

University of Washington Fall Quarter 2006

Course:	How to create and manage ideas (COM 597)
Instructor:	Scott Berkun
Class time:	6-10 p.m
Classroom:	Savery 243
Office Hours:	By appointment
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Course Descriptions and Objectives

The success of any creative work depends not only on the ability to find good ideas, but on the skills for developing, managing and presenting those ideas to others. This course will explore different techniques for finding and developing ideas (such as brainstorming, improvisation games, and whiteboard techniques), and apply them in common project and professional situations, such as presenting design briefs to potential clients, pitching ideas to peers or superiors, and winning design or creative debates with others. Readings and assignments will pull from cross discipline examples including digital media, architecture, web design, film production and others.

Course goals:

- Practice with idea generation techniques
- Understand how (design) decisions are made in organizations
- Learn how landmark ideas were developed
- Learn how to manage the creative process
- Gain practice with idea politics, group dynamics and creative momentum

Deliverables:

- Creation of mindmaps, storyboards and other in class exercises
- A written design brief on an idea developed during the course
- Creating and maintaining an idea journal during the course
- 5, 30, and 120 second pitches given to the class
- Participation in group critiques, debates and readings
- Paper on the history of a famous design, invention or idea

Course Structure and Requirements

Class time will emphasize discussion and student participation as four hours is a long time to do just about anything. Learning from each other will be an important part of the course and in-class time will be made as interactive as possible, applying many of the ideas and techniques covered in the course on the course itself.

Required Readings

They all laughed, Ira Flatow, Harper Paperbacks; ISBN 0060924152
101 Problem solving techniques, James Higgins, New Management Publishing 1994.
ISBN: 1-883629-00-4

Exams

There will be no midterm or final exams (unless you provoke the instructor to inflict them upon you).

Grading

Paper on the history of an idea	25%
Written design brief	20%
Dry run presentation	5%
Final presentation	20%
Class Participation	20%
Idea Journal	10%

Final Grade

Your final grade will be based on the total points received. The following is the scale used to determine the final grade:

90 points and above	= 4.0
81-89 points	= 3.0
71-80 points	= 2.0
61-70 points	= 1.0
60 points and below	= Fail

Policy on Late Papers and Incompletes

No papers and assignments will be accepted after the deadlines. The instructor will not give incompletes except under exceptional circumstances.

Communication with the Instructor

Please feel free to e-mail me with thoughts and questions. Office hours are negotiable.

Class Participation

We'll be doing many exercises and games during class, creating easy opportunities for participation. If you really don't want to ask questions, participate, or get involved during class, this might not be the class for you. If absolutely necessary you can choose to express your opinions outside of class: comments should address what you agree or disagree with regarding experiences in class or solutions to issues raised.

Idea Journal

One major goal of the course is to improve your understanding of your own creative process. The idea journal assignment is to keep a journal (physical preferred, but digital is allowed) with you as much as possible during the quarter, and write down any ideas you have, at any time, about anything, anywhere. This is an easy way to help you become aware of your own creative process, and provide a simple way to return to them later. The journals will be handed in late in the semester and graded primarily on volume, not quality. Sketching, drawing, doodling, diagramming, even caricatures of other students or instructors, or use of other techniques, including, but not limited to, those discussed in class is encouraged.

You will be required to bring your idea journal with you to class each week.

Paper on history of an idea

The problems of developing new ideas are based heavily on human nature. Therefore understanding the challenges faced by previous ideas can help creative thinkers today by giving a basis for comparison and models to reference. This assignment will involve you choosing a significant invention, innovation or product, and writing a paper that covers 1) how the idea was conceived, including motivating factors for the creators. 2) The challenges the creators faced in developing the idea, including any organizational, financial, political or personal challenges. 3) Analysis of key events and decisions made the idea successful or a failure. 4) A thorough analysis, including positive and negative aspects of the development of the idea in question, of what can be learned and applied to creative thinking for other ideas. Paper should be 8-12 pages in length (~6000 words).

Elevator pitch & Design brief

A critical part of creative work is presenting ideas to others. You will grow your experience with both conceiving ideas and expressing them by developing a written design brief for a concept and presenting an elevator pitch for the idea to the class. This concept can be related to your work, an idea for a small business or software start-up, a pitch for a feature length film, anything (but remember, you will be graded

primarily on the quality of the brief and pitch, not the idea itself). The design brief will be no longer than two pages in length and must establish: the goals for the idea, the problem you're trying to solve, the core elements of your solution, and an example (sketch, wireframe, model, photo, etc.) or prototype that illustrates the concept.

Based on your design brief, you will develop a 5 second, 30 second and 2 minute presentation, the actual pitches. The goal is to present your idea in a maximally compelling way in a several different, but limited spans of time. There will be two elevator pitch sessions during the course: a dry run and a final presentation. Students will receive feedback from the class (using critiquing techniques covered during the course) and the instructor for improving the pitch for the final version.

