

PA 3975 and PA 5975 – Election Design

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Course Overview

Course Description

An innovative course on design principles and their application to the election administration field (2.0 credits). At the end of this course, students will be able to:

- Identify good and bad design in election materials and use that knowledge to review materials or provide input to people creating election materials.
- Practice basic election design including plain language, layout, and design as applied to common election materials such as voter information, how-to-vote instructions, poll worker and candidate manuals, forms, and ballots.
- Apply design principles to real election materials within typical time, financial, and legislative constraints.
- Evaluate the usability of election materials for voters and other users, using a variety of techniques.

Required Materials

The following book is required for this course:

- Rubin, J., & Chisnell, D., (2008). *Handbook of Usability Testing*. (2nd ed.). Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley Publishing
 - ISBN-10: 0470185481 | ISBN-13: 978-0470185483

In addition, the Field Guides to Ensuring Voter Intent (volumes 1-10) are used throughout the course. They are available online at <http://civicdesign.org/fieldguides/>. You will also receive printed copies from the University.

The following books are recommended for this course and will be on reserve at the library.

- Horton, S., Quesenbery, W., & Gustafson, A. (2014). *A Web for Everyone: Designing Accessible User Experiences*. Brooklyn, NY: Rosenfeld Media
 - ISBN-10: 1933820977 | ISBN-13: 9781933820972
- Redish, J. (2012). *Letting Go of the Words*. (2nd ed.). Amsterdam, Netherlands: Elsevier.
 - ISBN-10: 0123859301 | ISBN-13: 978-0123859303
- Jarrett, C., & Gaffney, G., (2008). *Forms That Work*. Burlington, MA: Morgan Kaufmann Publishers.
 - ISBN-10: 1558607102 | ISBN-13: 978-1558607101

Required readings are included in the Course Details, below. There are dozens of additional readings and resources that you will find to be helpful in doing the activities and assignments. Those are included, along with the required readings, in [Readings and Video Resources List](#). Additional readings and resources are provided via links and are public documents.

Technical Support

The content for this course is hosted on the university's Moodle learning management system. You can log in to Moodle using the following URL: <https://ay17.moodle.umn.edu/>

- For Moodle assistance please contact: moodle@umn.edu. In your communication please refer to the URL of our course Moodle site: <https://ay17.moodle.umn.edu/course/view.php?id=8186>
- For technical support questions with WebEx, please contact IT@UMN by calling 612-301-4357 or email at help@umn.edu.

Spring 2018 Semester Schedule

		Start Day (Monday)	Live class sessions on Webex
Unit 1	Welcome and Introduction	January 16, 2018*	Web session this week See the course site for details.
Unit 2	Plain Language	January 22	
Unit 3	Writing Instructions	January 29	
Unit 4	Usability Testing (part 1)	February 5	Web session this week See the course site for details.
Unit 5	Usability Testing (part 2)	February 12	
Unit 6	Accessibility	February 19	
Unit 7	Course Project - Selection (part 1)	February 26	
Unit 8	Election Websites	March 5	
---	Spring Break	March 12	
Unit 9	Election Guides	March 19	
Unit 10	Forms and Notices	March 26	
Unit 11	Ballots	April 2	
Unit 12	Communicating with Voters	April 9	
Unit 13	Course Project Work (part 2)	April 16	Web session this week See the course site for details.
Unit 14	Course Project Work (part 3)	April 23	
Unit 15	Course Project Work (part 4)	April 30	
Unit 16	Course Project Final Delivery Final reflections	May 7	Web session this week See the course site for details.

***Note:** The Spring 2018 term starts on Tuesday, January 16 due to the Martin Luther King, Jr. Day holiday.

How to Approach This Course

You will participate in a variety of activities and assignments in this course. While many of these will be asynchronous, completed at different times and locations, they will be scheduled within

each unit so that everyone in the class is working on the same activities and assignments at the same time.

You will get the most value out of the course by completing all of the activities. They contain building-block skills you will need for the assignments. Participating in the class discussions is important, helping bring some of the collaboration and debate that is part of an in-person course.

