INF385T Presenting Information
Spring 2013
Mondays 9-12
UTA 1.210A (Computer Lab Teaching Room)

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Who Should Take This Course
I designed this course for students who wish to hone their skills in the presentation of information in its many forms. Without getting too caught up in semantics, I think it is fair to say that data become information when their presentation elicits understanding. Being able to present information well is, therefore, important if one is to help others understand and use information. Although presenting information effectively is a boon to any working professional, it is a particularly critical asset for information professionals. Thus, my goal in offering this course is to prepare you for your professional career by helping you acquire the skills needed to present information in numerical, visual, textual, and verbal form. I welcome students who are curious about the theory behind and the techniques of presentation, who are keen to add to their professional toolkit, and who are willing to work collaboratively with their peers to facilitate learning in an active group environment.

Learning Outcomes
When I say that you will learn the skills of presenting information, I mean in particular that you will learn how to:

- Design tables and graphs that fit the data
- Design an information dashboard
- Give talks that allow people to hear and see your message
- Create effective visualizations
- Master the basics of clean layout and design
- Apply your new skills to web pages, posters, handouts, and other materials
- Write tight memos and emails that elicit action and understanding
- Put together reports that get read
- Assemble slide decks that illustrate your words, support your points, and transform your talk
- Be a confident, engaging, and thoughtful presenter
- Grasp theoretical underpinnings from fields like cognitive psychology and communication so that you understand how the senses and brain work together to permit perception, and then design with that underpinning in mind
Overview

Bad information design choices confront us every day. Posters and flyers force us to hunt for basic information of where, when, who, what, and why. Emails ramble, address too many topics, and bury requests at the bottom. Reports lack basic formatting (read: headings) that might help us find information quickly; graphics magically appear in reports with no explanatory text or, for that matter, titles. We see web pages with vague content and hear talks that meander with no clear point. Slide decks inundate us with bulleted lists and animation. Whether the presentation is numerical, visual, textual, or verbal, bad design choices hinder our ability to comprehend and use information.

As information professionals, we, of all people, ought to know better. This course is one attempt to make sure we do. But mostly, it is an opportunity for us to have fun exploring new areas while learning how to be good presenters of information. That is to say, if you think you’ll like learning why white space is our friend, why tables look better with shading than with grid lines, why a three-panel layout is a winner every time, and why “tell them where you’re going, tell them where you are, tell them where you’ve been” is a bit tired as a plan for talk outlines, this course is for you. Although our time together will be heavily slanted towards gaining practical skills, we will build up these skills on the basis of our understanding of fundamental theories in areas such as cognitive psychology and communication that explain how people perceive and construe sensory input.

Course Policies

Attendance and Participation
You are expected to attend every class and to have completed the reading and any assignments so that you can actively engage in discussions. Your attendance and participation in class, including your willingness to discuss topics and your helpful, genuine behavior towards your classmates, may affect your grade at my discretion.

Grading
Three of your assignments are pass/fail (P/F), meaning that if you do the minimum that I ask, you will get full credit. I opted for some P/F assignments because I want you to have the experience of doing the work, but I also want you to be free of the pressure of grading for some of that work, particularly in cases where you will be gaining a skill step by step. Thus, for example, you will give three talks, but the first one is pass/fail. Similarly, the tables and graphs assignment is a prelude to your dashboard, and your two pages of text lead up to your report. See the next section for descriptions of assignments in this list.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Assignment</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Tables and Graphs</td>
<td>2.5% (P/F)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dashboard and Description</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Talk I</td>
<td>5% (P/F)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Poster, Newsletter, or Brochure</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two Pages of Text</td>
<td>2.5% (P/F)</td>
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Late Work Policy
I see value in meeting deadlines as good preparation for a professional career. Thus, you will lose a letter grade if your materials are not ready by class time on their due date. You will lose another half a grade per additional day late.

University of Texas Honor Code
The core values of The University of Texas at Austin are learning, discovery, freedom, leadership, individual opportunity, and responsibility. Each member of the university is expected to uphold these values through integrity, honesty, trust, fairness, and respect toward peers and community. Source: http://www.utexas.edu/welcome/mission.html

Documented Disability Statement
Any student with a documented disability who requires academic accommodations should contact Services for Students with Disabilities (SSD) at (512) 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone). Faculty are not required to provide accommodations without an official accommodation letter from SSD.

• Please notify me as quickly as possible if the material being presented in class is not accessible (e.g., instructional videos need captioning, course packets are not readable for proper alternative text conversion, etc.).
• Please notify me as early in the semester as possible if disability-related accommodations for field trips are required. Advanced notice will permit the arrangement of accommodations on the given day (e.g., transportation, site accessibility, etc.).
• Contact Services for Students with Disabilities at 471-6259 (voice) or 1-866-329-3986 (video phone) or reference SSD’s website for more disability-related information: http://www.utexas.edu/diversity/ddce/ssd/for_cstudents.php

Assignments
There are no group assignments in this class. You are expected to complete each assignment on your own, though you may ask your peers for their advice and feedback at any point.

Tables and Graphs. Due Week 4 – Feb 11
You will be given a handout in class week 2 with instructions for designing a set of tables and graphs. This assignment is pass/fail: If I determine that you have exerted effort in good faith, you will get full points; else you will receive no points.
Dashboard and Dashboard Description.  Due Week 6 – Feb 25
You will design an information dashboard for an organization of your choice. If you do not have an organization lined up, I have at least two organizations that have provided requests for dashboards. To convince an organization that they could use a dashboard for internal or external use, you might show them some examples; just type “information dashboard” into Google images, or direct them to this one at a museum: http://dashboard.imamuseum.org/. You are responsible only for the front end design of the dashboard, not the back end programming that would fetch and deposit information to it. You will hand in the dashboard design with a description of it details what information is displayed, why it is displayed the way it is, and why it is included in the dashboard (for example, its relevance to the organization and/or its relationship to other information on the board). Your description will also briefly discuss information you considered for, but chose not to include on, the dashboard. I will grade your work based on the quality of the dashboard according to metrics we discuss in class; I will use as input in assessing this quality the dashboard itself as well as your description of it. I will not grade the description as a report on its own because at this stage we will not yet have covered those skills. Nonetheless, a clear, logical description free of grammatical and typographical errors will aid your cause. Please don’t tell me that the printer was not working or that you could not find a stapler.

