

Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Proposal for a New Course

1. Course No: DES6XX

2. Course Title: **History of Design – I**

3. Per Week Lectures: 1 (L), 0 (T), 1 (P), 0 (A)

Credits ($3 \times L + 2 \times T + P + A$): 5

Duration of Course: Half Semester

4. Proposing Department/IDP: Department of Design

Other Departments/IDPs which may be interested: HSS

Proposing Instructor(s): Subhajit Chandra

5. Course Description:

The history of design traces the evolution of human creativity and problem-solving across different eras, from prehistoric times to Renaissance design. It examines diverse design processes aimed at enhancing human life, society, and the environment, thereby contributing to our overall progress. Additionally, it highlights key design achievements and movements, emphasizing their impact on significant cultural and technological advancements in the field.

6. Objectives

- To trace the evolution of design, how design has developed across different eras, from prehistoric times to the Renaissance.
- To analyse cultural and historical influences, how social, political, and technological contexts have shaped design.
- To inspire innovation and informed practice, enabling designers to build upon historical knowledge and apply principles to their designs.

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

S. No	Lecture Module	Descriptions	No. of Classes
1	Module 1	Foundations: What is Design? Heskett's definition of design as human capacity to shape the environment. Design as activity, object, and environment.	2
2	Module 2	Understanding design as a system of intentional decision-making. The role of the human mind, hand, and senses in design.	2

3	Module 3*	Origins of Human Making: Early hominid tool use and the emergence of design capability. The hand as the first design tool. Natural objects adapted as implements. The progression from found objects to crafted forms.	2
4	Module 4*	Abstraction, Form, and Innovation: Moving beyond nature's models. The role of abstraction in extending design beyond immediate problem-solving.	2
5	Module 5	Egypt: Design as Civilizational Practice. Design for power and ritual in Egypt. Hieroglyphics and early graphic communication. The role of architecture as designed environment. Pottery, metalwork, and textile design in ancient societies.	2
6	Module 6	Ancient Greece and Rome: Proportion and Function: Greek ideals of proportion and harmony. Rome: The Colosseum, aqueducts, and civic infrastructure.	2
7	Module 7	Design traditions from ancient China and India, Cross-cultural exchange of design knowledge.	1
8	Module 8	Early Medieval Design: Craft, Faith, and the Guild System: The decline of the Roman world and the reorganization of craft production. Workshops as sites of design innovation. Guild structures and quality standards. Manuscript illumination as graphic design.	2
9	Module 9*	Gothic Design: Structure, Symbol, and Civic Identity. The Gothic cathedral as environmental design. Structural innovation in medieval architecture.	2
10	Module 10*	The Renaissance: Humanism, Perspective and the Designers. The rediscovery of classical ideals and the emergence of the individual designer. The idea of the designer intellectual. Perspective of design and representational tool. The impact of printing on the circulation of design knowledge.	2
11	Module 11	The Renaissance continues: from Craft to Commerce. The transition from production to entrepreneurial design. Drawings and models as instruments of design specification.	1

* Studio sessions are part of these modules. The studio hours will be used to work on the assignments/projects.

Pre-requisites:

None

Learning Outcomes:

- Understanding design evolution – Students will be able to trace the development of design processes, movements, and techniques across different historical eras.
- Critical thinking and analysis – Students will be able to analyse and critique designs from various historical periods.
- Inspiration and creativity – Students will be able to draw upon diverse historical design approaches and narratives to inspire innovative thinking, applying insights from the past to generate new concepts.

Assessment Criteria and Weightage:

- Semester Exam: 60%
- Assignments: 40%

8. Short Summary for Course Booklet

This course traces design from prehistoric tools to Renaissance thought, examining it as activity, object, and environment. Drawing on John Heskett's framework, students explore what design truly is and how social, cultural, and technological forces have shaped it across civilizations. The course builds a historically grounded, critically aware foundation for design practice and inquiry.

9. References:

1. 'The Story of Design: From the Paleolithic to the Present' by Charlotte and Peter Fiell, The Monacelli Press, 2016.
2. 'World History of Design' by Victor Margolin, Volume I and II, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015.
3. 'Design: A Very Short Introduction' by John Heskett, Oxford Academic, 2005.
4. 'The Design History Reader' Edited by Grace Lees-Maffei and Rebecca Houze, Part I and II, Bloomsbury Publishing India Private Limited, 2010.

10. Any other remarks

The course adopts a hybrid structure of lectures (major focus) and studios (design practice) to develop observation and creativity.

Dated:_____ Proposer:_____

Dated:_____ DUGC/DPGC Convener:_____

The course is approved / not approved

Chairman, SUGC/SPGC

Dated:_____