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Graphic Design Studio Practice 26

CFA AR523 A1 | Spring 2026

Instructor: Associate Professor Nicholas Rock

Meeting Time: Wednesdays, 2:30–5:15 PM

Office: 808—406A

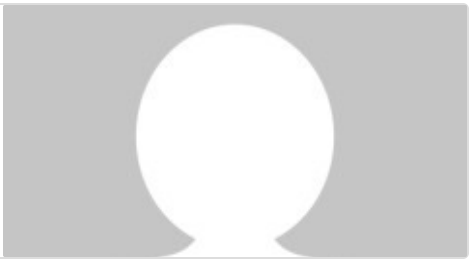
Email: nickrock@bu.edu

Office Hours:

By appointment—Tuesdays + Thursdays 10:30-12:30, Wednesdays 11:30-2:30

Office Hours

https://fantastical.app/nick-kSSb/office-hours



> “To be a good artist / letterer / designer / guitar player, it takes practice. A lot of it. More than you can even fathom when you’re starting out.”
>
> — Jessica Hische, Letterer and Designer

What This Course Is About

You’re good at design. But being good at design isn’t enough to have a career in design.

This course focuses on the professional practices that support a sustainable and meaningful career in graphic design. While studio courses emphasize making, this class centers on **how designers work in the world**—how they communicate, collaborate, present ideas, navigate clients, price work, and articulate value.

We'll engage with the practical skills, real-world scenarios, and professional habits that designers are expected to develop but are rarely explicitly taught. You'll build tools, documents, and confidence that extend beyond the classroom and into internships, freelance work, and full-time roles.

What You'll Learn

By the end of this course, you will be able to:

- **Articulate your skills, interests, and point of view** clearly and confidently
- **Present work professionally** to peers, clients, and employers
- **Develop polished resumes, portfolios, and professional profiles** ready for real use
- **Understand pricing, proposals, and contracts** and how to negotiate your value
- **Communicate effectively** in professional settings across different contexts
- **Navigate collaboration, feedback, and critique** with confidence and professionalism
- **Understand multiple career paths** within graphic design and make informed decisions

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Our Professional Community

We are a group of design professionals.

This isn't a typical classroom dynamic—we're colleagues preparing to enter (or advance in) the design industry together. We come from different backgrounds, with different experiences, career goals, and definitions of success. Some of you want to freelance. Some want to work in agencies. Some want in-house roles. Some don't know yet. All of these paths are valid, and we'll prepare for all of them.

We operate as professionals:
- We show up prepared and on time
- We give and receive honest, constructive feedback
- We support each other's growth and success
- We treat this space as we would a professional studio

We embrace diverse perspectives:
Our cohort includes people from all over the world with varied backgrounds and experiences. We learn from each other's different approaches to professionalism, communication styles, and career aspirations. We commit to understanding each other through the contexts of culture, identity, and lived experience.

We practice honesty over performance:
Professional practice requires talking about money, rejection, failure, and fear. These aren't comfortable topics, but we'll tackle them with honesty and mutual support. Real professional development happens when we're willing to be honest about what we don't know and what we're struggling with.

We stay flexible and adaptable:
I made a syllabus and a schedule. I will shift and adjust the work and the due dates to adapt to our class and what opportunities arise. This mirrors professional practice, where adaptability is essential.

I'm here to support your success:
My role is part instructor, part mentor, part connector. I'm committed to helping you grow and learn, and I'm committed to learning from you. If you're struggling with anything—course content, workload, job search stress, career decisions, life stuff—talk to me early. I can't help if I don't know what's going on.

Course Structure

This course is organized into modules that mirror common stages of professional development:

Part 1: Professional Identity (Weeks 1-4)

Articulating who you are, what you do, and how you present yourself

Part 2: Client Communication (Weeks 5-8)

Presenting work, writing proposals, pricing, and managing relationships

Part 3: Production & Tools (Weeks 9-10)

File preparation, commercial printing, and professional workflows

Part 4: Professional Contexts (Weeks 11-13)

Studio visits, career paths, and industry perspectives

Part 5: Launch (Weeks 14-15)

Final presentations and individual consultations

Weekly Schedule

Week 1 (January 21): Introduction & Current State

What we're doing:
- Course overview and expectations
- Discussion: What are the first steps in presenting yourself to prospective employers and clients?
- What do alums have to say about the transition to professional practice?
- Introduction: Your Professional Identity Package (semester-long project)

