

Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur

Proposal for a New Course

1. Course No: DES6XX

2. Course Title: **Metaphor as Design Method: Culture, Cognition and Practice**

3. Per Week Lectures: 1 (L), 1 (T), 4 (P), 0 (A)

Credits ($3 \times L + 2 \times T + 4P + 0A$): 9

Duration of Course: Full Semester

4. Proposing Department/IDP: Department of Design

Other Departments/IDPs which may be interested: HSS, Cognitive Science, CSE, Mechanical, Electrical

5. Proposing Instructor(s): Nilutpal Borgohain

6. Course Description:

This course presents metaphor as a practical design tool for understanding and shaping meaning in everyday artefacts and systems. It emphasises how embodied experience and cultural patterns influence interpretation across areas such as interaction, product, and communication design. Through observation, guided interpretation, and studio-based exploration, students learn to approach design as a process of meaning-making rather than just form creation.

A key part of the course is an iterative design framework where students initially respond to a design problem using their intuition and then revisit the same problem with structured metaphorical reasoning, fostering reflection on how their design approach evolves.

A) Objectives

1. To develop the ability to identify and analyse metaphorical structures in everyday environments and designed artefacts.
2. To understand how embodied experience and cultural context shape meaning in design.
3. To apply metaphorical reasoning as a systematic approach in the development of design solutions across domains.

4. To critically evaluate design outcomes through reflective comparison and iterative refinement.

B) Contents (preferably in 5–10 broad titles)

S. No	Broad Title	Topics	No. of L
1	Introduction to Meaning in Design	Meaning-making in design; examples from UI/UX, product, communication and spatial design	1
2	Foundations of Metaphor (Design-Oriented)	Conceptual metaphors (introductory), embodiment, everyday cognition (non-theoretical overview)	2
3	Baseline Design Exercise	Initial design task based on intuitive understanding; articulation of implicit assumptions	1
4	Observing Metaphors in Everyday Contexts	Field documentation: images, videos, interfaces, objects; identifying recurring patterns	2
5	Cultural and Contextual Dimensions	Variation of metaphors across contexts; cultural grounding of meaning	2
6	Mapping and Analysis of Metaphors	Identifying structures such as centrality, hierarchy, containment, flow, and diagramming meaning	2
7	Metaphors in Existing Design Systems	Interface metaphors, product semantics, visual hierarchy, interaction patterns	2
8	Translation into Design	Converting metaphor into design principles, concepts and frameworks	2
9	Iterative Re-Design Exercise	Revisiting baseline project using explicit metaphorical reasoning; comparative analysis	2
10	Final Design Project	Concept development, iterative prototyping, critique and refinement	2

C) Pre-requisites:

None (Basic familiarity with design processes is desirable)

D) Short Summary for Course Booklet

This course explores metaphor as a key mechanism for creating meaning in design. Students learn to recognise metaphorical structures present in everyday life and adapt them into design solutions across areas such as interaction, product, and communication design. Through observation, analysis, and iterative design tasks, the course promotes a structured approach to designing with intention.

7. Recommended Books

Textbooks

1. Lakoff, George & Johnson, Mark. *Metaphors We Live By*. University of Chicago Press, 1980 (Updated edition: 2003).
2. Norman, Don. *The Design of Everyday Things*. MIT Press, 2013 (Revised and expanded edition).

Reference Books

1. Jörn Hurtienne, et al. *Happy Is Up, Sad Is down: 65 Metaphors for Design*. BIS Publishers, 2020.
2. Forceville, Charles & Urios-Aparisi, Eduardo (eds.). *Multimodal Metaphor*. De Gruyter Mouton, 2009.
3. Forceville, Charles. *Pictorial Metaphor in Advertising*. Routledge, 2002.
4. Krippendorff, Klaus. *The Semantic Turn: A New Foundation for Design*. Taylor & Francis, 2006.
5. Edited by Hendrik N. Schifferstein and Paul Hekkert. *Product Experience*. Elsevier, 2007.
6. Johnson, Mark. *The Body in the Mind: The Bodily Basis of Meaning, Imagination, and Reason*. University of Chicago Press, 1987.
7. McCloud, Scott. *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art*. HarperCollins, 1994.
8. Berger, John. *Ways of Seeing*. Penguin Classics, 2008.

9. Armstrong, Helen (ed.). *Graphic Design Theory: Readings from the Field*.
Princeton Architectural Press, 2009.

8. Any other remarks

The course adopts a hybrid structure of lectures (conceptual grounding), tutorials (guided interpretation), and studios (design application) to support a three-stage learning process: observation, analysis, and translation.

Dated: _____ Proposer: _____

Dated: _____ DUGC/DPGC Convener: _____

The course is approved / not approved

Chairman, SUGC/SPGC

Dated: _____