

Department of Arts,
Culture & Media

Jennifer Bernstein

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Office hours:
By appointment

Department of Arts,
Culture & Media
Chair: Ned Drew
Course pre-requisites:
As specified by major sequence

*This course is a BFA in
Graphic Design Requirement.

SENIOR STUDIO SEMINAR II

**“The function of art is to do more than tell it like it is –
it’s to imagine what is possible.”**

bell hooks, (Writer, educator, and cultural critic)

“There is power in seeing people from the past.”

Noelle Lorraine Williams, (Newark artist)

**“If we don’t write ourselves into the future, we get
written out of tomorrow as well.”**

Gabriel Teodros, (Musician)

**“You never change things by fighting the existing
reality. To change something, build a new model that
makes the existing model obsolete.”**

Buckminster Fuller, (American designer, inventor, and futurist)

**“It doesn’t matter what you do, he said, so long as you
change something from the way it was before you
touched it into something that’s like you after you
take your hands away.”**

Ray Bradbury, (Author)

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COURSE INTRO

This course focuses on the conception, design, and implementation of your capstone project to be presented in the 2026 Senior Exhibition TRACEWORK, at the Project for Empty Space Ironside Gallery opening on April 16, 2026. The exhibit will showcase self-driven capstone projects under a common theme. This experience will teach you to apply your expertise to communicate your point of view as a system and create impact through design. In addition, course deliverables include the refinement and completion of your design portfolio.

CAPSTONE

The 2026 Capstone, TRACEWORK, invites graduating designers to explore the theme of legacy — the cultural, social, environmental, and personal imprints that shape our present and influence the futures we are actively creating. These legacies can be inherited, celebrated, or contested; visible or invisible. They live in traditions, stories, artifacts, and systems — and in the ways we choose to remember, challenge, extend, or transform them over time.

Through research, storytelling, and design, you will investigate legacies that matter to you, asking: What have we been given? What must we change? And what will we set in motion for those who come next?

Each project will create a transmedia experience that honors, critiques, or reimagines legacy, forging connections between past, present, and possible futures.

It asks:

- / Whose stories, marks, or ideas have shaped your life?
- / What traces of the past influence your present?
- / Which legacies do you choose to honor, challenge, or transform?
- / How do stories and traditions evolve across generations?
- / How does design preserve, distort, or reinvent what remains?
- / How can design intervene in cultural, social, or environmental systems to shape what comes next?
- / How can design make intangible traces — values, power, memory, responsibility — visible and actionable?

Students are tasked with exploring the theme of legacy through the design of a two- or three-part transmedia experience that positions their work along a spectrum of engagement — from inheriting, preserving, or celebrating, to repairing, activating, reframing, or projecting legacy forward. The work can preserve, celebrate, disrupt, or reinvent, and may invite dialogue or open new ways of seeing forward.

This will require rigorous research, a deep understanding of the chosen perspective, and a clear design strategy for how to frame or reframe it. Each medium should bring a distinct perspective, and together they should create a cohesive, layered narrative experience.

This theme challenges students to see design as both archive and invention — as a means of preserving what matters and as an active tool for shaping what comes next.

FRAMEWORK

The exhibition will showcase a rigorous research-driven design process and an exciting and unique visual rendition of your research. The purpose of this exhibition is to present your value as a professional designer by demonstrating what graphic design can do to communicate messages through compelling experiences. Each of you will formulate the conceptual framework, develop, design and deploy an integrated “transmedia narrative” or campaign composed of two-three, distinct stories or narratives which together create a “comprehensive and coordinated experience of a complex story.” (Henry Jenkins).

Each student (or pair of collaborating students) will establish a direction or micro-theme that can be explored through a 2-3-part narrative lens. Each narrative will have its own focus within the larger “story” and take a different point of view on the topic. The narratives should be able to stand on their own, but taken together they broadly address a single issue. A critical element in the conception and design of your capstone will be the integration of and connection between physical and digital experiences. This might include how a print-based experience connects to a digital experience, or possibly the blurring of these lines inherent in augmented, mixed and/or virtual reality. Students will develop a long-term working plan and execute the technical and technological implementation, whereby the narratives are arrayed and experienced across multiple media platforms to culminate in a unified exhibition installation set, with interrelated narrative content, where “the whole is greater than the sum of its parts.” The goal is: form/medium and content inextricably working together.