Assignment:
- Bring your current resume and portfolio (even if rough) to Week 2

Week 2 (January 28): Resume & Portfolio Workshop

What we're doing:
- Peer review and critique of current materials
- What makes a standout resume and portfolio?
- Workshop: Refining resumes + PDF portfolios
- Examples: strong and weak professional materials

Due: Current resume and portfolio (for review)

Assignment:
- Revise resume based on feedback
- Begin refining portfolio (select 5-7 strongest projects)

Week 3 (February 4): Personal Storytelling & Presentation Skills

What we're doing:
- Workshop: Telling your personal story authentically
- Writing exercise: Your professional bio (150 words)
- Practice: Talking about yourself without sounding rehearsed
- Assignment overview: Pecha Kucha format and expectations

Due: Revised resume

Assignment:
- Draft 3-minute Pecha Kucha presentation (10 slides × 20 seconds)
- Write professional bio (150 words)
- Practice your presentation (timing is strict!)

Week 4 (February 11): Pecha Kucha Presentations

What we're doing:
- Pecha Kucha presentations: each person presents (3 min)
- What landed? What could be stronger?
- What makes presentations effective vs. awkward?

Due: Pecha Kucha presentation + bio

Assignment:
- Refine bio based on feedback

Week 5 (February 18): Proposals & Scope of Work

What we're doing:
- Lecture: Anatomy of a proposal (scope, deliverables, timeline, budget)
- Proposal Tips
- Discussion: Defining scope (what's in, what's out)

Week 6 (February 25): Presenting Creative Work

What we're doing:
- **Guest Speaker #1 — Erin Kelly**
- Lecture: Professional client communication basics
- Workshop: Structuring creative presentations
- Case studies: successful (and unsuccessful) client presentations

Assignment:
- Prepare 10-minute presentation of a design project (as if to client)
- Include: problem, process, solution, rationale

Week 7 (March 4): Client Presentations & Feedback

What we're doing:

- Student presentations: present design work as if to a client
- Peer feedback on clarity and communication
- Discussion: Managing difficult client feedback
- Workshop: Translating "I don't like it" into actionable direction

Due: Client presentation

Assignment:
- Draft project proposal for hypothetical or real client

Week 8 (March 18): Pricing, Billing & Contracts

What we're doing:
- Discussion: How do you price design work?
- Lecture: Contracts, licensing, and usage rights
- Creating invoices and estimates
- Tools: Invoicing platforms and business systems

Coming Up: Project proposal

Assignment:
- Finish GameDay Concept presentatons

Week 9 (March 25): File Prep & Print Production

What we're doing:
- **Guest Speaker #2: Julie Ostrow**

- GameDay Concept presentations in class

Week 10 (April 1):

Lecture: Preparing files for commercial printing
- Workshop: Preflight, packaging, specifications
- Discussion: Working with print vendors
- Common mistakes and how to avoid them

Assignment:
- Prepare print-ready file + print request
- Research printing facility before tour

Assignment:
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- Update Web portfolio with refined projects

Week 11 (April 8): Commercial Printing Facility Tour (tentative)

What we're doing:
- **Field Trip:** Meridian Printing

https://meridianprinting.com
- Tour of commercial printing processes
- Q&A with print professionals

Due: Portfolio update

Week 12 (April 15): Studio Visit #2

What we're doing:
- **Studio Visit:** TBD

https://pinkergreen.com
- Studio tour and conversation
- Comparative observation

Before visit:
- Research studio
- Prepare 3 questions

Due: Studio visit #1 reflection

Assignment:
- Write comparative analysis of both studios (750 words)
- Finalize all professional materials

Week 13 (April 22): Portfolio Review & Networking

What we're doing:
- **Guest Speaker #3:** Nikita Singh
- Class presentations: updated portfolios + resumes
- Peer feedback session
- Discussion: Career paths and next steps

Due: Comparative studio analysis

Assignment:
- Final polish on professional materials

Week 15 (April 29): Individual Consultations (Optional)

What we're doing:
- Optional one-on-one meetings for:
- Career guidance
- Portfolio and job search support
- Specific questions
- By appointment only

Assignments & Deliverables

Assignments in this course are practical and cumulative. They're designed to be directly usable beyond the course.

