

# MEJO 717 Syllabus · Summer 2020

Professor Elizabeth Shell | Hussman School of Journalism and Media | UNC-Chapel Hill

## INFORMATION DESIGN AND VISUALIZATION

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**MEJO 717 explores the overlap among several disciplines: graphic design, information visualization, cognitive science and journalism.**

The communication landscape is constantly evolving with new types of content and platforms. Luckily, the principles of what makes good communication effective are consistent. In this course you will learn: (1) what makes effective visualizations (and why), (2) how to express yourself in the language of graphics, (3) how to create clear and meaningful visualizations, and (4) how to communicate data with clarity and creativity.

This course is not intended to create industry-ready designers or data crunchers, but to instill the basics of information visualization and how to communicate effectively with information design.

### **This course is designed to help you:**

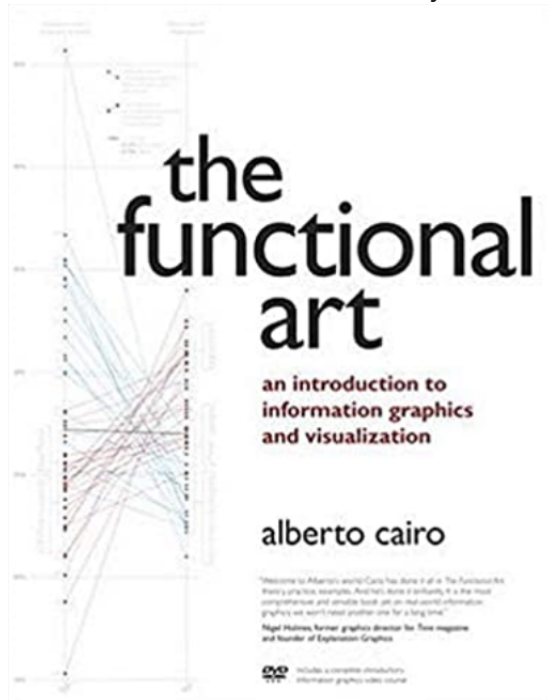
- Demonstrate understanding of design principles and information visualization
- Investigate forms of information design, information graphics and data visualization
- Visually organize information to improve understanding in a thoughtful and purposeful way
- Produce basic information graphics and data visualizations
- Help your audience comprehend what you're showing them
- Identify and analyze effective vs. misleading data charts, maps and visualizations

### **The essentials**

- Instructor: Professor Elizabeth Shell, [eshell1@email.unc.edu](mailto:eshell1@email.unc.edu), 419-508-1483 (mobile)
- Office hours: **Thursdays from 5 p.m. - 6 p.m.**, and by appointment as needed. For office hours, join me on Zoom: <https://unc.zoom.us/j/6209727514>
- Instructor availability: If you have questions or need clarification, email is the best way to reach me. I will respond within 24 hours during the week and within 48 hours on weekends.
- News note: I'm a full-time journalist at USA TODAY, and there may be times where breaking events in the world will require me to cancel or postpone office hours or meetings with little warning. I will work to keep these to a minimum (and hopefully not at all) and to provide as much communication ahead of time as I'm able.

## Required supplies

**Book:** The Functional Art by Alberto Cairo, published September 2012. Amazon link (including Kindle edition): <https://www.amazon.com/Functional-Art-introduction-information-visualization-dp-0321834739/dp/0321834739/> The book includes a DVD of video lectures; I will also have links available for you to watch the videos online.



**Book:** White Space Is Not Your Enemy: A Beginner's Guide to Communicating Visually Through Graphic, Web & Multimedia Design (3rd Edition) by Kim Golombisky and Rebecca Hagen, published February 2017. Amazon link (including Kindle edition): <https://www.amazon.com/White-Space-Your-Enemy-Communicating-ebook/dp/B06X6JZVZV/>



Readings of additional articles, book chapters and other links will be posted in the week-by-week in the Resources section of your course Sakai site.

### A note on tools

While this class has been traditionally taught in Adobe Illustrator, you may also use Canva. If there's another design program you use regularly that you'd like to use in this course, let's talk about it first. Some assignments will also require the use of Google Sheets and Charts.

### Software:

- UNC provides students with a free subscription to Adobe Creative Cloud, including Illustrator: <http://software.sites.unc.edu/adobe/> Directions for this subscription are also posted on Sakai course site.
- **Canva:** set up a free account here: <https://www.canva.com/>
- **Google Sheets/Charts:** If you do not already have a google account, set one up here: [https://accounts.google.com/signup/v2/webcreateaccount?service=wise&continue=https%3A%2F%2Fdocs.google.com%2Fspreadsheets%2F%3Fusp%3Dmkt\\_sheets&ltmpl=sheets&dsh=S537135540%3A1584904619917304&gmb=exp&biz=false&flowName=GlifWebSignIn&flowEntry=SignUp](https://accounts.google.com/signup/v2/webcreateaccount?service=wise&continue=https%3A%2F%2Fdocs.google.com%2Fspreadsheets%2F%3Fusp%3Dmkt_sheets&ltmpl=sheets&dsh=S537135540%3A1584904619917304&gmb=exp&biz=false&flowName=GlifWebSignIn&flowEntry=SignUp)
- **Recommended:** [Lynda.com](http://software.sites.unc.edu/lynda/) training library is free to UNC students and will be helpful for the design portions of the course: <http://software.sites.unc.edu/lynda/>

### Video lectures

There will be both recorded and synchronous video lectures in this course. Each week will generally either have a recorded or synchronous lecture available. Sometimes there will be both. Your participation in these is required. If you're unavailable during the synchronous video lecture, you are to watch the recording that will be made available after.