Some of the assignments require you to visit an elections office. If you are not already an election official, we urge you to take the time to get to know your local office. Among the many other benefits, they may be helpful in identifying a project for your Course Project.

Live Web Sessions

There will be a number of synchronous sessions where our class discusses topics online at the same time and when you have the opportunity to meet with instructors to discuss your Election Design course project. We encourage you to attend these sessions to connect with your instructor and peers. Live web sessions will be recorded and posted in Moodle in the event that you miss the session.

These sessions will be held using WebEx, an online conferencing tool. Please refer to the Announcements forum in Moodle for the session agenda and to confirm the day/time. Review the [WebEx quick start guide](#) in advance of these sessions. If you have any technical or audio issues please check the WebEx [meeting room guidelines](#).

Key Concepts

A combination of videos, audio, and graphics supporting your required readings will be provided through the Key Concepts. Many of the topics covered in the Key Concepts provide additional information to help you further your discussions and complete the activities and assignments, including the Election Design course project. We encourage you to review these before attempting any of the graded assignments.

Activities and Discussions

Activities in the course consist of exercises that allow you to practice using the skills you learn in the class or apply the election design principles you will learn before using them in a graded assignment or your Election Design course project. We encourage you to share your insights and learnings from completing the activities via the discussion board forum. While these activities may not be graded, they are an integral part of how you will learn topics covered in this course.

Written Assignments

Written assignments are a way for you to analyze the topics covered in the course and make connections to your personal experiences. These assignments will be shared with your instructor for grading. We also expect you to discuss and share your first drafts with peers on a discussion board forum. You will then review the work shared by peers and provide constructive feedback.

Election Design Course Project

All students (PA 3975 and PA 5975) will choose a substantive body of election materials to work on updating using the design principles and techniques covered in this course, to make them more effective for voters, poll workers, or candidates to use. You will be able to work on sections of this project throughout the course, building towards the completed project.

Working on this project will give you an opportunity to explore different ways of communicating information on an election topic to voters or poll workers.

All of the assignments will help you build the skills you need for your course project. Four units are set aside for work on the project, with specific activities in each week. These activities are not graded, except as part of our final project.

Graduate Students: In Unit 16, you will present your project to the class using VoiceThread, and will comment on other students' presentations. (This is OPTIONAL for undergraduate students in PA 3975.)

Choosing a course project

No doubt there are pieces around your local election office that are problematic. You may not know why or what to do with them to improve them. These are perfect candidates for the final project. Keep in mind your constraints. Of course, there is the time you have available, but more important is to choose something you can legally change. You might consider absentee ballot instructions, job aids for poll workers, or the voter registration lookup on your website.

You will pick an election document or group of related documents to revise. This will be a larger project than the individual projects and activities each week. For example, if it's a single document or manual, it should be at least 8-12 pages, not just a single sheet. If it's a form (like a voter registration form or vote-by-mail ballot request) it will include the form along with any voter education or instructions needed for the voter to complete the activity. Some ideas:

- Voter registration materials: a brochure with information about voting, the voter registration form, and instructions for how to send it in (and alternative formats).
- A voter guide for a specific election, including how to vote and information about what's on the ballot.
- The page from an elections website with basic information for voters.
- The voter registration / sample ballot look-up tool on an election website.
- A package of all of the voter information materials used to communicate with vote-by-mail (absentee) voters, including materials sent with the ballot, and special letters or other communication that might be needed.
- Poll worker's manual for how to check in a voter, including all variations.
- Information and forms about how to file a petition or become a candidate.

What you will do in the course project

The Course Project tab in Moodle provides you with a detailed description and breakdown of the deliverables and the dates in which they are due.

The main activity is to redesign the material. Required activities:

- Rewriting and redesigning the material (Draft 1)
- Usability testing the new design with at least 5 people
- Updating the design based on what you learned in the usability test. (Draft 2 through your final draft)
- Identifying any requirements under the local election code that affect the design.

Note: State election statutes are normally available online. The Minnesota election code, for example, is in [Chapters 200-212 of the Minnesota Statutes](#).