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+ Narrative/s or Campaign: a
larger “story” made up of three
distinct narratives or campaign
components, utilizing 3 different
media

CAPSTONE COMPONENTS

- + Abstract: the name, working title, and a 100-200 word description of your capstone — subject and point of view, research interests, background history/research, target audience, use of mediums, exhibition considerations, strategy for design approach, and description of your solutions.
- + Narrative(s) or Campaign: a larger “story” made up of three distinct narratives or campaign components, utilizing 2-3 different mediums
- + Exhibition: design of exhibition installation of your narrative/s
- + Documentation: presentation of your research and design process

PROCESS OVERVIEW

Phase 1: Ideation & Research

Ideation & Research will consist of the formulation of the conceptual framework for your project, identification of larger narrative “theme” or story, and the development/collection/creation of content and other raw materials. Write an approx. 100-200 word abstract that describes your topic.

Phase 2: Design Development

Design Development, will encompass the creation of multiple narrative content (your “Story World”), the planning of a systems-oriented functional framework of three (3) distinct narratives that work independently and as a “whole:” the goal being: form/medium and content inextricably working together. An extensive research and sketch process will be an essential aspect of your work.

Phase 3: Design Implementation

Design Implementation will involve the refinement of your narrative/s, the build-out of all technological requirements (i.e bookbinding, interactive prototyping/simulation, etc), and the design and planning of your individual exhibition

Phase 4: Design Validation

Design Validation will focus on the completion of your Capstone, and the coordination and presentation of a cohesive transmedia narrative experience in both a physical and virtual space.

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- + Finesse independent critical thinking to solve communication problems through design.
- + Embrace and exploit technology to satisfy your message.
- + Hone collaboration and presentation skills.
- + Refine your eye for detail and impeccable, appropriate presentation.
- + Learn how to properly document and present work.
- + Perfect your projects demonstrating creative knowledge, technical expertise and an original perspective.
- + Apply writing as a tool to strengthen critical thinking.
- + Demonstrate effective time management & planning skills.
- + Encourage class members to be critical observers of design.
- + Make observations verbal by making use of the professional design vocabulary.
- + Balance originality of expression and appropriateness of purpose for a target audience
- + Learn to effectively navigate our sociotechnical & data-centric landscape
- + Gain an understanding of the social and ethical responsibilities of communication design practice

EXPECTATIONS

You will be expected to apply previously gained notions in printed and digital means, where typographic principles, the relationships between form and meaning, sign and symbols, visual/informational hierarchy, type specifications, comprehensive understanding of composition, grid systems & problem solving process skills, are habitual considerations.

Through the semester, you will be required to conduct mindful research and make use of the DANA Library archives for further assessment. We will also expect you to **actively participate in class critiques, make use of critical analysis towards your work and the work of your peers, apply your design vocabulary, formally present and defend your work, read all assigned materials, write your own content, improve your craft skills as much as your competency in design software, explore alternative media, and to pursue references beyond the fields of art and design to broaden your perspectives and add depth to your work.**

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PROCESS BOOK

Along with your assignments, you will be expected to keep track of your process, research and evaluations visually. This documentation may be manifested as a sketch/scrap book or a digital representation of it, like a personal blog or folder structures of process that backup your projects, but notes, sketches and visual revisions must be uploaded. (see pg. 9 for organization of process)

REQUIRED READING

Readings will be assigned over the course of the semester, and will be posted to our class website. Our class site is: acmgd.info/gd6.

MATERIALS

Students should have materials for sketching and idea-generation for all classes (sketch pads, tracing paper, pencils, pens, etc) a device for backing up their work on a source other than their computer (digital backup), and a sketchbook. Digital cameras would be useful, but are not required.

DIGITAL POLICY

The responsibility for backing up digital files lies solely with the individual student. Corruption of files containing coursework will not be considered a valid excuse for missing a deadline. It is each student's responsibility to consistently back up work on multiple devices in case of file corruption, disk or computer failure.

