

Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur
Proposal for a New Course

1. Course No: DES6XX

2. Course Title: **Design Semiotics and Communication Theory**

3. Per Week Lectures: 3 (L), 0 (T), 0 (P), 0 (A)

Credits ($3 \times L + 2 \times T + P + A$): 9

Duration of Course: Full Semester

4. Proposing Department/IDP: Department of Design

Other Departments/IDPs which may be interested: HSS

Proposing Instructor(s): Subhajit Chandra

5. Course Description:

Semiotics and Communication Theory examines how meaning is created, communicated and interpreted through signs, symbols, language and visual representations. The course introduces fundamental concepts of semiotics and semantics, followed by major communication models and their relevance to design. It explores how perception, culture, emotion and experience influence the interpretation of products, images and messages. Through lectures, visual analysis, case studies and studio exercises, students learn to apply theoretical concepts into design and develop a critical understanding of communication in everyday life and professional practices.

6. Objectives

The course aims to develop an understanding of semiotics, semantics and communication processes, with particular attention to their application in design. The objectives are to:

1. Understand the fundamental concepts of semiotics, including signs, signification and the construction of meaning.
2. Study communication models and examine their relevance to visual communication.
3. Understand the influence of perception, culture, emotion and context on the interpretation of signs and messages.
4. Examine how meaning is developed and communicated through products, images and interactive experiences.
5. Apply semiotic methods and communication theories to analyse and develop designs.

7. Contents (preferably in 5–10 broad titles)

S. No	Lecture Module	Descriptions *	No. of Classes
1	Module 1	Introduction to Semiotics and Basic Concepts: This module introduces semiotics and semantics, covering sign, signifier and signified, the arbitrariness of signs, paradigm and syntagm, denotation and connotation, and Peirce's classification of icons, indexes and symbols; Categorisation, Natural Language and meaning in design, Prototypes, Category boundaries and the relationship.	10
2	Module 2	Structuralism, Post Structuralism and Semantic Perception: This module examines how meaning emerges through relationships between signs and how interpretation varies across contexts. It explores semantic perception, emotion as a semantic construct, affective components in products and visuals, and the relationship between interactive experience and cognition.	6
3	Module 3	Semantic Modelling and Transfer in Design: This module explores semantic constructs in design, fuzzy based modelling and the interpretation of products, visuals and interactive experiences. Students will examine how concepts are translated into visual forms through shape, colour, image, material and composition.	8
4	Module 4	Communication Theory and Fundamental Models: This module introduces communication theories in design, examining communication as the transmission and interpretation of messages through the sender, message, channel, receiver, context and feedback. Aristotle's model, the Shannon and Weaver model, and the distinction between technical and semantic noise.	6
5	Module 5	Communication Models and Their Application to Design: This module examines Lasswell's model, Westley and MacLean's model, and Wendell Johnson's approach to communication, focusing on audience, mediation, perception, language and interpretation. Students will compare communication models and apply them to graphic design, advertising and visual information.	6

* Studio hours will be used to work on the assignments/projects as needed.

Pre-requisites:

None. Basic familiarity with design processes and the principles of visual design is desirable.

Learning Outcomes:

Upon successful completion of the course, students will be able to:

- Identify and interpret signs, symbols and relationships that contribute to the construction of meaning.
- Explain major communication models and analyse their relevance to different communication situations. Further they can apply the same in design processes.
- Examine how perception, culture, emotion and context influence the interpretation of meaning in products, images and messages.
- Develop and present design solutions supported by an understanding of meaning, audience and communication context.

Assessment Criteria and Weightage:

- End Semester Exam: 10%
- Assignments: 50%
- Presentations: 20%
- Project: 20%

8. Short Summary for Course Booklet

This course explores how signs, symbols and communication processes create meaning in design. Students will study semiotic concepts, communication models and the influence of perception, culture and emotion on interpretation. Through visual analysis, case studies and studio projects, they will learn to apply these theories to products, graphic design, branding and interactive experiences.

9. References:

1. Athavankar, U. A. (1989). Categorization... Natural language and design. *Design Issues*, 5(2), 100–111.
2. Chandler, D. (2017). *Semiotics: The Basics* (3rd ed.). Routledge.
3. Csikszentmihalyi, M. (1990). *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*. Harper and Row.
4. Dalglish, T., & Power, M. J. (Eds.). (1999). *Handbook of Cognition and Emotion*. John Wiley and Sons.
5. Krippendorff, K. (2005). *The Semantic Turn: A New Foundation for Design*. CRC Press.
6. McLuhan, M. (1964). *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. McGraw Hill.

7. Meggs, P. B. (1992). Type and Image: The Language of Graphic Design. Van Nostrand Reinhold.
8. Patnaik, P. (1997). Rasa in Aesthetics. D. K. Printworld.

10. Any other remarks

The course combines theoretical discussions with practical exercises, case studies and studio projects. Students will examine how signs and messages operate in different social and cultural settings and how design decisions influence interpretation. The practical component will encourage students to use semiotic methods and communication models in their design process, connecting theoretical understanding with the analysis and development of visual and interactive communication.

Dated:_____ Proposer:_____

Dated:_____ DUGC/DPGC Convener:_____

The course is approved / not approved

Chairman, SUGC/SPGC

Dated:_____