CRN: 21093
Course: TCC 6110 Information Architecture
Winter 2018, 12-week term
Start date: January 8 – March 31, 2018
Course Format: Online
Meeting Time: Online/Virtual

Instructor Name: Christopher S. LaRoche
E-mail: c.laroche@northeastern.edu

Required Text(s)/Software/Tools:
Book title: Information Architecture for the Web and Beyond (the ‘Polar Bear’ Book)
Author/Publisher: Louis Rosenfeld, Peter Morville and Jorge Arango, O'Reilly Press
ISBN: 978-1-4919-1168-6

Book title: Elements of the User Experience
Author/Publisher: Jesse James Garrett, New Riders Press
ISBN: 978-0735712027

Books are available through the Northeastern book store [http://northeastern.bncollege.com/].

Note: Many of the readings in this course include relevant academic articles – particularly recent research in the field. These readings are located within Blackboard > Course Material > Week [X] > Readings.

Please note that some articles are direct links to the article within a database accessible through Northeastern University's Library system, some are PDF and some are HTML. Your myNEU login information will be required for accessing the library information. You can obtain information at http://library.northeastern.edu/. Additional information is available at http://library.northeastern.edu/gateways/graduate-students.

Course Description
Introduces concepts important to the design of information architecture. Central to the course is an understanding of user-centered design principles. User-centered design requires that the information designer incorporate the end user into the design process. Offers students the opportunity to analyze and describe the design of an existing information appliance and then move on to the analysis of the design of information architecture. Finally, students submit their own plans for an information architecture accompanied by a contextualizing document that describes the audience and circumstances for the use of the design.

Course Outcomes
By actively participating in the course and satisfactorily completing assignments, students will have the opportunity to:

- Develop an understanding of information architecture concepts and how to apply them to technical communication
- Develop an understanding of the relationship of user experience and information architecture and how it applies to technical communication
- Develop an understanding of some methods to develop and evaluate an information architecture

Course Methodology

Each week, you will be expected to:
1. Review the week’s learning objectives.
2. Complete all assigned readings.
3. Complete all lecture materials for the week.
4. Participate in the Discussion Board/Class Discussions.
5. Complete and submit all assignments and tests by the due dates.

Participation/Discussion Board

Participation is a portion of your overall grade. Lively questions and active discussion are expected throughout each week of the course. I post two questions to the discussion board each week. Each week I expect, at a minimum, each student to do the following:

- Post one primary response to each question that I post in the Discussion Board. For question 1, this should be done by Wednesday night, for question 2, by Saturday night.
- Post one secondary response (respond to another student’s comment). For question 1, this should be done by Thursday night and for question 2, by Sunday night.
- I expect email replies to each other to be respectful, thoughtful, and polite. Email does not come across with the tone you get from traditional classroom discussion. **Think carefully before you respond.**
- Refer to the Discussion Board Rubric Overview document (within the Discussion Board sections) for a complete understanding of the requirements and expectations of class participation for this course.
- Since class participation is 25% of your final grade, get involved in discussions early and often. For this class, you can obtain 2 points per week (each question is worth 1 point) in the discussion board as part of your class participation grade. Use this option to maximize your grade and discuss the question with other students.

Communication

If you have questions about course material or assignments, please post them in the ‘ask the instructor’ section of Blackboard. This will allow all students to benefit from the questions. I am always available by email as well and try to respond as quickly as possible but definitely within 24 hours.

Submission of Work

Submitting an Assignment Electronically:
In the Assignments folder, click on the View/Complete Assignment link to view and each assignment. Attach your completed assignments here (in pdf format) and click Submit to turn
them in to me. Once your assignment has been graded, you will be able to view the grade by clicking on My Grades in the Tools module from the Northeastern University Online Campus tab. I will send you a separate email with homework comments for each assignment.

Homework is due the Monday morning 8 am (Boston time) after the week completes. The final project is due Saturday, March 31, 2018, at 6 pm (Boston time).

When I mention page requirements or limits, page expectation includes a double-spaced page of no more than a 12-size font – with an expectation of an 11-point font such as Tahoma. Papers should have standard one-inch margins on each side. Please include a cover page with your name, date, class number, and homework assignment number – and this page is not included in the page count.

For easier homework identification, always submit your homework with your last name underscored with the homework number: for example: smith_hw1.pdf.

Submit all homework in PDF format unless stated otherwise.