PREPARATION FOR CLASS

Students are to be prepared at the start of each class with assigned work and supplies. This includes the presentation of sketches and comps for projects, in required form, for class critiques. Students who are not prepared and do not participate in class critiques or individual discussions with faculty when scheduled to do so should not expect private critiques at a later date. Students are also responsible for the knowledge and practice of tools, materials and methods previously covered in class. Students who miss lectures and class discussion due to absences must obtain notes and assignments for subsequent classes from a responsible student prior to the next class period. While I will be happy to clarify information for students who are confused, I cannot repeat lectures or elaborate project descriptions on an individual basis. Students should make every attempt to obtain general information from classmates before discussing details with me. For students who need to reach us outside of class time, our email addresses are listed above on the top right of this handout

DEADLINES

This course is structured so that all work can be completed during a normal semester. **There will be no incomplete grades given without a serious, documented excuse. Completion of ALL required projects is mandatory to pass the course.** Any project not completed by the deadline must be turned in by the beginning of the next class at which time it will automatically receive one grade lower. All projects must be handed in at the deadline but may be further developed and refined for the final review. The new grade assigned will be the average of the original and new project.

ATTENDANCE

Consistent and prompt attendance develops responsible professional behaviour and insures that students have access to the full range of experiences and information necessary to complete class assignments and acquire the skills and knowledge emphasized in a university education. Attendance is required during the scheduled class periods. Punctual arrival, effective use of the full studio period, and participation in assigned work is required. **For this course, only two excused absences for the semester are acceptable. Allotted absences are to accommodate illness only.** Doctor appointments, advisor conferences, trips to supply stores and labs, employment, etc., should not be scheduled to conflict with class. All students are expected to attend class on a regular basis. Prolonged illness should be verified by a physician and may require the student to withdraw from class if he/she cannot complete work in a comprehensive and timely manner. In some instances, unsatisfactory attendance may result in a failing grade.

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Excessive lateness, early departures, excessive break time, lack of participation in assigned studio activities and not having homework will count as equivalent to an absence (2=1 absence). Lateness is defined as being ten minutes late for class or departing before the class has been formally dismissed by the instructor. Lateness that exceeds one hour will be counted as one absence. More than 2 absences equals a lower letter grade (without a note from the Doctor or a pre-arranged excuse).

EVALUATION AND ASSESSMENT

Throughout the semester we will use a combination of formative assessment (discussion and critique) leading to summative evaluation (a grade). You are expected to play an active role in this process. Final grades will be determined using the following criteria:

The quality of your design process:

- + Quality of Research
- + Conceptual Strength
- + Conceptual Development (sketches, roughs, drafts)
- + Attention to Detail / Craft / Presentation of Work
- + Syntactic Quality of Work (form, composition)
- + Semantic Quality of Work (message, communication)
- + Pragmatic Quality of Work (function)
- + Understanding of the role of medium & technology as an ever-changing entity to serve communication goals
- + Motivation
- + Successful completion of all Final Deliverables

Your professionalism and conduct (as a member of the studio):

- + Participation in Critiques / Discussions
- + Written Articulation
- + Verbal Articulation
- + Overall Attitude
- + Class Attendance / Punctuality
- + Deadlines / Class Preparation
- + Respect for your work and the work of others
- + Meeting Objectives of Assignments
- + Mastery of the objectives of the course

GRADING

The grading system for this course is the following:

- A Excellent without exception
- B+ Well above average
- B Above average
- C+ Average
- C Average
- C- or below, failing
- INC Incomplete

HOW TO BE SUCCESSFUL IN THIS CLASS

- + Self-advocate. If you do not understand something, or need help, make your project advisors and classmates aware of the situation. This is part of the collaborative approach to a "learning community."
- + Set individual progress milestones as well as meeting those held in common within the class.
- + Be flexible in your problem-solving approaches.
- + Develop project management and organizational strategies or seek out help to do so, if you lack these skills.
- + Be willing to tutor another student if you have knowledge or skills that would be useful to help them progress.
- + Critique constructively and do not offer false praise.

