JUNIOR GRAPHIC DESIGN

Spring 2026

CFA AR 382

Audience, Authorship

LEVEL	BFA · Junior studio
CREDITS	4
MEETS	Section A1 Tuesdays + Thursdays 3:30–6:15 · Section B1 Tuesdays + Thursdays 12:30–3:15
DATES	Spring 2026
LOCATION	[confirm]
INSTRUCTOR	Nicholas Rock · with a teaching assistant · Visiting Critic Daria Nikolaeva (nikodesign.studio)
OFFICE	808 Commonwealth Ave — 406A
CONTACT	nickrock@bu.edu
OFFICE HOURS	By appointment — Tuesdays and Thursdays 10:30–12:30, Wednesdays 11:30–2:30 · fantastical.app/nick-kSSb/office-hours

01

Overview

Audience, Authorship, and the Practice of Design

This studio begins from a simple premise: designers are always authoring meaning.

Every decision you make — what to include, what to exclude, how to frame information, how you interpret constraints, which tools to use — shapes how work is understood, interpreted, and experienced. Design is not neutral. It organizes attention, communicates values, and influences behavior, whether intentionally or not.

This course asks you to begin to take responsibility for that authorship.

Across the semester, we will explore authorship not as personal style or self-expression, but as a practice of decision-making. You will examine how meaning is produced through interpretation, constraint, collaboration, and systems. You will work individually and in teams, move between quick experimentation and long-form thinking, and design for different audiences and contexts. Each project will ask you to author

meaning in a different way — and to reflect on how those decisions shape what others see, feel, and understand.

Audience, directly connected to authorship, is a core thread of the course. You will be asked not only *what* you are making, but *for whom*, or alternatively, you will consider how people may interpret your work. You will practice thinking beyond yourself and considering how design operates in the world.

This studio is not focused on producing polished portfolio projects — though it may. Instead, it emphasizes process, reflection, and growth. You will be expected to experiment, take risks, revise your thinking, and articulate your decisions clearly. Collaboration is treated as a core design skill, not an obstacle to individual voice. Through team-based work, you will learn how authorship shifts when ideas are shared, negotiated, and built together.

This course treats design as an ongoing practice — one shaped by curiosity, constraint, and collaboration. The goal is not to arrive at a singular design philosophy or style, but to develop the ability to ask better questions and to build work that is intentional, thoughtful, and responsible.

02

Learning Outcomes

You will leave this class with:

- a stronger sense of how you interpret and frame ideas
- greater confidence in making and defending design decisions
- experience navigating authorship across individual and collaborative contexts
- a deeper understanding of the relationship between designer and audience

---

03

Course Structure

Class as Community

I come into this class from a place of respect and trust, and I hope that you all do too.

We are a microcosm — of the department, the school, the university, and while small, we are still an incredibly diverse community. Our cohort includes students from all sorts of geographies, backgrounds, and experiences.

Our class is inclusive and accessible — We come from different places, backgrounds, and walks of life. We embrace the unique identities of each member of this community and commit to learning, growing, and understanding each other through historical contexts of race, gender, religion, sexuality, and other expressions of self.

I understand that your trust is earned — I am committed to helping you grow and learn and change or solidify your perspective and knowledge in design, and I am committed to learning from you. I will ensure that our class is a safe space to teach and learn, as I see all of us working in both capacities.

We will explore diverse content — I am working to ensure that this course represents a vast range of perspectives, ideas, topics, people, and cultures through what I will provide and what I hope you all will bring to the conversation. I will also strive to elevate your voices in this class through the project work and the conversation.

We will be flexible, patient, and understanding — I made a syllabus and a schedule of projects. I will shift and adjust the work and the due dates to adapt to our class. There is understandable uncertainty coming into this semester. Let's commit to the experience and see where it takes us.

Working Groups

This semester, you will be organized into groups of 3–4 students. The groups will be used to structure class meetings to make the best use of in-studio time, and to create a design team structure that mirrors how you might work in a real-world environment.

Class Structure

Classes will be a mixture of mini-lectures, discussions, individual and small groups, and full-class meetings, critiques, and presentations.

Weekly Homework — Noticing Journal

Weekly · prompted through Basecamp

> People talk in a precious way about genius, creativity, and curiosity as superpowers that people are born with but noticing is a more humble pursuit. Noticing is something we can all do. —Jason Kottke

What things have you found or looked at or thought of this week? Something you want to do next, what inspired you, what did you hate.

Playlists

Each group is responsible for making a playlist for the week — make a shared playlist and create the cover art.

04 Projects

1. I Love / I Hate 2026
2. Makers' Lab 2026
3. Catalog of Influences

05

Assessment

Evaluation Criteria

- **Engagement + Participation.** This course functions as a learning community. Active participation in discussion, critique, and studio work is essential. Attendance matters, as studio dialogue and critique cannot be replicated outside of class. If you must miss a class, communicate with me or the TA as early as possible.
- **Project Execution.** Projects must be completed in accordance with the brief and submitted on time. Emphasis is placed on the seriousness of effort, clarity of intent, and responsiveness to feedback across the semester.
- **Process & Documentation.** Students are expected to document research, sketches, writing, experiments, iterations, and decision-making. Process materials are evaluated with the same level of care as final outcomes.
- **Professionalism.** Professional conduct includes respectful communication, accountability, preparedness, and care in giving and receiving feedback. This course is a space to practice professional design behavior.
- **Group Work.** Design is inherently collaborative. Students will be evaluated on their ability to contribute meaningfully to group work, communicate effectively, and navigate shared authorship responsibly.

07

Materials & Tools

Things You Need

Basic design kit for you to function in the class. This is my basic list. If you are a nerd about what tech and supplies people use, check out usesthis.com.

The essentials

- Laptop
- Flash drive
- Camera
- Sketchbook + something to write with
- X-Acto knife + extra blades
- Bone folder
- A flatfile drawer
- A sense of humor

Recommended

- Music
- Coffee, tea, water, or other sustenance is welcome here
- A projector adapter
- A tripod
- Gaffer tape

- Bookbinding materials

Required Reading

- Tejada, Ramon, et al. *The Decolonizing, or puncturing, Design Reader.* An in-progress, collaborative project since 2018 started by Ramon Tejada with collaboration by many, many people (thanks to all who have contributed). There have been many anonymous contributors as well as many friends and students who have engaged in conversations and shared knowledge.

Suggested Reading

- *Extra Bold: A Feminist, Inclusive, Antiracist, Nonbinary Field Guide for Graphic Designers.*
- Monteiro, Mike. *Ruined by Design: How Designers Destroyed the World, and What We Can Do to Fix It.*
- Walker, Rob. *The Art of Noticing: 131 Ways to Spark Creativity, Find Inspiration, and Discover Joy in the Everyday.*

Software + Services

It goes without saying that you will need to have access to Adobe Creative Cloud if you don't already. I don't expect this to be an issue but wanted to be sure. That said, I think it is obnoxious that our industry is so reliant on prohibitively expensive design software from one giant corporation so I encourage you to explore alternatives to the Adobe software. Experiment with something new. Here are some good tools: Keynote, Pixelmator, Sketch, Procreate, Cinema4d, Figma, Miro.

We will be using a project management tool used by professionals in the design industry called Basecamp, to consolidate class communications. You all will have access to our Basecamp site after the first class; this will act as a central portal for class discussion outside of class as well as a digital library of class resources, such as this syllabus, project briefs, certain readings as well as our class calendar.

You MUST have a backup solution in place after the first week. I recommend Backblaze.