In the final week (Unit 15) you will turn in:

- The original and revised material, including the version you usability tested and the final version.
- A brief report on the usability testing including what you decided to change based on what you learned. (You will learn how to do this in Units 4 and 5.)
- A short report that documents your process, including the design principles used, how you approached the design, how you addressed legal requirements (if any), and any open issues or unresolved questions in the final version.

Final Presentation Guidelines (OPTIONAL for PA 3975)

Graduate students, your presentation will be created using the video tool VoiceThread and should be 5-10 minutes. It is a chance for you to share all of your work before submitting your final project. Slides are allowed but not necessary. If you do have slides, please use them as a reference, not a script!

Your presentation will include a summary of:

- The documents that you chose to revise and why you selected these materials.
- Your experience conducting the usability test, your findings, and what you decided to change based on what you learned.
- The design principles used, how you approached the design, and how you addressed any legal requirements.

Be prepared for the instructor to leave comments on your video and respond to comments from your peers.

Grading

If you are taking the course for credit, your final course grade is based on your performance in discussions, assignments, and delivery of Election Design course project and presentations.

	PA 3975 Undergraduate	PA 5975 Graduate
Participation in class discussions	30%	30%
Written Assignments	40%	40%
Final Election Design Course Project (VoiceThread presentation is optional)	30%	--
Final Election Design Course Project, including a VoiceThread presentation and peer feedback video discussion	--	30%

Grading for Participation in Class Discussions

Discussions are a vital part of learning. We want to see collegial give-and-take among students in true online conversations about whatever the topic is. Avoid writing essays. Instead, assert your position and ask questions about the topic and the intentions of your peers as they share their work. When you share your work, ask your peers to give you feedback on specific questions or concerns that you have about your work. Generally, be constructive and open.

We will be watching for

- Clearly expressed ideas
- Well-developed viewpoints, backed up with Election Design Principles or examples from other evidence.
- Connections to real experiences of elections
- Well-written standard English, without grammatical or typographical errors.

Late Policy and Extra Credit

No extra credit will be awarded on assignments in this course.

Course Details

We recommend that you review all of the required readings thoroughly before progressing on to the activities and assignments within each unit. In addition, the Key Concepts in your Moodle course contain videos, graphics and other resources necessary to complete the unit assignments.

Most units follow the same pattern:

- Most activities are due on Wednesday of the unit week. For discussions, this means that your first contributions are made by that day.
- First drafts of assignments for discussion and comment are due by Thursday or Friday.
- Final assignments and all activities are due by Sunday.

Field Guides

The Field Guides to Ensuring Voter Intent are used throughout the course. The Key Concepts in each unit point to the volumes most applicable to the current work.

You can find them all online at <http://civicdesign.org/fieldguides>

- Vol. 1 Designing usable ballots
- Vol. 2 Writing instructions voters understand
- Vol. 3 Usability testing ballots
- Vol. 4 Effective poll worker materials.
- Vol. 5 Choosing how to communicate with voters.
- Vol. 6 Designing voter education booklets and flyers.
- Vol. 07 Designing election department websites.
- Vol. 08 Guiding voters through the polling place
- Vol. 09 Creating accessible online information.
- Vol.10 Creating forms that help voters take action

There are other readings, as well. [See the complete list of readings and videos, by unit](https://ay17.moodle.umn.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=751804), here: <https://ay17.moodle.umn.edu/mod/page/view.php?id=751804>

Unit 1: Welcome and Introduction

VoiceThread: Introduce Yourself

You will use the VoiceThread tool to introduce yourself and say hi to your classmates. There is a tutorial for how to use the tool – which will also be used for your final presentations.

Live Web Session

U1 Activity: Choose the Top 10 Design Principles (ungraded)

U1 Activity: Discuss Your Experience of Election Design

U1 Assignment: Catalog “Designed Materials” from an elections office and Map the Materials along the Voter Journey

Unit 2: Writing So Voters Understand (Plain Language)

Discussion: Is this Plain Language?

