

**Bill Wolff**  
**Information Architecture, Spring 2009**  
**Syllabus**

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**Course Info**

**Course Location:** Education Hall 2099

**Office Location:** Education Hall 3075

**Contact:** [wolffw@rowan.edu](mailto:wolffw@rowan.edu)

**Course Web Sites:** <http://williamwolff.org/courses/ia-spring-2009/>

**Course Hours:** M 7:00pm – 9:15pm

**Office Hours:** M 2:30 – 4:00

H 2:30 – 4:00 or by appt.

**Office Phone:** 856-256-5221

**Course Description**

In this course we will be considering the evolving, networked, symbiotic relationships among information, texts, and technologies. We will be looking at how information is structured, classified, and situated within larger ecologies. We will read, critique, and put into practice theories on metaphor, ecology, classification systems, font, color, mapping, visual rhetoric, evidence presentation, and creativity. As a way to engage in the dissemination and exchange of information we will be blogging on the site of the International Association of Online Communicators—an organization dedicated to thinking critically about how people communicate (that is, move information) in online environments—and will construct our own fonts and color palettes that make rhetorical arguments.

The course has a significant reading component. Each of the texts has been selected to highlight a particular idea(s) on information architecture. Our discussions will be lively, complex, and, at times, maddening. In the end, however, each of us will think in new ways about language, technologies, society and how we interact with them all. And by learning about, using, and reviewing new Web 2.0 applications like Twitter, Ning, Twine, Blern, and many others, we will see how the web is both fueling and responding to new modes, constructions, and systems of information.

**Brief Description of Semester-Long Projects**

We will be completing three overlapping semester-long projects.

**Blogging for The International Association of Online Communicators**

Each student will have an account on the blog site of The International Association of Online Communicators where they will create posts that discuss, share, and forward ideas about information architecture. The posts are to be composed for a sizeable readership community that is interested in how communication is changing as a result of new web technologies. This assignment will require students to find and post about news stories and other blogs that discuss things relating to information architecture. Students are also expected to read the blog on a regular basis, and comment on posts and/or reference posts in their own posts. There will be no formal prompt for blog entries. Nor is there any requirement on the length of a blog post, nor the format that posts take or use (text, video, image, and so forth). As we will see (and you may already be aware) post characteristics are determined by a host of factors, including author goals, subject matter, and time.

This semester-long assignment will stretch our understanding of what the genre can do. Requirements: Minimum of 2 posts per week per student, one of which must respond to the weekly reading in a way that is meaningful to IAOC readership. Students will also post on the blog a review of one Web 2.0 application and one Twitter application (see below for details).

### **@Twittering #ias09**

Twittering is micro-blogging, a form of communication that, like text messages, uses only 140 characters (including spaces), and it is quickly becoming the communication medium of choice for people around the world. According to Hubspot's "State of the Twittersphere" for the 4<sup>th</sup> Quarter of 2008, "Twitter has about 4-5 million users, about 30% are relatively new or unengaged users; An estimated 5-10 thousand new accounts are opened per day; Traffic has grown over 600% in the past 12 months (Compete.com); Twitter.com became one of the top 1,000 websites by traffic in May 2008 (Alexa.com)." It is, in short, a phenomenon—and as a result we are going jump in with both feet and Twitter throughout the semester. Each student will be responsible for at least 3 tweets per day (a post on Twitter is called a "tweet"). Tweets do not have to be about class.

One of the great things about Twitter is the number of free applications and tools that have been created to facilitate Twittering from the desktop, mobile phone, and the web, as well as give you information about your twitter usage. You can get your Twitter grade, connect Twitter your Google calendar, and find your latest Twitter stats. As a result of the plethora of apps, each student will choose and review one Twitter-related application. The review will be posted on the IAOC blog and the application will be demonstrated in class. Furthermore, 1 student each class period (the student functioning as the secondary lead—see below) will be dedicated as the in-class Twitter-leader, leading an online interpretation/discussion about what is going on in class while class is taking place. This activity will challenge us to think about the potential for and implications derived from synchronous online and real life discussions. To get started finding the apps and tools, try <http://twitter.com/downloads> and/or <http://tinyurl.com/6y6o8b>.