Grading/Evaluation Standards
The following is the grading scheme for this class:

25% -- Class Participation (Discussion Board)

5% -- Homework Assignment 1
(Due at start of week 2 – [TUESDAY] 1/16/18 at 8 am [Boston time])

10% -- Homework Assignment 2
(Due at start of week 3 – 1/22/18 at 8 am [Boston time])

10% -- Homework Assignment 3
(Due at start of week 5 – 2/5/18 at 8 am [Boston time])

10% -- Homework Assignment 4
(Due at start of week 8 – 2/26/18 at 8 am [Boston time])

15% -- Homework Assignment 5
(Due at start of week 10 – 3/12/18 at 8 am [Boston time])

25% -- Final Project
(Due Saturday 3/31/18 at 6 pm [Boston time])

Each week builds upon the previous week and failure to participate in discussion and complete homework assignments is strongly discouraged. Anyone neglecting to participate in discussions and complete homework on time will receive an unsatisfactory Class Participation grade, hindering your ability to pass the class.

Homework is both crucial to learning in this class and assists in working towards the final project. Homework is due at 8 am Monday morning (Boston time) the week after that week’s
reading/assignments. **Late homework will not be accepted.** If you fall behind and cannot complete your homework, your Homework Assignments grade suffers.

**Grading Rubric:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score Range</th>
<th>Grade</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>95-100</td>
<td>A</td>
<td>Outstanding, insightful work. Goes beyond requirements of the task to develop a response, which is thoughtful, reflective, considers alternative views and makes connections among ideas and information from different sources or from different aspects of the course. Well researched and documented (if research is part of assignment). Displays creativity and originality.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>90-94</td>
<td>A-</td>
<td>Very good work. Purposefully and logically developed. Thoroughly addresses all aspects of the task. Synthesis of details and concepts from various sources or topics shows evidence of sound understanding and thoughtful examination. Research information appropriately cited (if research is part of assignment).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>87-89</td>
<td>B+</td>
<td>Good work. Generally clear, accurate and relevant. Adequately addresses all requirements of the task. Demonstrates understanding of course concepts, with evidence of some thoughtful examination and reflection. Development is generally logical, facts generally correct. Tends to focus on one interpretation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84-86</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Satisfactory work. Shows basic understanding of concepts with minimal evidence of reflection or thoughtful analysis. Complies with the basic requirements, relies on limited sources of information, little integration of concepts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>80-83</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>Minimally satisfactory work. Shows some understanding of concepts with little reflection or analysis. Barely meets basic requirements of assignment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>77-79</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>Unsatisfactory work. Fails to address the topic in a meaningful way. May be extremely brief, inaccurate, illogical or undeveloped.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74-76</td>
<td>C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70-73</td>
<td>C-</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69% or below</td>
<td>F</td>
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*Please note that CPS does not award grades below a C- for graduate level courses.*

It is expected that students’ written work be clear, comprehensible, and competently produced. The following resources are available to our students who need help to improve their writing skills:

- **Smarthinking** (available free in Tool section of Blackboard) – this allows students to submit written material in any subject and have it reviewed by an e-instructor within a 24-hour window (in most cases).
- **Writing Center** on Northeastern Campus – contact the center to schedule an appointment.
- **The Purdue Online Writing Lab** ([http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/](http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/)) is a valuable source of information about grammar, sentence structure, and general writing skills.
Assignments

Homework Assignment 1 – Information Architecture in Your Home

Choose a type of physical (not digital) organization in your home/apartment—kitchen cabinets, a closet, a garage/shed, DVD/CD player storage, etc.—and describe the way that it is organized (be sure to include visuals). Include how this organization relates to information architecture as you understand it after this week’s reading. Keep paper to 2-page maximum. Remember to submit your paper as a pdf.

Also, participate in Discussion Board by introducing yourself, why you are taking this class, and discuss your view of what information architecture is and is not.

Homework Assignment 2 – Critique an Information Architecture

Write a brief paper (2-page maximum) on what you consider an example of a Web site that has poor information architecture based on the course material presented thus far. Choose from one of the following Web sites:

- Guildhall Fun Flyers - (http://guildhallfunflyers.com/)
- Barnstormers – (http://www.barnstormers.com/)
- Barn Playhouse – (http://www.barnplayhouse.org/)

Homework Assignment 3 – Fix the Information Architecture from Assignment 2

Building upon your previous assignment, take that example and, using the information organization discussion in weeks 2-3, propose an improved and modified information architecture for the particular Web site. Keep this to a 4-page maximum so limit what you would reorganize and restructure for maximum effect.

