ART 424 Topics in Web, Interaction and Screen Design: PHP and WordPress

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Abbreviated Syllabus

Catalog Description
Exploration of concepts and technologies in web, interaction and screen design.

Course Objectives & Learning Outcomes
- experiment with dynamic web pages through server-side scripting (PHP)
- explore Content Management Systems (WordPress)
- learn the basics of databases (MySQL)
- refine design skills (navigation, interface, information hierarchy, usability)
- strengthen CSS knowledge base and refine CSS skills
- develop compelling content for the web (client-based and/or creative)

Course Description

PHP and WordPress is a course that introduces students to the technology behind WordPress, the world’s pre-eminent free and open-source content management system. Two-thirds or more of the websites on the internet are built with WordPress. In a nutshell, WordPress lets you create, edit, and customize complex and professional websites with a powerful web-based interface. The UWM website is run using WordPress. WordPress is free and open source.

In this course, we’ll get an introduction to the server-side scripting language that gives WordPress its power: PHP. We’ll also learn to interact with databases (how WordPress stores all the information in that is input into a WP site) using MySQL. We’ll get under the hood and learn about how WordPress themes work, and even build our own.

Anyone who wants the tools to build a professional and customizable portfolio site, or to do freelance web design, really needs to understand WordPress.

The prerequisite for this course is ART 324 Web Design, so it is expected that students already have a strong understanding of HTML and CSS, semantic and structural markup, as well as issues of usability, information design and screen design. This is because PHP server-side scripting is embedded in HTML documents, and is used to generate HTML for web pages. **You must have taken ART 324 Web Design, an equivalent course, or have equivalent experience, to be successful in this course.**
Don't worry if you feel your HTML and CSS skills are a bit rusty. There will be opportunities to strengthen and expand these skills at the beginning of the semester.

Most class time will be spent on lectures and technical demonstrations, and will include opportunities to complete short, in-class exercises. Each larger design project will also have in-class critiques scheduled.

Coursework will consist of exercises and projects that teach technical skills as well as creative and effective design. There will also be some assigned reading (provided) to explore issues in technology, communication and internet culture. There will be several short quizzes on Canvas.

We'll be using lynda.com/linkedin learning tutorials for most of the technical support for the course content.

Workload Statement

In ART 424 PHP and WordPress you can expect the following workload:

Time in class: 5hrs/week x 15 weeks = approx. 75 hours
Time spent on non-collaborative work outside of class (studying, watching videos, reading, doing homework, doing projects): approx 105 hours

Total estimated workload of class = approximately 180 hours (12 hours per week estimate)

This estimated workload is, of course, only an estimate, and time investment will neither be evenly distributed throughout the semester nor will everyone’s time investment be equal. There are many factors at play. It is also important to understand that you will be evaluated on the quality of the work you turn it, and not on the number of hours you spend on that work, although there is a correlation between time investment and successful outcomes.

Canvas

We will be using Canvas quite a lot in this class. Your exercises, project briefs, video tutorial assignments, test study prompts and other information will be posted on Canvas. You will also turn in most work, submit proposals and respond to feedback on Canvas. Your grades and project feedback will be in the Canvas gradebook. You must check our Canvas announcements page before each class and throughout the week. You are responsible for all the information that is posted on the Canvas site.

This is our first semester using Canvas for this course, so there may be some growing pains as we figure out the way in which this environment can help augment our learning experience.

Assignments
Coursework will consist of one reading/writing project, 2 large stand-alone web site projects (one focused on scripting, one focused on WordPress), a series of scored technical Mini-Projects, several short quizzes, numerous in-class exercises and ongoing required coding homework (described above). Each project has a detailed project brief. Exercises (both in-class and out-of-class) will have instructions either in the body of the exercise itself, or in an accompanying readme file.

The Class Community

You and your classmates constitute a community. You all bring your own unique experiences, knowledge and viewpoints to the community. It is crucial that everyone participates in the community (during critiques and discussions, for example), and supports its ecology. With that in mind, you must arrive to class on time, come prepared for the day’s activities, focus your full, undivided attention during all lectures/discussions: turn off cellphones and other hand-held electronics. You must also be willing and able to collaborate with your classmates, and share your knowledge with others.

Required Materials/Supplies/Books

- note-taking equipment (recommend a notebook dedicated to this course)
- desktop server: MAMP (Links to an external site), XAMPP (Links to an external site) or AMPPS (Links to an external site)
- FTP client (Filezilla (Links to an external site) is recommended; you want the "client," not "server," and you do NOT need "pro")

OPTIONAL

- domain name
- web host with PHP capabilities (see links page for possible hosting services). You only need this if you would like to keep the work you do live beyond the end of the semester, since SOIS will deactivate your account at the end of May.

We will be using the LAMP environment set up by SOIS for student work. However, I recommend that students consider acquiring a domain name and hosting account, because you only have access to the SOIS web space until the end of spring semester.