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ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

As an academic community dedicated to the creation, dissemination, and application of knowledge, Rutgers University is committed to fostering an intellectual and ethical environment based on the principles of academic integrity. Academic integrity is essential to the success of the University's educational and research missions, and violations of academic integrity constitute serious offenses against the entire academic community. The entire Academic Integrity Policy can be found here: <http://academicintegrity.rutgers.edu/academic-integrity-policy>

ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT

For Individuals Experiencing Disability: The Office of Disability Services (ODS) works with students with medical, physical, and/or mental conditions who encounter disabling barriers in order to determine reasonable and appropriate accommodations for access. Students who have completed the process with ODS and have approved accommodations are provided a Letter of Accommodation (LOA) specific to each course. To initiate accommodations for their course students must both provide the LOA to and have a conversation with the course instructor about the accommodations. This should occur as early in the semester as possible. More information can be found at the RU-N ODS website (ods.newark.rutgers.edu). Contact ODS at (973) 353-5375 or via email at ods@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals who are Pregnant: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance is available to assist with any concerns or potential accommodations related to pregnancy. Students may contact the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance at (973) 353-1906 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Absence Verification: The Office of the Dean of Students can provide assistance for absences related to religious observance, emergency or unavoidable conflict (illness, personal or family emergency, etc.). Students should refer to University Policy 10.2.7 for information about expectations and responsibilities. The Office of the Dean of Students can be contacted by calling (973) 353-5063 or emailing deanofstudents@newark.rutgers.edu.

For Individuals with temporary conditions/injuries: The Office of the Dean of Students can assist students who are experiencing a temporary condition or injury (broken or sprained limbs, concussions, or recovery from surgery). Students experiencing a temporary condition or injury should submit a request using the following link: <https://temporaryconditions.rutgers.edu>.

For Gender or Sex-Based Discrimination or Harassment: The Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance can assist students who are experiencing any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or harassment, including sexual assault, sexual harassment, relationship violence, or stalking. Students can report an incident to the Office of Title IX and ADA Compliance by calling (973) 353-1906 or emailing TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu. Incidents may also be reported by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNReportingForm.

For more information, students should refer to the University's Title IX Policy and Grievance Procedures located at <https://uec.rutgers.edu/wp-content/uploads/60-1-33-current-1.pdf>

For support related to Interpersonal Violence: The Office for Violence Prevention and Victim Assistance (VPVA) can provide any student with confidential support. The office does not have a reporting obligation to Title IX. Students can contact the office by calling (973) 353-1918 or emailing run.vpva@rutgers.edu. There is also a confidential text-based helpline available to students; students can text (973) 339-0734 for support. Students do not need to be a victim/survivor of violence; any student can receive services, information and support.

For Crisis and Concerns: The Campus Awareness Response and Education (CARE) Team works with students in crisis to develop a plan of support plan and address personal situations that might impact their academic performance. Connect with the CARE Team by using the following link: tinyurl.com/RUNCARE or emailing careteam@rutgers.edu.

For Stress, Worry, or Concerns about Well-being: The Counseling Center has confidential therapists available to support students. Students should reach out to the Counseling Center to schedule an appointment: counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or (973) 353-5805. If students are not quite ready to make an appointment with a therapist but are interested in self-help, check out Sanvello for an easy, web-based approach to self-care and support. Visit <https://my.rutgers.edu/>, click on Sanvello: Wellness @ RUN, and log in with your netid to begin your journey toward wellness.

For emergencies, call 911 or contact Rutgers University Police Department (RUPD) by calling (973) 353-5111.

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LEARNING RESOURCES

Rutgers Learning Center (tutoring services)
Room 140, Bradley Hall
(973) 353-5608
<https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/learning-center>

Writing Center (tutoring and writing workshops)
Room 126, Conklin Hall
(973) 353-5847
nwc@rutgers.edu
<https://sasn.rutgers.edu/student-support/tutoring-academic-support/writing-center>

PROCESS BOOK / DOCUMENTATION FORMAT

<p>TITLE</p>	<p>DESCRIPTION</p> <p>A paragraph or two about your project.</p> <p>Think about it like a design brief.</p>	<p>RESEARCH</p> <p>Reference images, lists words, books, quotes, etc.</p> <p>Multiple pages.</p>
<p>ROUGH SKETCHES</p> <p>Multiple pages.</p>	<p>RESPONSE TO 1ST CRIT</p> <p>A paragraph about feedback.</p>	<p>REFINED SKETCHES</p> <p>Several pages. It can be purely screen shots, but should show the different explorations based on your last crit.</p>
<p>RESPONSE TO 2ND CRIT</p> <p>A paragraph about feedback.</p>	<p>RE-REFINED SKETCHES</p> <p>Several pages. It can be purely screen shots, but should show the different explorations based on your last crit.</p>	<p>POST MORTEM</p> <p>Conclusion : A paragraph or two about what failed, what worked, lessons learned, & what you'll do moving forward.</p>