### **Course calendar**

Week 0: Wed. May 13 - Sun. May 17  
Intro and Google form week

Week 1: Mon. May 18 - Sun. May 24  
What is information design?  
\*Summer non-residency week

Week 2: Mon. May 25 - Sun. May 31  
Design basics part 1

Week 3: Mon. June 1 - Sun. June 7  
Design Basics part 2 and visual perception

Week 4: Mon. June 8 - Sun. June 14  
Visualizing data

Week 5: Mon. June 15 - Sun. June 21  
Visualizing data and applying the principles of graphic design

Week 6: Mon. June 22 - Sun. June 28  
Storytelling with maps

Week 7: Mon. June 29 - Sun. July 5  
Interactive graphics

Week 8: Mon. July 6 - Sun. July 12  
Ethics

Week 9: Mon. July 13 - Sun. July 19  
Final Project

Week 10: Mon. July 20 - Thurs. July 23  
Final project + critique  
\*Final day of class: Thursday, July 23

### **Grading**

This course uses the graduate grading scale of H (high pass), P (pass), L (low pass), and F (fail). Your grade will be based on the components below.

### **Component and Percent of Grade**

Design Assignments: 40

Discussions: 20  
Article: 10  
Final project: 30

### **My Grading Philosophy**

The purpose of each assignment is not to follow rules or complete a checklist but to create a professional, informative, well-designed project that demonstrates your knowledge and ability. The goal is not to make you an industry-ready designer, but I do expect your best effort and work wherever you may be. Your burden is to prove that you understand the subject matter – so make that clear by executing a quality project.

### **Criteria + Grade**

Work significantly exceeds expectations H  
Work meets expectations P  
Work is lower than expectations L  
Work is unacceptable F

### **Components**

The main grading components will be weekly design exercises based on the concepts learned in the assigned readings and completed in Illustrator or Canva; your participation in discussions and feedback/critiques; one written article; and a final project that consists of a robust information graphic.

- **Discussions:** Discussion is an important activity for effective online instruction, and in this class will be the way to provide feedback and critiques on your colleagues' work (and receive feedback on your own). Managing or working with designers will require effective, thoughtful and robust communication, feedback and critique. We will use time during synchronous sessions and the discussion boards to explore that. You should base the content of your critiques on your understanding of the readings and on thoughts you had when completing the assignment yourself.
- **Design assignments:** Design fundamentals are core to this course, and most weeks there will be a design-based assignment. The complexity of these will build on each other based on the readings and lectures each week, and as such, your skill should increase over the course. The assignments are building blocks to help inform your final project. Each assignment will build on what you've learned from the course so far. There are core expectations that any editor or project manager would have for a designer, and the following minimum basic standards must be met:
  - Completed according to the assignment specifications.
  - Completed on time.
  - No spelling, grammatical or mechanical errors.
  - Sound application of design principles.
  - Clear presentation of data.
  - Aesthetic design choices.
  - Creativity.
  - Written justifications and explanations of design decisions.

- **Article:** The article will be graded based on the following criteria:
  - Writing style. Articles should be written in an informal and engaging manner. These are not scholarly papers! Write them as if they were for professional publications in your field. Include footnotes and bibliographical references, but avoid overusing jargon. You may use whichever style (Chicago, MLA, etc) you're most comfortable with, but be consistent.
  - Comprehension. Your text will get you a better grade if it proves that you have a good grasp of course materials and that you are able to apply what you have learned to the analysis of visualizations in the media. (Both articles are critical reviews of news coverage.) Demonstrating your comprehension and synthesis of course materials is the first component of each article.
  - Problem Solving. Proposing alternatives that, if implemented, would greatly improve the graphics and coverage. You should write about different ways of conveying the same information, discuss what kind of professionals should be involved in the project if the organization/magazine/think tank/etc had another chance to work on it, etc.
- **Final project:** The purpose of the final project is to synthesize everything you've learned throughout the course. It will be a robust, multi-section project that allows your readers to drill down into information visualization through story, design, graphics, mapping, data – any combination of these. It will also include a two-page summary of the project and design decisions. More details will be available in the Sakai site.

### **Missed work**

Deadlines are absolute, and all assignments are due as stated. Late assignments will not be accepted. Reach out in the case of medical and urgent situations.

### **Drop Week**

Students may have one week "off" where no assignments, discussions, etc. will be counted toward grading. This is often used for family vacations and the like. Drop week isn't required, but a reality of summer classes and full-time work and family life. Students must let the instructor know which week this will be a reasonable amount of time before the chosen drop week begins.