Homework Assignment 4 – Card Sort

Using the software on the optimalsort.com Web site, you will be given a list of items to use for the card sort and then perform an online card sort with 5 participants (from outside of the course). This assignment will be a combination of both learning the software tool and understanding how to perform and analyze data from a card sort. So the homework will be two parts:

- Create an account with optimalsort.com and perform a card sort based on the content provided.
- After completing the card sort, submit a 1-2-page paper reflecting on the process and card sorting exercise. The paper should include a description of the results of your card sort - were there definitive themes that you could uncover from the card sort or not? Discuss your impressions of the entire process and how you think this could (or could not) help you as a writer with organizing information. What were the limitations of this method? Lastly, include a link to the results on the Web site.

Homework Assignment 5 – Presentation on a topic in Information Architecture

This presentation will be on one of the important topics in information architecture today: taxonomies, folksonomies, controlled vocabularies, ontologies, metadata, task-based navigation, etc. The presentation should examine and describe this topic at a high level and then discuss how the topic relates to the technical communication field. If you want to choose an information architecture topic not listed here, that is fine but please talk to me personally on email and we can discuss. The Web site Boxes and Arrows is an excellent starting place to browse and find potential ideas for paper topics.

Your presentation should be 10 -15 slides and should include a video of you giving the presentation. Please do not upload the video to blackboard but include a link to YouTube or the platform of your choice with your submission.
**Final Project – User Interface Redesign Presentation**

Your final project will be a compilation of what you have learned throughout the course. This final project will be a presentation of a proposed redesign of a navigational and labeling structure for a site of your choosing. Although that is the focus, I expect this final project to be a presentation (PowerPoint or keynote) that you would be giving to a work project group (such as development, project managers, marketing, etc.) describing this proposed update to an audience not familiar with information architecture principles. Critical to this report is how will this reworking either save or increase money for the product and company.

Final Presentation should include the following:

- Executive Summary
- Goals of the redesign (and include problem statements if applicable and why this is needed/being done)
- Business rationale for this update
- List of the issues uncovered in various IA analysis
- Prototypes showing updated navigational and labeling of the Web site: one home page example & two sub page examples
- Conclusion & Next Steps

Please remember that this final project/presentation would be one you would be giving to a project team at work, such as development, project managers, marketing, etc. so it needs to include terminology and wording that would be understandable to a wide and varied audience. The final presentation could vary in size from 10-15 slides, depending upon the scope of your issues uncovered and review and analysis. For the sake of being concise – the presentation cannot be more than 15 slides total. It should also include audio/video of the actual presentation.

Please remember another primary goal of the final project is that it is a culmination of all your work and information that you learned this term. This could be something you would be able to use as a portfolio piece.

As with assignment 5, you can submit the presentation via Blackboard and include a link to the audio/video presentation on YouTube or similar platform.

The final project is due Saturday, 03/31/2018 at 6 pm (Boston time).
# Class Schedule / Topical Outline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Dates</th>
<th>Topic</th>
<th>Assignments</th>
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| 1    | 1/8 – 1/14  | Introduction to Information Architecture (our definition!) and various Administrivia | **READING:** Garrett: Chapter 1  
Morville: Chapter 1 & 2  
Read posted articles within Week 1 Course Materials. |
| 2    | 1/16 – 1/21 | Evolving definitions of Information Architecture and Elements of the User Experience Overview | **READING:** Garrett: Chapters 2-3  
Morville: Chapters 3, 4, 12  
Read posted articles within Week 2 Course Materials.  
**HOMEWORK:** Homework 1 due 1/16/18 @ 8 am [Boston time] [TUESDAY] |
| 3    | 1/22 – 1/28 | Information Organization, Organization Systems, and Terminology/Types | **READING:** Garrett: Chapters 4, 5  
Morville: Chapters 5, 6  
Read posted articles within Week 3 Course Materials.  
**HOMEWORK:** Homework 2 due 1/22/18 @ 8 am [Boston time] |
| 4    | 1/29 – 2/4  | Navigation Systems                                                   | **READING:** Morville: Chapter 8  
Read posted articles within Week 4 Course Materials. |
| 5    | 2/5 – 2/11  | Navigation Systems, continued Introduction to Content Strategy       | **READING:** Garrett: Chapters 6, 7, and 8  
Read posted articles within Week 5 Course Materials.  
**HOMEWORK:** Homework 3 due 2/5/18 @ 8 am [Boston time] |
| 6    | 2/12 – 2/18 | Labeling Systems/Categorization                                     | **READING:** Morville: Chapter 7  
Read posted articles within Week 6 Course Materials. |
| 7    | 2/20 – 2/25 | Labeling Systems continued, with a                                   | **READING:** Read posted articles within Week |