Activity and Discussion: Short Exercises in Rewriting Election Materials

Assignment - Part 1: Provisional Voting Instructions (share your rough draft)

Assignment - Part 2: Provisional Voting Instructions for a New Voter

Unit 3: Writing Instructions

Activity and Discussion: Make sense of a recipe

Discussion: Checking the Checklists

Assignment: Review Poll Worker Procedures, parts 1 and 2

Unit 4-5: Usability Testing Checking Your Design

Live Web Session

Discussion: Origami Practice with Usability Testing

Activity: Usability Test of Origami Instructions

Assignment: Plan and Design a Usability Test, and Identify Participants

Discussion: Usability Testing of Election Design Materials

Assignment: Usability Testing of Election Design Materials

Unit 6: Making Things Work for Everyone (Accessibility)

Activity and Discussion: Accessibility in the Real World

Activity and Discussion: Is This Space Accessible?

Poll: Support for Accessible Voting

Discussion: How Does Your Jurisdiction Support Voters with Disabilities?

Assignment: Is This Website Accessible?

Unit 8: Designing Election Department Websites

Activity and Discussion: Review 3 Election Websites Against Voters' Questions

Assignment: How Easily Do Voters Find Answers on Your Website?

Unit 9: Election Guides

Activity and Discussion: How Voters Learn What's On the Ballot

Assignment: TBD

Unit 10: Election Forms and Notices

Activity and Discussion: How Hard Will It Be to Fill in This Form?

Activity and Discussion: Create a Journey Map of Forms and Notices

Assignment: Create a usable form...within the Election Code

Unit 11: Ballots and Polling Place Materials

Activity and Discussion: Review the Variety of Ballots in Use in This County Forum

Discussion: Different Ways of Counting Votes

Assignment: Solve This Ballot Design Problem!

Unit 12: Communicating with voters

Discussion: Voter Education and Outreach: How You Communicate with Voters

Assignment: Voter Information Across the Voter Journey

Final Project Delivery

Activity: My Top 10 Design Principles

Discussion: Reflect and Review
Final Project Presentation: VoiceThread (OPTIONAL for PA3975)
Video Discussion: Peer Feedback on Election Design Presentations
Assignment: Final project delivery
Live Web Session

Academic Policies and Code of Conduct

Student Conduct Code

The University seeks an environment that promotes academic achievement and integrity, that is protective of free inquiry, and that serves the educational mission of the University. Similarly, the University seeks a community that is free from violence, threats, and intimidation; that is respectful of the rights, opportunities, and welfare of students, faculty, staff, and guests of the University; and that does not threaten the physical or mental health or safety of members of the University community.

As a student at the University you are expected adhere to Board of Regents Policy: *Student Conduct Code*. To review the Student Conduct Code, please see:

http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf.

Note that the conduct code specifically addresses disruptive classroom conduct, which means "engaging in behavior that substantially or repeatedly interrupts either the instructor's ability to teach or student learning. The classroom extends to any setting where a student is engaged in work toward academic credit or satisfaction of program-based requirements or related activities."

Use of Personal Electronic Devices in the Classroom

Using personal electronic devices in the classroom setting can hinder instruction and learning, not only for the student using the device but also for other students in the class. To this end, the University establishes the right of each faculty member to determine if and how personal electronic devices are allowed to be used in the classroom. For complete information, please reference: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/STUDENTRESP.html>.

Scholastic Dishonesty:

You are expected to do your own academic work and cite sources as necessary. Failing to do so is scholastic dishonesty. Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering, forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis. (Student Conduct Code:

http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Student_Conduct_Code.pdf)

If it is determined that a student has cheated, he or she may be given an "F" or an "N" for the course, and may face additional sanctions from the University. For additional information, please see: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/INSTRUCTORRESP.html>.

The Office for Student Conduct and Academic Integrity has compiled a useful list of Frequently Asked Questions pertaining to scholastic dishonesty: <http://www1.umn.edu/oscai/integrity/student/index.html>. If you have additional questions, please clarify with your instructor for the course. Your instructor can respond to your specific questions regarding what would constitute scholastic dishonesty in the context of a particular class-e.g., whether collaboration on assignments is permitted, requirements and methods for citing sources, if electronic aids are permitted or prohibited during an exam.