### **Information Ecology**

Through our discussions of the readings and uses of web technologies we will be considering how we as human beings are located within "information ecologies." Bonnie A. Nardi and Vicki L. O'Day (1999) "define an information ecology to be a system of people, practices, values, and technologies in a particular local environment. In information ecologies, the spotlight is not on technology, but on human activities that are served by technology" (p. 49). Beginning with the reading of *Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart*, the main project for the semester will be to investigate and then represent our own information ecologies that are comprised of multiple on- and off-line interrelated, symbiotic spaces. The final representation will be a 36" x 56" poster created using PowerPoint that incorporates the visual rhetoric, font, color, mapping, and other theories we will discuss this semester.

### **Required Texts**

Bowker, G, & Star, S.L. (2000). *Sorting things out: Classification and its consequences*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press

- Brown, J.S. & Duguid, P. (2002). *The Social Life of Information*. Boston: Harvard Business School Press.
- Kress, G., & van Leeuwen, T. (1996). *Reading images: The grammar of visual design* (2<sup>nd</sup> ed). London: Routledge.
- Lakoff, G. & Johnson, M. (2003). *Metaphors we live by*. Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press.
- Lessig, L. (2005). *Free culture: The nature and future of creativity*. New York, NY: Penguin.
- Lupton, E. (2004). *Thinking with type: A critical guide for designers, writers, editors, & students*. New York, NY: Princeton Architectural Press
- McCloud, S. (1994). *Understanding comics: The invisible art*. New York: Perennial.
- Nardi, B.A. & O'Day, V.L. (2000). *Information Ecologies: Using Technology with Heart*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.
- Reynolds, G. (2008). *Presentation Zen: Simple Ideas on Presentation Design and Delivery*. Berkeley, CA: New Riders. (recommended, though will be invaluable)
- Tufte, E. (2006). *Beautiful evidence*. Cheshire, CT: Graphics Press.
- Turchi, P. (2004). *Maps of the imagination: The writer as cartographer*. San Antonio, TX: Trinity University Press.

Assorted online readings.

### Discussion Leader

Starting in the second week of the course, each week will have a primary and a secondary discussion leader. That is, each week two students will be responsible for leading the discussion, but only the lead is responsible for generating a series of five questions for the group to pursue prior to coming to class. We will use those five questions to think about the material the evening before class begins (and respond to some of those questions before coming to class). Everyone participates in the discussion surrounding the five questions the leader has raised. I ask that you post your questions to the IOAC blog no later than 7:00pm the Sunday night before you present so everyone has a chance to read these questions and think about them and respond briefly to them before class. The questions should appear as a seamless extension of your weekly response to the text.

Some of you have participated in similar activities in other classes with mixed results. Let me explain that I ask for some decorum in our conversations. We come to this course with varying levels of expertise and various backgrounds academically. Let us respect all of those positions. No question is stupid if it is related to the readings and all responses should be valid ones. We are to use this element of the course to enrich our understanding of the material.

While there are no stupid questions, there are more effective questions to encourage richer discussions. Just as in your weekly responses, please refrain from questions and discussion that will elicit or center on whether or not you liked or disliked the text. It is true that some texts are more attractive than others. Ultimately, however, whether we like the text or not doesn't matter and such tautological discussions become rather tiresome. What does matter is how it furthers the overall goals of the class, asks us to reconsider previous understandings and rethink the other texts we read, and so on. Because we will be posting the questions on the IAOC blog the

questions will be open to discussion by their readership, as well, so ensure that the questions are broad enough to address that audience.

### **Web 2.0 Application Review List**

Each student will select a web 2.0 application from the following list (each application can only be used by one student) and will compose a multimodal review that will be posted on the IAOC blog. Specifics on the review (which will be due throughout the semester and will be accompanied by an in-class presentation) will follow, but I recommend signing up and beginning to interact with the site—and conducting some online research about the site—immediately. The more interaction you have with the application and the more you understand about its related applications the more meaningful and effective your review will be.

- citeulike
- blern
- bubbleply
- dandelife
- diigo
- digg
- flickr
- last.fm
- librarything
- lulu
- netvibes
- ning
- picnic
- seesmic
- twine
- voicethread
- webs
- wetpaint
- wordpress
- zotero

### **Office Hours**

Office hours are designed for you, giving you a more private environment in which we may talk about your work, your performance in class, etc. If you are unable to see me during my office hours, do not hesitate to make an appointment to see me at a different time. My office hours are M/H 2:30 – 4:00 and by appointment.

### **Contacting Each Other**

There will be times during the semester when I will need to contact the class and you will need to contact me. I will contact you via your Rowan email account, so please be sure that you are checking it regularly and/or forwarding it to the email service you use most regularly. I am in my office only during office hours and the brief times before and after class. As a result, calling me in my office will not get you an immediate response.

