

This seminar is a platform for approaching graphic design as an engaged cultural practice and a forum for critical thinking and exploration. The course has two central objectives: 1) to survey the cultural context that surrounds and shapes graphic design today, and 2) to explore strategies for critically engaging that context through design work. We'll pursue the first objective through a program of readings/viewings and discussion, and the second through a series of small, low-resolution design projects. You should leave this course with a sense of what designers and other cultural thinkers are talking about today, and a set of strategies for engaging those conversations from the position, and with the tools, of graphic design.



Thomas Alleman

Basics

Meetings: Mondays 9am–12pm (subject to adjustment)

Instructor: Anther Kiley (akiley01@risd.edu)

Slack: [Grad Seminar I](#)

Outcomes

- Establish familiarity with some of the cultural conversations and ideas that define graphic design's context.
- Develop critical awareness of graphic design's position in relation to structures of power.
- Explore strategies for engaging critical issues through visual practice.
- Sharpen research, writing and critical analysis skills.
- Develop personal opinions, values, and agendas that inform practice.

Books & supplies

In order to participate effectively in this class, you will need a computer, reasonably fast internet connection, and the ability to access Google documents. If you don't have access to any of these things, please let me know so that I can make accommodations. All readings are provided as google docs, linked from the [Reading/Viewing](#) page.

Class sessions

Grad Seminar 1 is a 3-credit course that meets online for around 3 hours each week. Sessions will consist of a mixture of tasks and exchanges outlined in a weekly [class agenda](#): comment conversations in Google docs, small group and full class Zoom discussions, peer reviews of work, etc. All reading, research, and other homework must be completed in advance of sessions. Expect to spend 3–6 hours a week on work for this class outside of meetings.

The remote learning format can be challenging! Scheduling synchronous class activities, remaining engaged in discussions, and making spoken contributions, can all feel more burdensome than they would under other circumstances. I will do my best to mitigate these challenges, and I ask that you also make special efforts to be flexible.

All session agendas and due dates can be found on the [Calendar](#) page.



Tech CEO fan art

Readings & viewings

Engaging readings/viewings in various ways will be our main activity in this class. You'll be asked to read around 10,000 words a week, to contribute written comments to the reading docs, and to participate in online discussions. You'll also be regularly tasked with preparing annotations to the texts, which may involve research, additional reading, and other work. You'll work with a 'reading partner' throughout the semester, and will co-facilitate discussions with them at two points over the course of the class.

The reading list and associated requirements can be found on the [Reading/Viewing](#) page.

Projects

You'll be asked to complete 4 small projects over the semester. The first will focus on critical analysis and research skills; the remaining three will explore strategies for engaging ideas through visual work. These projects will be brief (1–2 weeks each) but challenging; they will push you to ideate, research, and frame your work at a sophisticated level. Projects in this course will be supported by individual peer and faculty review rather than critique.

The project prompts can be found on the [Projects](#) page.

Final website

All or part of your final project outcomes for this class may be published on a public-facing course website/gallery at the end of the semester. This platform will be developed at the discretion of the class, and will be a collaborative project.

Attendance

It's really important that you are present, active, and prepared in every session. If you need to miss a session, or schedule elements of your participation at another time, please notify me at least 24 hours before the start of the session so that I can arrange. I will do my best to accommodate scheduling constraints. However, missed sessions will inevitably impact your performance.

2 unexcused absences = automatic letter grade drop

3+ partial absences = automatic letter grade drop

3 unexcused absences = incomplete

Contact

Remote learning functions best when we all stay in close, supportive touch with one another. Please join and engage the class [Slack channel](#), respond to emails promptly, check in with one another regularly, and communicate issues to me as soon as they arise (akiley01@risd.edu).

I am always happy to schedule 1-on-1 Zoom meetings if you'd like extra feedback or guidance on anything.



Pruitt-Igoe, 1972

Evaluation

Your grade for this course will have 2 components:

- 50% Readings & discussions: engagement, etiquette (see code of discussion conduct), quality of offerings (comments, annotations)
- 50% Projects (20% for 'unpack' project, 10% for each 'low res' project): ideas, development, final writing & visuals.

- A Always 100% prepared, consistently makes perceptive and sensitive contributions to class discussions (written and/or in-person); demonstrates rigorous and productive working process; makes substantial weekly progress in projects; works and reworks outcomes to bring them to a high level of refinement; seeks out feedback; engages ideas with depth and commitment.
- B Almost always prepared, present and active in discussions (in writing and/or in-person); respects discussion etiquette; demonstrates productive working process; consistently makes progress in projects; completes assignments on time and satisfies briefs; responds well to feedback.
- C Usually prepared, present in discussions but often inactive (in both writing and in person); has a solid but underproductive working process; makes inconsistent progress in projects; completes assignment only to the minimum requirements of the brief; responds to feedback inconsistently or begrudgingly.
- D Participates minimally in discussions and crits; has an unproductive working progress; makes little progress with projects; completes assignments only partially; does not respond to feedback.
- F (Any or all of these:) misses more than 3 sessions without making arrangements with instructor; consistently fails to complete reading and/or projects; produces work that does not engage the subject matter of the course and/or ignores project requirements; does not respect discussion and critique etiquette.

Equity

My intention is to make this class a place in which all aspects of personal identity—gender, sexual orientation, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and culture—are valued and allowed to shape the work, opinions, language, and learning styles of every student. I have worked, and am working, to build a reading list that reflects a diversity of voices and engages real and urgent contemporary issues; to structure activities that allow for a variety of modes of engagement and participation; and to encourage a class culture of respect. These efforts are always a work in progress, and I sincerely welcome any suggestions you might have as I continue to work on them.

Please note that the readings assigned in this course present subjective opinions, not all of which represent my own, and none of which are official positions of the program. The reading list is by nature incomplete and unbalanced, and may evolve and/or expand with the changing course of discussion.

Students with disabilities

If you are a student with a disability that may require accommodations to complete the requirements of this class, I encourage you to discuss your learning needs with me during the first week of the term. Once an approval letter from the Office of Disability Support Services is submitted, accommodations will be provided. For more information on how to receive accommodations, please contact [Disability Support Services](#).

Land acknowledgement

I want to acknowledge that RISD, myself, and many of you, are currently occupying the traditional homelands of the Narragansett and Wampanoag peoples. Our claim to be here—studying and thinking about design, in English, within a largely western-European academic lineage—is legitimized by colonial power structures violently imposed on this land and its original inhabitants and responsible for many other violences, both past and ongoing. What this means for us as graphic designers and as members of this community, and what we should do about it, is something I intend to actively engage in this course.

