

Department of Arts,
Culture & Media

Jennifer Bernstein

Associate Professor
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Warren Street, Room 510

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.

VISUAL MEANS

“Raw data can be, but isn’t necessarily, information, and, unless it can be made to inform, it has no inherent value. It must be imbued with form and applied to become meaningful information.”

RICHARD SAUL WURMAN

“What is to be sought in designs for the display of information is the clear portrayal of complexity. Not the complication of the simple; rather the task of the designer is to give visual access to the subtle and the difficult – that is, revelation of the complex.”

EDWARD TUFTE

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COURSE INTRODUCTION

Visual Means is an advanced course led by core Graphic Design faculty where faculty and students work together as a design studio/firm to collaborate with local and global researchers with a focus on publicly engaged work, to analyse, define, and, visualize their research through design solutions. The premise: once research is visualized into communication vehicles, it has a greater potential to impact a wider audience, and therefore, transformative power.

The mission of Visual Means is to offer innovative creative support to RU-N faculty and a broader research community working for the public good, through content assessment mediated by the lens of communications design.

This course exposes students to professional working processes and experiences towards applying their design thinking and creative skills to make complex information accessible, through data representation and visualization. Given today's information culture and the ever increasing amount of data available, never before has visualizing complex content been more important. Data visualization excels in capturing the audience's attention and transcends through storytelling. It demystifies complexity and clarifies it through design.

The class offers different interdisciplinary data-intensive research experiences every semester; since content and themes are built upon the research partner's field. Students may take the course two consecutive semesters as the class will present new content and will not function as a sequence.

COURSE GOALS

- + Provide students with a professional experience where they can apply their skills
- + Go beyond what can be learned "in the classroom"
- + Introduce students to information visualization as a focus within communication design through both theory and practice
- + Invest in and serve the Newark and University community

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- + Further develop and pursue conceptual and process-driven visual problem solving
- + Create original and meaningful communication design solutions that focus on visualization of actual academic research
- + Grasp and dissect complex information, identify patterns and convey concepts in a universal visual language
- + Understand and address the ethical and analytical challenges of data visualization
- + Hone critical and verbal abilities to evaluate each other's work, as well as your own
- + Learn how to work with a client, and manage a design process from start to finish
- + Understand how to contribute as an individual, and as a member of a team (collaboration)
- + Identify your own strengths and nurture them; seek collaborators who have different strengths and understand the benefit of this type of team structure
- + Take responsibility for individual contributions, and collaborative work
- + Develop systems and apply them to a complex design solution
- + Successfully manage a complex design process
- + Set high technical standards
- + Refine sensitivity to detail for both design work and impeccable professional presentation

EXPECTATIONS

You will be expected to come to the studio prepared with whatever is due, and to work diligently throughout the studio's duration. 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.

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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 me outside of class time, my email address is listed above on the top left of this handout.

You will be expected 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, and to pursue references beyond the fields of art and design to broaden your perspectives and add depth to your work.

PROCESS

When you start working on a project, and throughout its course, consider these elements within your process:

- Trigger > The brief and its scope. The challenge in all its context.
- Audience > The people, their surroundings, their feelings and their challenges.
- You > Self reflection and awareness of your place and voice within the challenge/conversation.
- Concept > Ideas; your intellectual or emotional intentions.
- Content > The message. The information intended to be communicated.
- Function > The purpose. Practical use of the work.
- Place > The environment where your piece will live and the circumstances surrounding it.
- Structure > Organization of how the content is arranged. Hierarchy / Architecture / UX.
- Form > Appearance. The physical manifestation of your piece.
- Prototype > The Testing of ideas/proposal and refine based on comments/feedback.
- Reflect > Document and assess impact of offerings.

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/vm

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.

ATTENDANCE

Consistent and prompt attendance develops responsible professional behaviour and ensures 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/they cannot complete work in a comprehensive and timely manner. In some instances, unsatisfactory attendance may result in a failing grade.

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 unexcused absences equals a lower letter grade** (without a note from the Doctor or a pre-arranged excuse).

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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 me outside of class time, my email address is 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.

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 in order 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

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GRADING

The grading system for this course is the following:

- A Excellent without exception
- B+ Well above average
- B 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 it 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.

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/>

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI) USAGE

AI-generated content must not replace original creative work or core design decisions. While AI tools may be used to support the creative process, their use must be guided by critical thinking and thoughtful reflection. Students who choose to use these tools are fully responsible for any errors, omissions, or inaccuracies in their work. Furthermore, all AI-assisted content must be clearly documented in an appendix. Please refer to the **ACM-GD Policy** addendum on **AI Tools Usage Guidelines** at the end of this document for detailed instructions and ethical considerations.

ACCOMMODATION AND SUPPORT

Rutgers University-Newark (RU-N) is committed to the creation of an inclusive and safe learning environment for all students and the University as a whole. RU-N has identified the following resources to further its mission of access 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 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 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) 353-5063 or via email at TitleIX@newark.rutgers.edu.

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For Short-term Absence Verification: The Office of the Dean of Students can help with 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, recovery from surgery, etc.). 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. VPVA is a confidential resource and does not have a reporting obligation to Title IX.

Students can call the office at (973) 353-1918 or email run.vpva@rutgers.edu. VPVA also maintains 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 to receive assistance; 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 Psychological Support (Stress, Mood, Family Issues, Substance Use concerns and other personal challenges): The Rutgers University-Newark Counseling Center provides individual therapy and support groups for students dealing with psychological issues. To schedule an appointment, email counseling@newark.rutgers.edu or call (973) 353-5805.

Additional support is available to any RU-N student through Uwill services:

- Umatch: Teletherapy with flexible scheduling, starting with a free account.
- Uhelp: Crisis support at 833-646-1526 (available 24/7/365).
- Urise: Wellness-based video collection with a free account.

Access Uwill@RUN at <https://my.rutgers.edu> using your netid. Services are confidential and free.

For emergencies, call 911 or Rutgers University Police Department at (973) 353-5111.

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>

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.