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GD405 Design Seminar  
 Fall 2019  
 John McVey, instructor

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Tuesday & Thursday, 8:30-11:10, Hardie 309  
<http://workworks19.blogspot.com>

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john.mcvey@montserrat.edu (also jmcvey@tiac.net)  
 office hours : Tues/Thurs after class; other days/times (early a.m. preferred) by appointment

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Design Seminar focuses on

- 1 the projects/initiatives of each seminarian; and
- 2 discussion of that work and of readings that are pertinent to that work (or to design more generally), around the seminar table.

For most seminarians, this is the first of a two-semester process.

The first semester is about digging into your theme, and finding and digging into your material. Try things out, assess, move on or sideways. Typically, where you are in December, is not where you thought you would be at the end of August, let alone in May. There will be a body of work, that needn't be seamlessly packaged together; there will also be a process book, that documents ones processes, experiments, trials and errors, changes in approach and thinking.

The second semester may pick up where the first left off; it may involve a dramatic change in course, or even a new project entirely. You are now familiar with your materials and their potential, and will probably devote more time to fewer approaches, and to getting the craft as good as possible. There will be a gallery show; followed by second process book, that will be commercially printed. That process book has to be good.

Format of seminar is basically group discussions. Ordinarily, work is done outside of class time — this is a six credit class, so you're doing studio work that is equivalent (at least) to two studio classes.

Seminar participants (including the instructor and occasional guests) are the support group for each individual. It's as if we're in a design firm, and meet periodically to present our respective projects for feedback, to hear ourselves articulate what is at stake. Participation in Design Seminar goes two ways: each student helps the rest, but also, each student must find ways to usefully involve her/his fellow seminarians in her/his process.

Each student will scribe (take notes) for the discussion of one other student's work, and send those notes by e-mail to that student (and the instructor). Who scribes for whom will change, from week to week.

There is a course blog; it is an extension of the seminar table, room and crit wall.

Students have access to work space in the studio area behind the seminar room; keys are distributed on the first day of class, and are to be returned when a student completes seminar. (Students may also have access to other studio space, e.g., in 301 Cabot, if available.)

Truth is not discovered by proofs but by exploration. It is always experimental.

— Simone Weil. *First and Last Notebooks of*. Translated by Richard Rees. (1970) : 135

Design and making, experimentation, should be happening all along. The making part does not wait until "research" has been done, but is done as the research proceeds. The relationship of research and ideas, to making, will vary from person to person, and is not a constant even for one person. But the *design* part is not to create a "report" about the *research* results.

Design experiments. Execute them.

*how it works —*

Design Seminar encourages reflective practice in the exploration, development, design and production of content. Studio work is complemented by one-on-one and group crits and discussions (some involving guest participants); discussions of and presentations relating to research and readings; blogging and continuing documentation of process; and an exhibition in the 301 Cabot Gallery (ordinarily in the Spring, for Spring graduates; sometimes mixed shows of graduating seniors also run in the late Fall).

Two faculty panel reviews are scheduled during the course of the Fall semester, typically late September and late October or early November. Students intending to continue on to a second semester of Seminar will participate in the end-of-semester evaluations in December, as well.

The instructor seeks to make seminar a valuable learning experience for every participant. It is up to the individual student and the instructor to determine how much structure is appropriate. The professional career considerations of Seminarians also are taken into account, particularly with regard to development of a body of work “*indicative of an ability to participate [in design] as a professional.*” Students should reflect on how their project might, in combination with other portfolio work, position them for work (and life) beyond Montserrat.

Studio work needs to be located within a context of ideas, inquiry, testing. It should involve stretch — of imagination, technical skills, ability to articulate and argue for a solution or solutions — and it should reflect a commitment to perfection but also to exploring multiple approaches, channels, iterations to or of the same material.

Visiting designers, design alums and others may also join us, for discussion of work in progress, or the visitor’s own work, experience, etc.

*completion —*

Work done for each semester becomes complete with the submission of documentation of that work. The purpose of the documentation is two-fold : (1) encourages precision, method and reflection; and (2) provides a record for future seminarians. The documentation is a designed document and, for the second of a two-semester sequence, is produced by a commercial printer (e.g., Lulu).

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project design	<input type="checkbox"/>	title
	<input type="checkbox"/>	thesis statement / proposal
	<input type="checkbox"/>	personal, educational and professional objectives
	<input type="checkbox"/>	overview (stages, schedule; one or two semesters, etc.)
progress	<input type="checkbox"/>	description and discussion of each stage of project
	<input type="checkbox"/>	rationales for approaches taken and/or abandoned
	<input type="checkbox"/>	evaluations
physical description	<input type="checkbox"/>	e.g., tools used, applications, style sheets, paper, etc.
conclusion	<input type="checkbox"/>	evaluation
	<input type="checkbox"/>	questions one is left with at conclusion of project
	<input type="checkbox"/>	advice to future seminarians
other	<input type="checkbox"/>	bibliography

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Process (documentation) books going back several years are archived in the Seminar Room; an annotated index is available on paper and at <http://studio.montserrat.edu/gd/405/index.htm>.

*evaluation —*

The FINAL GRADE is based on (1) the student's studio work (in some instances in consultation with faculty reviewers), and (2) the student's seminar work. Studio work may involve, in addition to (a) the student's own work developed in consultation with the course instructor; (b) exercises assigned in the seminar component of the class. Evaluation of STUDIO WORK takes into account the following factors: exploration (various iterations), attention to typographic and other detail, bringing work to completion, craft, and appropriateness of the chosen solution/s to the proposal, documentation of process; willingness to engage in the back-and-forth of discussion with others.

student's independent project	25	quality of exploration (evidenced by multiple iterations, research, willingness to consider and pursue suggestions, alternate strategies)
	15	presentation, technical and craft
	20	documentation
seminar work	15	attendance, active participation in crits, discussions
	10	other assigned work (e.g., note-taking), senior design show
	15	writing, blogging
total	100%	

Seminar (non-studio) work consists primarily of (a) constructive participation in crits and discussion of assigned readings, both in class and on blogs; (b) participation in group exhibition (where this happens).

*learning differences, writing and study issues —*

It is an absolute commitment of this instructor to make Seminar a good experience for everyone.

If you anticipate that you have learning differences that could be a challenge, see or contact the College's Writing Studio and/or its Academic Access Studio, both on the second floor of 248 Cabot Street.

details for both at <https://www.montserrat.edu/academic-advising-and-support/>

Here is the College's official language on this point —

Under the guidance of Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Americans with Disabilities Act Amendments Act of 2008 (ADAAA), it is my priority to create an equitable and accessible learning environment for you. If you are registered with the Academic Access Studio and approved to use accommodations, let's find a time to talk about how you might use those accommodations in this course. If you have any questions about Academic Access or accommodations, please contact Meagan Grant, Director of the Academic Access Studio, [meagan.grant@montserrat.edu](mailto:meagan.grant@montserrat.edu)

Colleen Michaels  
Director, Writing Studio Director      [colleen.michaels@montserrat.edu](mailto:colleen.michaels@montserrat.edu)

Meagan Grant  
Director, Academic Access Studio      [meagan.grant@montserrat.edu](mailto:meagan.grant@montserrat.edu)

I am happy to meet individually with anyone where there are challenges to address