Makeup Work for Legitimate Absences:

Students will not be penalized for absence during the semester due to unavoidable or legitimate circumstances. Such circumstances include verified illness, participation in intercollegiate athletic events, subpoenas, jury duty, military service, bereavement, and religious observances. Such circumstances do not include voting in local, state, or national elections. For complete information, please see: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/MAKEUPWORK.html>.

Appropriate Student Use of Class Notes and Course Materials:

Taking notes is a means of recording information but more importantly of personally absorbing and integrating the educational experience. However, broadly disseminating class notes beyond the classroom community or accepting compensation for taking and distributing classroom notes undermines instructor interests in their intellectual work product while not substantially furthering instructor and student interests in effective learning. Such actions violate shared norms and standards of the academic community. For additional information, please see: <http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/STUDENTRESP.html>.

Grading and Transcripts:

The University uses plus and minus grading on a 4.000 cumulative grade point scale in accordance with the following:

A	4.000	Represents achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements
A-	3.667	
B+	3.333	
B	3.000	Represents achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements
B-	2.667	
C+	2.333	
C	2.000	Represents achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect
C-	1.667	
D+	1.333	

D	1.000	Represents achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to meet fully the course requirements
S		Represents achievement that is satisfactory, which is equivalent to a C- or better.

For additional information, please refer to:

<http://policy.umn.edu/Policies/Education/Education/GRADINGTRANSCRIPTS.html>.

Sexual Harassment

"Sexual harassment" means unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and/or other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature. Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work or academic performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive working or academic environment in any University activity or program. Such behavior is not acceptable in the University setting. For additional information, please consult Board of Regents Policy:

<http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/SexHarassment.pdf>

Equity, Diversity, Equal Opportunity, and Affirmative Action:

The University provides equal access to and opportunity in its programs and facilities, without regard to race, color, creed, religion, national origin, gender, age, marital status, disability, public assistance status, veteran status, sexual orientation, gender identity, or gender expression. For more information, please consult Board of Regents Policy:

http://regents.umn.edu/sites/default/files/policies/Equity_Diversity_EO_AA.pdf.

Disability Accommodations:

The University of Minnesota is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities for all students. The Disability Resource Center is the campus office that collaborates with students who have disabilities to provide and/or arrange reasonable accommodations.

If you have, or think you may have, a disability (e.g., mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical), please contact DS at 612-626-1333 to arrange a confidential discussion regarding equitable access and reasonable accommodations.

If you are registered with DS and have a current letter requesting reasonable accommodations, please contact your instructor as early in the semester as possible to discuss how the accommodations will be applied in the course.

For more information, please see the DS website, <https://diversity.umn.edu/disability/>.

Mental Health and Stress Management:

As a student you may experience a range of issues that can cause barriers to learning, such as strained relationships, increased anxiety, alcohol/drug problems, feeling down, difficulty concentrating and/or lack of motivation. These mental health concerns or stressful events may lead to diminished academic performance and may reduce your ability to participate in daily activities. University of Minnesota services are available to assist you. You can learn more about

the broad range of confidential mental health services available on campus via the Student Mental Health Website: <http://www.mentalhealth.umn.edu>.

Academic Freedom and Responsibility: for courses that do not involve students in research

Academic freedom is a cornerstone of the University. Within the scope and content of the course as defined by the instructor, it includes the freedom to discuss relevant matters in the classroom. Along with this freedom comes responsibility. Students are encouraged to develop the capacity for critical judgment and to engage in a sustained and independent search for truth. Students are free to take reasoned exception to the views offered in any course of study and to reserve judgment about matters of opinion, but they are responsible for learning the content of any course of study for which they are enrolled.*

Reports of concerns about academic freedom are taken seriously, and there are individuals and offices available for help. Contact the instructor, the Department Chair, your adviser, the associate dean of the college, or the Vice Provost for Faculty and Academic Affairs in the Office of the Provost.

** Language adapted from the American Association of University Professors "Joint Statement on Rights and Freedoms of Students".*