

Semester design project: Engl 309, Fall 2021

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Summary: Develop a research or implementation project which uses a design process to engage the design issues we're learning about. Complete five milestones including two drafts and a testing plan and report.

Following the design process we've learned about in our readings, and putting our theories of design into practice, select one of two options and complete the milestones as noted below.

1. **Research option:** Investigate an issue in design, learn more about ways practitioners in your field or across fields have approached, studied, or theorized it, and complete an academic poster, paper, or talk which articulates and responds to a research question. Consider how your issue can be data-driven, seeking research which is evidence-based.
2. **Implementation option:** Isolate a design problem, propose a solution for that problem, and execute the solution, at least in part. Include the development of testing instruments which support testing of your ideas or designs.

Project examples

Past projects have approached the following topics:

- A. **Research 1:** What are the design characteristics common to high-end makeup brands?
- B. **Implementation 1:** Last year, a large Purdue student organization event suffered its first ever decline in attendance. Vendors and volunteers both complained of logistical problems. This suite of promotional and instructional documents better structures, promotes, and supports the event.
- C. **Research 2:** How should fitness professionals consider the ethical concerns of photomanipulation and staging photos in their work?
- D. **Implementation 2:** Overcrowding at the Purdue Co-Rec can make exercise difficult and unpleasant. A mobile phone app which gathers and publishes real-time information about Co-Rec use would reduce overcrowding, while also supporting Co-Rec programs.

These are just a few examples. Feel free to imagine more—and steer clear of these specific ideas, please. Given our diverse backgrounds, you have a wide latitude in selecting the forms and content you wish to work with. Try to shape your project so it will give you opportunities to develop knowledge you don't already have, and practice skills you're not already good at. But keep in mind our limited time frame. Twelve weeks will go by very quickly.

You have quite a bit of latitude in form here: the research option could be a traditional research paper, a poster, or a slide deck with accompanying talk; the design option could be an app, a suite of documents, or a website. You get to choose—as long as you have a good read on your audiences (your users and their tasks). These will be refined through testing, of course.

Milestones

Regardless of the assignment option you select, you'll complete five milestones along the way. These dates are also included in the detailed course schedule. Evaluation criteria are noted for each milestone below.

Milestone	Date
Prospectus	Fri Oct 08
Discovery draft	Fri Oct 22
Draft & testing plan	Fri Nov 12
Testing report & project update	Mon Nov 29
Final project (optional memo of transmittal)	Tue Dec 14

Milestone one: Prospectus (Fri Oct 08)

Create a project plan which outlines your planned work, especially the form and media you intend to engage, and explains your personal and/or professional motivation for the research — for example, you can be motivated by past experiences, or by big questions in your field.

Draft a calendar which begins with the required milestones and adds dates from your own calendar to manage your workload.

I will provide you feedback which evaluates the scope of the project, offers specific ideas about the project, and looks forward to next steps. This will include commentary on the fit between your ideas and the media you imagine will satisfy them.

If you have never written a prospectus before, please ask for help, and refer to guidance for writing a proposal from your technical communication textbook. This is technical writing, so tables, lists, and the like are just fine. Include flowcharts, plans, or other elements as needed. Depending on the approach, about two pages single-spaced.

Research option proposal

Provide a research question (or questions if you aren't sure) and describe your research methods. Will you be conducting an archival project? A historical analysis? A traditional research report? Planning an empirical study? You have some latitude with both methods and final form here; just make sure they match up.

Ensure your project is data-driven in some way, either by relying on data-driven research from academics or practitioners, or conducting (or at least planning) design research of your own.

Describe the field in which you'll be working, and explain how it will be shaping the work you're doing. If you're not sure, let's talk about it.

Include a brief list of the sources which will be guiding you. These can be academic, practitioner, and popular materials in many genres. While I won't be super-rigorous about citation, I do expect some professionalism, and I always recommend attending to citation from day one.

Implementation problem statement

Write a problem statement and outline the proposed solution or solutions.

Explain the problem you are confronting in depth — why is it a problem? What consequences does it have? How is it actionable? How can you begin to break down the problem into smaller subproblems? What has already been written about the problem? How can it educate you?

Begin framing out possible solutions. What other design projects and research can you draw upon for ideas and inspiration? If you have a complicated problem, you need not have a concrete solution, though it's a good idea to have something in the works. How will you create or find the materials you need? You'll want to have some idea of the possibilities.

