility requirements and the appeals process.

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 consists 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.

Relationship and Sexual Violence Prevention Services (RSVP) - *(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) 740-2500*
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.

USC Emergency - *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.

USC Department of Public Safety - *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* otfp@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.