Talk I.  Due Week 6 – Feb 25
You will give a talk in which you treat the class as an audience from the organization for which you designed the dashboard. Your talk will be the “reveal” of the dashboard, in which you will lay out for the organization many of the same points you included in your dashboard written description. In addition, you will want to convey to your audience how they should use the dashboard. You will not use a slide or projector for this talk. Instead, you should print your dashboard on posterboard, which we will display on a stand during your talk. I will provide the stand; you will provide the posterboard. For tips on how to print your posterboard, see http://www.ischool.utexas.edu/technology/instruction/poster_short_course_fall_2008_ho.pdf. This talk is pass/fail, which means if you make an attempt that I deem conscientious (e.g., you are prepared and clearly practiced), you will get full points, else you will get zero points. In other words, this talk is your chance to get down basic skills without the anxiety of graded assessment. You will receive feedback from the class and me that will highlight what you did well and where you can improve. Class size will determine talk length, but a reasonable ballpark figure for now is 5 minutes or less.

Poster, Brochure, or Newsletter.  Due Week 8 – Mar 19
We will have in-class design workshops weeks 7 and 8. At the beginning of the first workshop, I will present you with a choice: You will create a poster, a newsletter, or a brochure per my in-class specifications. (I have three organizations who have submitted design problems of these types.) You will submit your final creation as a digital file by 5 p.m. Tuesday March 19th. I will grade the designs according to criteria that we will discuss in class.
Slide Deck.  
Due Week 10 – Apr 1
You will create a slide deck for an organization of your choice. You must have at least five slides in the deck, with no two exactly alike. In other words, I want to see you display a range of information that demands a range of presentation formats (text, charts, graphics, photos, and the like), yet displayed in a coherent set. The deck can be a deck that an organization gave to you and asked you to fix up or it can be a deck that you create from scratch. I will have a few options for you from organizations if you have none of your own. In all cases, the organization must be real. I will grade the assignment based on criteria that we will discuss in class.

Talk II.  
Due Week 10 – Apr 1
You will give a talk using your slide deck. You will not give a talk that explains your design choices in relation to the slide deck (as you did for the dashboard); rather, you will give the talk that a person from the organization might give with the slide deck. You will construe the class as the audience appropriate for that talk. Class size will determine talk length, but a reasonable ballpark figure for now is 5 minutes or less. I will grade the talk against criteria that we will discuss in class. You will receive feedback from the class and me that will highlight what you did well and where you can improve.

Two Pages of Text.  
Due Week 12 – Apr 15
For a class writing exercise, you must bring to class in hard copy form the first two pages, and two pages only, of a paper that you wrote for some other class, either here in the iSchool or elsewhere. You gain full points simply for timely submission of two full pages; failure to submit earns zero points. The text on the two pages must be double-spaced.

Written Report.  
Due Week 14 – Apr 29
You will write a report for an organization of your choice detailing for them the features of their new web site. (See below.) As part of your report, you will spell out the research that you did about the organization, its mission, and its needs that shaped your design. You will explain why you included the features and content that you did, and why you rejected some other possibilities. You will note what your objective was in this design. There is no page limit or minimum for this report, but bear in mind that a balance between brevity and thoroughness is desired. I will grade this report against metrics that we will discuss in class. The report must have the following sections: executive summary, table of contents, and subsequent sections per the table of contents. Text must be double-spaced, in 12-point font, with minimum one-inch margins. Reports must be stapled, and preferably will be double-sided. Please don’t tell me that the printer was not working or that you could not find a stapler.

Website.  
Due Week 14 – Apr 29
You will redesign the website of an organization of your choice. I will have options on hand should you have one of your own. You must design, at a minimum, one wireframe design and two visual mock-ups based on that wireframe. You may construct your wireframe and mock-ups in any tool, provided that for presentation purposes you are able to project the page
images as they would appear on the site and that, for grading purposes, you are able to save the designs as pdf or PowerPoint images that you will submit to me digitally. I will grade the website against criteria that we will discuss in class.

Talk III. Due Week 14 – Apr 29
In this talk, you will address, as the designer, the organization for which you have redesigned a website. You will explain to them your redesign and your rationale for it, raising points similar to those that you included in your written report. Class size will determine talk length, but a reasonable ballpark figure is 5 minutes or less. You may use any display technology you like; you are advised to test it in the room prior to this day. I will grade the talk against criteria that we will discuss in class. You will receive feedback from the class and me that will highlight what you did well and where you can improve.

Materials

Required Physical Implements (bring the first four to class every day)
1. Calculator.
2. Wooden (preferred) or rigid plastic ruler.
3. Sharpened pencils: black lead and colored.
4. Blank unlined paper or a sketch pad of full page size.
5. Posterboard for dashboard assignment, 20”x30”.
6. Spraymount (buddy up with 2-3 friends to split a bottle, good for ~4 posterboards).

Required Books (all students, bring to class on appropriate day)

Required Articles and Book Chapters (on Blackboard)


**Handy Books** (not required, but useful in everyday work)


**Informative Books** (not required, but useful in gaining scientific knowledge)


**Fascinating Books** (not required, but intriguing and helpful in developing understanding)