For this assignment, the problem and solution work together like a two-item pie chart: if you have a fairly simple problem, then you can write more about the solution. If you have a complex problem, spend more time on that.

Submission

Create a Google Doc titled "Lastname semester project prospectus, Engl 309" and add it to your Drive repository. Share the address in Brightspace, with any comments that will help me evaluate it.

Evaluation

1. Does the prospectus provide the information needed?
2. Is the calendar detailed and workable?
3. How are design principles motivated and engaged in the project?
4. How is research motivated in the project?
5. For research projects, do the methods fit the questions?
6. For implementation projects, is the balance of problem and solution appropriate?
7. Is the prospectus well-written and formed?
8. Did project delivery follow instructions?

Milestone two: discovery draft (Fri Oct 22)

As with the redesign project, write a discovery draft (☺ first draft). Make it as complete as possible, from top to bottom — no matter how rough.

Experience shows this will highlight successes and weak spots and help you plan the next month of work. Also, I'll be able to offer my help and can share resources with the whole class if I see broad trends.

Research option

At the very least, submit a detailed outline and partial draft of the project which shows the trajectory of your work. That is, map out the sections you'll be writing and offer rough summaries of each, drawing on specific information from your research. Include an updated list of sources. If it's not obvious, explain how the research you've presented is data-driven.

Implementation option

Show how you're approaching the problem in your statement through a design or designs — offering several ideas is great. Sketches, wireframes, and other mockups are all viable. Turn to my feedback on your problem statement for guidance.

Submission

Bring hard copy to class on the due date. If you are working with digital forms, add them to your Drive repository as well. Share a brief comment in Brightspace that confirms how you submitted your work, with any comments that will help me evaluate it.

Evaluation

1. Is the draft as complete as possible?
2. How are design principles motivated and engaged in the project?
3. How is research motivated in the project?
4. How do implementation projects help users complete the desired tasks?
5. How do research projects frame and approach the research question(s)?
6. How does the project engage design ethically?
7. Did project delivery follow instructions?

Milestone three: Draft & testing plan (Fri Nov 12)

Write a full draft of the project which reflects the results of preliminary testing (if any) and takes others' comments into account. Include a plan for testing based on our readings and adapted to your particular project form and content.

Submission

Bring hard copies to class on the due date. Deliver your previous draft as well. Share the digital formats you're working with via your Drive repository. Access the assignment in Brightspace and use the "Comments," summarizing what you're delivering and how, including links when possible, so I'm sure to look at every document.

Evaluation

All of the criteria for the discovery draft, plus:

1. How did revision improve the project?
2. Are the test methods proposed workable?
3. Do test methods follow Krug's best practices, or modify them sensibly?

4. Does the testing plan follow forms suggested by Krug and other readings?

Milestone four: Testing report & project update (Mon Nov 29)

Write a brief project update summarizing work you've completed since the previous draft, articulating questions which you have about the project, and looking ahead to completion: what are you confident about? What could you use help with? Attach documents as needed.

Write up the results of your testing using the approach to reporting covered in week 11. Share whatever media make sense given your testing methods as well.

Modification Nov 19: If you are not ready to share a testing report, you can delay that until the final project submission on Tue Dec 14. *But everyone needs to share a project update.*

As before, if you don't have experience writing technical reports, consult our shared folder or a technical communication text for assistance. I'm happy to help as well.

Submission

Create **two** documents in your Drive repository: "Lastname project update, Engl 309." and "Lastname testing report, Engl 309." Add testing media to Drive and link or embed as needed. Access the assignment in Brightspace and use the comments to summarize what you are sharing with me.

Evaluation

1. Is the project update professionally formatted and written?
2. How does the testing report explain methods, results, and actions taken?
3. Does the testing report use the language and form recommended in our readings?
4. How does the project update explain progress since the previous draft, and remaining issues as well?

Milestone five: Final project (Tue Dec 14)

Your final project, revised based on the results of testing and reviews over the past few weeks.

Include a testing report if you did not previously submit it.

Note the optional [memo of transmittal](#) is due simultaneously.

Submission

Collate all hard copies you've accumulated over the project life (drafts, testing report, my commentaries, etc.) in a folder, and bring them to my office on or before the due date. Share the digital formats you're working with via your Drive repository. Access the assignment in Brightspace and use comments to summarize what you are sharing with me.

Evaluation

All of the criteria for the draft and discovery draft.

Document history

2021-1119: Testing report deadline moved from 11/29 to 12/14.

2021-0922: Original published.