Notes on drop week:

- If a student chooses not to use the drop week, the lowest grade for an assignment and the lowest grade for a discussion will be dropped instead.
- This does not apply to the final project or the ethics assignment. Not completing a final project will result in an F for the course.

### **A note about the summer session**

This course is 10 weeks long, spanning Summer 1 and Summer 2. The university doesn't allow summer courses to run 15 weeks. Courses can either be one summer session long, which is five weeks, or cross over both summer sessions for 10 weeks. But not 15 weeks. So,

when this program was created back in 2011, the faculty had to decide between condensing a course from 15 weeks to 10 weeks in the summer or not having any summer courses at all, which would elongate the program by a full semester. They chose to have a summer course, figuring that students were used to having two courses a semester already, so a single, condensed course would be manageable.

### **Online Course Statement**

1. By enrolling as a student in this course, you agree to abide by the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill policies related to the Acceptable Use of online resources. Please consult the Acceptable Use Policy (<https://unc.policystat.com/policy/6875241/latest/>) on topics such as copyright, net-etiquette and privacy protection.
2. As part of this course you may be asked to participate in online discussions or other online activities that may include personal information about you or other students in the course. Please be respectful of the rights and protection of other participants under the UNC Chapel Hill Information Security Policies (<https://its.unc.edu/about-us/how-we-operate-2/>) when participating in online classes.
3. When using online resources offered by organizations not affiliated with UNC Chapel Hill, such as Google or YouTube, please note that the Terms and Conditions of these companies and not the University's Terms and Conditions apply. These third parties may offer different degrees of privacy protection and access rights to online content. You should be well aware of this when posting content to sites not managed by UNC Chapel Hill.
4. When links to sites outside of the [unc.edu](http://unc.edu) domain are inserted in class discussions, please be mindful that clicking on sites not affiliated with UNC-Chapel Hill may pose a risk for your computer due to the possible presence of malware on such sites.
5. Online courses may at times require Web-based assignments that are public in nature and may be viewed by third parties online. This is especially true in social media and blogging platforms. Be mindful of the information you choose to share publicly as part of your assignments. Under the Federal Family Education Rights and Privacy Act of 1974 (FERPA) and UNC's FERPA regulation (<https://registrar.unc.edu/academic-services/uncferpa/>), a student's education records are protected from disclosure to third parties. However, FERPA protection does not extend to material shared publicly by students.

### **UNC Honor Code**

It is expected that each student in this class will conduct him/herself within the guidelines of the Honor System (<http://honor.unc.edu>). All academic work should be done with the high level of honesty and integrity that this university demands. If you have any questions about your responsibility or your instructor's responsibility as a faculty member under the Honor Code, please feel able to see the course instructor, speak with the senior associate dean of graduate studies in this school, and/or speak with a representative of the Student Attorney Office or the Office of the Dean of Students.

### **Seeking Help**

If you need individual assistance, it's your responsibility to meet with the instructor. If you are serious about wanting to improve your performance in the course, the time to seek help is as soon as you are aware of the problem – whether the problem is difficulty with course material, a disability,

or an illness.

### **Diversity**

The University's policy on Prohibiting Harassment and Discrimination is outlined in the 2017-2018 UNC Bulletin at <http://catalog.unc.edu/about/introduction/>. In addition, the School of Media and Journalism also has its own policy that can be found here: <http://www.mj.unc.edu/diversity-and-inclusion>. UNC is committed to providing an inclusive and welcoming environment for all members of our community and does not discriminate in offering access to its educational programs and activities on the basis of age, gender, race, color, national origin, religion, creed, disability, veteran's status, sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression.

In this course, you are encouraged to represent diverse populations, diverse viewpoints, and diversity of perspective in your own work. You are also asked to be sensitive to the various backgrounds, perspectives, origins, and situations represented by the students in the course, the students, faculty, and staff at this university, and the residents of this state.

### **Special Accommodations**

The University of North Carolina – Chapel Hill facilitates the implementation of reasonable accommodations, including resources and services, for students with disabilities, chronic medical conditions, a temporary disability or pregnancy complications resulting in difficulties with accessing learning opportunities.

All accommodations are coordinated through the Accessibility Resources and Service (ARS) Office. In the first instance please visit their website at <http://accessibility.unc.edu>, call the office at 919-962-8300, or email [accessibility@unc.edu](mailto:accessibility@unc.edu). A student is welcome to initiate the registration process at any time. However, the process can take time. ARS is particularly busy in the run-up to finals and during finals. Students submitting self-ID forms at that time are unlikely to have accommodations set until the following semester. Please contact ARS as early in the semester as possible.

### **Accreditation**

The School of Journalism and Media's accrediting body outlines a number of values you should be aware of and competencies you should be able to demonstrate by the time you graduate from our program.

MEJO 717 will specifically address the following competencies:

- understand concepts and apply theories in the use and presentation of images and information;
- contribute to knowledge appropriate to the communications professions in which you work;
- think critically, creatively and independently;
- apply basic numerical and statistical concepts;
- apply current tools and technologies appropriate for the communications professions in which you work, and to understand the digital world.