PROFESSOR FIRST NAME /LAST NAME	KEY
Course Name, Semester 2018	5 Excellent
Course Number and Section	4 Good
Course Meeting Schedule	3 Satisfactory
Location (Building/Room #)	2 Unsatisfactory
	1 Unacceptable
	NA Not Applicable

Student Name:

Project X - Name of Project

PROCESS + REALIZATION

Research Development & Implementation	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Formal Development (sketches & process)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Formal Strength & Realization	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Conceptual Development (sketches & process)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Conceptual Strength & Realization	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Syntactic Quality of Work (Form/Comp/Vis Hierarchy)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Semantic Quality of Work (Message, Communication)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Pragmatic Quality of Work (Function)	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Working with Technology	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Attention to Detail / Craft / Presentation of Work	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Meeting Objectives of Assignment	5	4	3	2	1	NA

PROFESSIONALISM

Participation in Critiques / Discussions	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Motivation	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Verbal Articulation	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Written Articulation	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Overall Attitude	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Class Attendance / Punctuality	5	4	3	2	1	NA
Deadlines / Class Preparation	5	4	3	2	1	NA

Final Grade

ACM-GD Policy: Guidelines for AI-Assisted Graphics, CHatGPT and Other Tools

“How do we instill a lasting value for wondering and exploring? The kind of knowledge you gain by wrestling with tough questions shouldn’t be undermined or replaced by quick, easy answers. That’s the heart of the challenge for younger generations who now have this powerful tool: leaving room for the unexpected, the unresolved, and sometimes the longer route. Because it’s the journey—the struggle, the discovery, the exploration—that builds real learning. And while not every subject requires this approach, it’s the underlying spirit of education that matters most. That’s where we need to get creative right now.”

— Maria Fernanda La Rotta

In concert with Rutgers’ code of conduct, which mandates that “all work submitted in a course, academic research, or other activity is the student’s own and created without the aid of impermissible technologies, materials, or collaborations,” this course is designed to help you develop knowledge and emerging skills that will be valuable in your professional career.

AI tools may be used as an aid in the creative process but must be accompanied by critical thinking and reflection. Students who choose to use these tools are responsible for any errors, omissions, or inaccuracies in their work. Additionally, any AI-assisted content must be fully documented in an appendix, including:

- / The AI tool(s) used
- / The prompts or inputs provided
- / The AI-generated output
- / A thoughtful reflection on its role in the work

AI-generated content must not replace original creative work or fundamental design decisions.

When appropriate, students may also be asked to consider the environmental and social costs associated with AI tools.

AI Use in Visual Design Work

AI may be used to support the creative process in the following ways:

- / Generating patterns or textures
- / Removing backgrounds from images
- / Refining or modifying images you have created
- / Silhouetting elements
- / Generating word lists for concept development
- / Assisting with research and idea organization
- / Extracting or generating minor elements (e.g., adding hair to an illustration)
- / Supplement research references

AI cannot be used in the following ways:

- / Submitting AI-generated images, illustrations, or compositions as your own work
 - / Using AI to replace essential design decisions (e.g., typography, layout, composition)
 - / Failing to document AI use in an appendix
-

AI Use in Written Content

AI may be used to assist with writing in the following ways:

- / Generating word lists or brainstorming ideas
- / Helping structure an outline
- / Refining sentence structure or grammar of your own writing
- / Assisting with research (acting a supplementary tool while critically evaluating sources)

AI cannot be used in the following ways:

- / Writing full project rationales, abstracts, artist statements, or critical reflections without significant student revision
 - / Replacing the student's personal voice, analysis, or perspective
 - / Submitting AI-generated content as-is, without meaningful revision
 - / Failing to document AI use in an appendix
-

Documentation Requirements

Any use of AI in an assignment must be **fully documented in an appendix**, detailing:

/ The tool(s) used

/ How AI was applied in the design process or writing

/ How AI-generated content was integrated or modified within the final submission

Students should also be prepared to critically assess the role of AI in their work, considering its impact on authorship, originality, and ethical implications in visual design and writing.