In Class Assignments

Every week we will do one or more exercises exploring idea generation, communication and decision making techniques. You will work in different ways, from competitive groups, to working alone, to working as a class together to solve a problem. In some cases you won't fully understand what you're doing until it's done.

Class Schedule:

Week One – 9/27

Defusing Idea myths

Topics discussed: Course overview / Q&A about assignments. Genius and creativity myths. The history of looking around, Chicken 50 ways / improvisation games, Observation exercise, Idea Journal intro. Common misnomers about idea generation. Historic examples of how great ideas in history were conceived.

Readings:

None

Assignments due:

None

Week Two – 10/4

Idea Generation

Show / tell / play with different methods. Identifying problems, Lists, Sketching, Mindmaps, Journals, Index cards, Storyboards, Think-pak / IDEO Cards, Post it notes, whiteboards, prototyping and the kitchen sink.

Readings due:

1. 101 Problem solving techniques, Chapter 4. pg 60-90

2. They all laughed, Chapters 1 & 2

3. <http://www.3m.com/about3m/pioneers/fry.jhtml>

Assignments due:

Bring idea journal

Week Three – 10/11

The History of ideas

Learning from the history of the development of Post-it notes, Light-bulbs, the Internet and New Coke. Case studies with breakdowns of: the business, political, creative and technical challenges the ideas faced and overcame (or didn't).

Readings:

1. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/New_Coke

2. http://www.gladwell.com/2002/2002_05_27_a_televisionary.htm

3. They all laughed, Chapters 3, 4 & 6

Assignments due:

1. Bring idea journal

2. Pick topic for your pitch / brief

3. Pick topic for your research paper

Week Four – 10/18

How to Critique ideas

What makes criticism constructive or destructive? Who is responsible for making critiques useful? What good critics do and why they do it. How to accept criticism. Ground rules for group critiques. The reasons why debates become unfair and how to avoid them. How to lead and participate in a good creative debate. Techniques for critiquing ideas alone.

Readings:

1. <http://www.scottberkun.com/essays/essay23.htm>
2. <http://www.scottberkun.com/essays/essay35.htm>
3. http://www.gladwell.com/2000/2000_10_30_a_pitchman.htm
4. Chapters 7 & 8

Assignments due:

1. Bring idea journal

Week Five - 10/25

Pitch & Persuasion: part 1

Design brief / Elevator pitch

Class time will be spent on watching dry runs of student pitches.

Topics we'll cover in critique: What makes an idea compelling? How do you distinguish between the value of an idea and how it is presented to you? The role of spin. Dissecting good presentations: materials, practice and performance. The differences between sales, passion and persuasion. The history of persuasion in creative ideas (case studies).

Readings:

1. <http://www.scottberkun.com/essays/essay38.htm>
2. They all laughed, Chapters 9 & 10

Assignments due:

1. Be prepared to do your 5/30/120 pitches.
2. Bring idea journal.

Week Six - 11/1

Generating ideas with others

The difference between group idea generation and solo. What are the new challenges? Benefits, if any? What are common roles in group idea generation. The risks of committees and groupthink. Six thinking Hats (DeBono), Affinity diagrams, brainstorming sessions, mind-writing, focus groups. Idea politics and social dynamics.

- Readings:
1. 101 Problem solving techniques, Chapter 5.
 2. They all laughed, Chapters 11 & 12.

Assignments due: 1. Written design/idea brief

Week Seven - 11/8

The politics of ideas

Anyone who's tried to run with a great idea knows that there is more to succeeding with an idea than the quality of the idea itself. What are idea politics? What role do they play in how ideas are developed, used, or ignored?

- Readings:
1. They all laughed, Chapters 13 & 14.

Week Eight 11/15

Managing the creative process

How is managing creative work different from other work? What good managers do. Ways to think about the creative process (and their pros and cons). The leadership role in managing process. Balancing new ideas with delivering on old ideas.

- Readings:
1. The art of project management, Chapter 6: What to do with ideas once you have them.
 2. They all laughed, Chapters 15 & 16.

Assignments due:

Week Nine 11/22

No Class - Thanksgiving

Week Ten 11/29

Decision making

When and how do ideas convert from the abstract into the tangible? What decisions are necessary in an organization (or a person's own mind) to make an idea real? We'll explore different ways to evaluate ideas, different levels of decision making and study the decision process used in creative organizations.

- Readings:
1. Art of project management, Chapter 8: How to make good decisions.
 2. They all laughed, Chapters 17 & 18

Assignments due:

1. Paper due on the history of an idea.

Week 11 – 12/6 (Last week)

Pitch and persuasion: part 2

Design brief & Elevator pitch

Second and final round of in class elevator pitches.

Readings:

1. They all laughed, Chapters 19 & 22.

Assignments due:

1. Final elevator pitches