Major Deliverables:

1. **Professional Resume** — Due Week 3
2. **Professional Bio** — Due Week 4
3. **Pecha Kucha Presentation** — Due Week 4

4. **Client Presentation** — Due Week 6
5. **Project Proposal** — Due Week 8
6. **Portfolio (website or PDF)** — Due Week 11
7. **Written Reflections** — Printing tour + 2 studio visits
8. **Final Professional Package** — Due Week 14

All assignments must be completed according to the brief and submitted on time. Emphasis is placed on clarity, seriousness of effort, and responsiveness to feedback rather than polish alone.

Evaluation

Engagement & Participation (30%)

This course depends on discussion, presence, and shared experience. You're expected to:
- Attend class and participate actively in conversations
- Engage respectfully with peers and guest speakers
- Contribute to critique and feedback sessions
- Practice professional communication—listening, asking questions, offering feedback

Assignment Completion (50%)

Assignments must be completed and submitted on time. Evaluation considers:
- Meeting the requirements of each brief
- Clarity and professional quality
- Responsiveness to feedback
- Seriousness of effort

Professionalism (20%)

You're expected to practice professional conduct throughout the semester:
- Written and verbal communication
- In-class behavior and preparedness

- Respect for others' time and work
- Meeting deadlines and commitments

Attendance

Because this class meets once per week, attendance is essential.

Attendance Policy:
- You get **2 absences**, no questions asked
- **3rd absence** drops your final grade by one letter grade
- Missing a **studio visit or guest speaker** counts as 2 absences
- **Late (>15 minutes)** = half absence
- If you must miss class, email me before class begins

Much of the value of this course comes from discussion, guest speakers, and shared context, which cannot be replicated outside the classroom.

Course Policies

Late Work

Extensions available for legitimate emergencies—talk to me early.

Communication

- Email me at nickrock@bu.edu (response within 24-48 hours on weekdays)
- Book office hours: https://fantastical.app/nick-kSSb/office-hours
- If you're struggling with anything, talk to me early

Academic Integrity

Present your own work. Cite sources. Don't plagiarize.

If you use AI tools (ChatGPT, etc.) for writing or content generation, disclose it and explain how it was used. Using AI without attribution is plagiarism.

Accessibility

If you need accommodations, please contact me and BU's Office of Disability & Access Services. I'm committed to making this course accessible for everyone.

Course Values

This course values:

- **Honesty over performance** — Be real about what you know and don't know
- **Clarity over jargon** — Communicate directly and plainly
- **Curiosity over certainty** — Ask questions, explore options
- **Preparation over improvisation** — Show up ready
- **Respect for diverse career paths** — There's no single "right" way to be a designer

Professional practice is not about having all the answers—it's about learning how to navigate uncertainty with intention and care.

Required Texts

Purchase These:

1. Graphic Artists Guild Handbook, 16th Edition (2023)

Pricing & Ethical Guidelines

Amazon

2. Design Is a Job by Mike Monteiro (2012)

Client relationships and professional boundaries

A Book Apart

Additional Materials

Readings, resources, and links will be provided throughout the semester. Most materials will be short, applied, and discussed in class.

Studio Visits & Guest Speakers

Studio Visits

TBD

Before each visit:
- Research the studio thoroughly
- Prepare 3 thoughtful questions
- Dress professionally (business casual)

After each visit:
- Written reflection on Basecamp

Commercial Printing Tour

Meridian Printing — Week 10 (March 25)

https://meridianprinting.com

Guest Speakers

We'll host 3 guest speakers throughout the semester from various areas of design practice. Specific speakers will be announced as confirmed.

Before each guest:
- Research their work
- Prepare 2 questions

Professional Tools & Resources

Throughout the course, you'll become familiar with tools that professional designers use:

Portfolio & Presentation

- Adobe Portfolio, Squarespace, Cargo, or custom website
- PDF portfolio best practices
- Presentation software (Keynote, PowerPoint, Google Slides)

Business & Communication

- Invoicing platforms (Studioworks, FreshBooks, Wave, Harvest)

- Project management tools (Asana, Notion, Basecamp)
- Communication tools (Slack, email best practices)

Resources

- AIGA (professional organization)
- Design job boards
- Boston design community events
- Online learning platforms

Specific resources and links will be shared as relevant to weekly topics.

Final Note

This course is meant to be useful.

The goal is for you to leave with tools, language, and confidence that you can carry forward into your professional life. Not theoretical knowledge—practical skills you'll use immediately.

Show up. Participate. Be honest about what you don't know. Support your colleagues. Take this seriously, but don't take yourself too seriously.

Let's get to work.