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<th></th>
<th></th>
<th>focus on card sorting</th>
<th>7 Course Materials.</th>
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</thead>
</table>
| 8 | 2/26 – 3/4 | Search Systems | **READING:** Morville: Chapter 9, 10, 11  
Read posted articles within Week 8 Course Materials.  
**HOMEWORK:** Homework 4 due 2/26/18 @ 8 am [Boston time] |
| 9 | 3/5 – 3/11 | Folksonomies, Crowdsourcing, Ontologies | **READING:** Read posted articles within Week 9 Course Materials. |
| 10 | 3/12 – 3/18 | Introduction to Wireframing | **READING:** Morville: Chapters 13  
Read posted articles within Week 10 Course Materials.  
**HOMEWORK:** Homework 5 due 03/12/18 @ 8 am [Boston time] |
| 11 | 3/19 – 3/25 | Information Architecture: how business goals tie into Information Architecture | **READING:** Read posted articles within Week 11 Course Materials. |
| 12 | 3/26 – 3/31 | Information Architecture Future: what is the next frontier and job opportunities | **READING:** Read posted articles within Week 12 Course Materials.  
**HOMEWORK:** Final Project due 03/31/18 @ 6 pm [Boston time] |

**Academic Integrity Policy**

The University views academic dishonesty as one of the most serious offenses that a student can commit while in college and imposes appropriate punitive sanctions on violators. Here are some examples of academic dishonesty. While this is not an all-inclusive list, we hope this will help you to understand some of the things instructors look for. The following is excerpted from the University’s policy on academic integrity: the complete policy is available in the Student Handbook. The Student Handbook is available on the CPS Student Resources page > Policies and Forms.

*Cheating* – intentionally using or attempting to use unauthorized materials, information or study aids in an academic exercise

*Fabrication* – intentional and unauthorized falsification, misrepresentation, or invention of any data, or citation in an academic exercise

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Plagiarism – intentionally representing the words, ideas, or data of another as one’s own in any academic exercise without providing proper citation

Unauthorized collaboration – instances when students submit individual academic works that are substantially similar to one another; while several students may have the same source material, the analysis, interpretation, and reporting of the data must be each individual’s independent work.

Participation in academically dishonest activities – any action taken by a student with the intent of gaining an unfair advantage

Facilitating academic dishonesty – intentionally or knowingly helping or attempting to violate any provision of this policy

For more information on Academic Integrity, including examples, please refer to the Student Handbook, pages 9-11.

Student Accommodations
The College of Professional Studies is committed to providing equitable access to learning opportunities to students with documented disabilities (e.g. mental health, attentional, learning, chronic health, sensory, or physical). To ensure access to this class, and program, please contact The Disability Resource Center (http://www.northeastern.edu/drc/) to engage in a confidential conversation about the process for requesting reasonable accommodations in the classroom and clinical or lab settings. Accommodations are not provided retroactively so students are encouraged to register with the Disability Resource Center (DRC) as soon as they begin their program. The College of Professional Studies encourages students to access all resources available through the DRC for consistent support.

College of Professional Studies Policies and Procedures
For comprehensive information please see the download the Student Handbook also available on the Student Resources page of the Northeastern University College of Professional Studies website.

End-of-Course Evaluation Surveys
Your feedback regarding your educational experience in this class is very important to the College of Professional Studies. Your comments will make a difference in the future planning and presentation of our curriculum.

At the end of this course, please take the time to complete the evaluation survey at https://neu.evaluationkit.com. Your survey responses are completely anonymous and confidential.

For courses 6 weeks in length or shorter, surveys will be open one week prior to the end of the courses; for courses greater than 6 weeks in length, surveys will be open for two weeks. An email will be sent to your HuskyMail account notifying you when surveys are available.

Northeastern University Online Policies and Procedures
For comprehensive information please go to http://www.cps.neu.edu/online/

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