I strongly suggest you contact me via email, which I check all day long. Email, however, tends to be seen as an informal medium. This, however, should not always be the case. All emails that I send to you will have a meaningful subject line and a proper salutation (“Hi Class,” or “Hi Jane,” etc.). The first sentence will notify you of the purpose of the email, and then will get to the heart of the matter. It will end with a formal closing (“Thanks, BW”). I expect the same from any email you send. Any email that does not will immediately be deleted and not responded to.

### **Students with Disabilities**

Your academic success is important. If you have a documented disability that may have an impact upon your work in this class, please contact me. Students must provide documentation of

their disability to the Academic Success Center in order to receive official University services and accommodations. The Academic Success Center can be reached at 856.256.4234. The Center is located on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Floor of Savitz Hall. The staff is available to answer questions regarding accommodations or assist you in your pursuit of accommodations. We look forward to working with you to meet your learning goals.

### **Attendance and Late Work**

You are expected to attend class every day. You cannot pass this class if you miss more than 25% of the scheduled meeting times, including excused and unexcused absences. For our section of Information Architecture, which meets once a week, the **maximum number of permissible absences is 3**.

### **Excused Absences**

You will be permitted to make up missed work for excused absences only. These include:

- religious observances
- official University activities
- illness
- death of a family member or loved one
- inclement weather

You must provide verifiable documentation. Consult with your instructor for what is considered acceptable.

In the case of religious observances or official University activities, you must inform your instructor **in advance** of your absence for it to be excused.

In the case of illness, death of a family member or loved one, or inclement weather, you must inform your instructor as soon as possible after the fact.

If the events described above lead to your exceeding the maximum absence limit, you will be referred to the Dean of Students for a hardship withdrawal from the class.

### **Unexcused Absences**

Unexcused absences will be treated using the following scale:

1 or fewer	no penalty
2 absences	-2/3 final grade (a B would become a C+)
3 absences	-1 1/3 final grade (a B would become a C-)

This rate of deduction continues until reaching the maximum, after which you will receive an F for the course.

### **Course Strands**

In this course all work will be dedicated to students developing their skills in the following Course Strands:

**Information Architecture:** Students will develop their understanding of how information is structured, ordered, and classified, in a variety of texts, media, and modes.

**Visual Rhetoric:** Students will gain greater familiarity the theories and practices relating to visual constructions of meaning.

**Critical Reading, Thinking, and Writing:** Students will develop their ability to read judiciously, think about, filter information about, and write about texts in a variety of genres and media.

**Technology:** Students will learn about and will use contemporary communication technologies in a variety of settings.

**Collaboration:** Students will develop their ability to work collaboratively in a variety of in- and out-of-class activities and settings.

### Grading

Final grades will be calculated in the following way:

Information Ecology Project	40%
Semester-Long Blog	20%
Web 2.0 Application Review	10%
Twittering and Twitter App Review	10%
Discussion Lead and Questions (2 @ 5%)	10%
In- and Out-of-Class Participation	10%
Total	100%

Grades will be determined on the following scale:

A+ 100; A 96	B- 82	D+ 69
A- 92	C+ 79	D 66
B+ 89	C 76	D- 62
B 86	C- 72	F 59 and below

Detailed criteria will be provided for each assignment. For every missing major assignment, your grade will be lowered by one full letter grade. For every 3 late non-major assignments, your final grade will be lowered by one full letter grade. It is better to complete an assignment late than to not complete it at all.

Major Assignments will be assessed according to the following grading criteria:

- A, A-** Represents outstanding participation in all assignment-related activities; all assigned work completed, with very high quality in all work produced for the assignment. Work at this level demonstrates activity that goes significantly beyond the required assignment work in one or more Course Strand.
- B+, B, B-** Represents excellent participation in all assignment-related activities; all assigned work completed, with consistently high quality in assignment work. Work at this level demonstrates activity that goes beyond the required assignment work in one or more Course Strand.
- C+, C, C-** Represents good participation in all assignment-related activities; all assigned work completed, with generally good quality overall in assignment work.
- D+, D, D-** Represents uneven participation in all assignment activities; some gaps in assigned work completed, with inconsistent quality in assignment work.
- F** Represents minimal participation in all-assignment activities; serious gaps in assigned work completed, or very low quality in assignment work.

Final grades correspond to the Graduate Handbook (A-C) for graduate students. All work is expected to be the student's own. Any plagiarism—intended or not—will result in a failing grade for the course.