

WINTER
2026

SYLLABUS
VISUAL COMMUNICATION
FOR PLANNING

DETAILS

Nohad A. Toulan School of Urban Studies and Planning

USP 573-001: Visual Communication for Planning

Dates: *January 6 through March 10, 2026*

Day / Time: *Tuesdays 530-850p*

Location: *Karl Miller Center - Room 245*

OVERVIEW + OBJECTIVES

Visual communication in urban planning is a necessary and expected means of developing and expressing ideas and outcomes to a broad audience. Professional planners, designers, elected officials, and community members alike benefit from evocative, legible graphics, illustrations, animations, and other products.

Whether a diagram depicting a project schedule, a rendering showing a proposed future development, or an adopted graphic such as a code illustration or master plan, visuals have unique power to convey ideas and recommendations. In this class, we will introduce you to a range of planning visuals and the graphic techniques used to create them. We will use class time each week to present examples, critique student work, and give you the foundational skills and starting point(s) you will need for each assignment.

INSTRUCTOR

- Matthew Arnold, Western Planning Director, Toole Design Group
Email: PSUGraphics2019@gmail.com
Back-Up Email: arnold24@pdx.edu

CLASS STRUCTURE

This course is designed to lightly ~mimic your responsibilities as a professional planner. Imagine that you have recently been hired at a planning firm working in land use, transportation, and/or urban design. You will use your newly-acquired graphics skills to work through a “project,” developing graphics and a final Executive Summary (i.e., a well-designed document containing all your work from this course).

Each student will either use one of the provided geographies or select a geography within the Metro Urban Growth Boundary (UGB) for which to produce related graphics. Your geography should span several scales: individual site → surrounding district or main street → broader

neighborhood. Pick an area - *other than Ladd's Addition* - that you find interesting and with interesting aspects to depict. (We'll talk more about this during Week 1.)

You will produce a set of deliverables over this course (detailed below). Each deliverable is typical of many different planning projects and will allow you to build your skillset. In professional planning studios, assignments are given internal draft deadlines to allow for review and revision before sending to a client; your instructor will serve as your project manager and will conduct formal reviews. You will also be consulting with your classmates for advice and feedback.

You will submit draft products every week for review; these drafts will not be graded, but will be critiqued by your classmates and marked up by your instructor for your consideration. Your first draft of each assignment must be submitted within one (1) week of the assignment being made; specific due dates are listed below. You may submit a product for review as many times as you like - the instructor will strive to provide you comments within three (3) business days. **Please maintain all draft products and written comments in your deck** (see below) **for the duration of the course** as your progress / improvement is key to your success.

You will not be graded until the end of the course when your final products are submitted. **Final deliverables are due by 5pm on Wednesday 3/18/26.**

CLASS SCHEDULE

Class will meet a total of ten (10) times - once per week over the term. Generally, we will use the first portion of class for a lecture / instruction - presenting graphic examples, discussing production methods, and preparing you for your weekly assignment. The second portion of each class will contain a critique session, wherein *all of us* will critique student work, offer feedback, and explore other graphic opportunities. As time allows, your instructor will also be available to answer software and technique-related questions.

OFFICE HOURS

Your instructor will be available by request to discuss questions / concerns you have on assignments and techniques (via Zoom / Teams / Meet / phone / in-person).

SOFTWARE

This class will leverage your skills in the typical range of software programs used to create professional planning graphics. We do not have time to explore or instruct in full depth all the tools offered by these programs (or, for that matter, all available programs). We understand that this class may be your first exposure to using these software; while we will use ~some class time to provide very basic orientation and quick tips, ***the primary responsibility for learning any software will be yours.*** The core software we will be teaching to include: Google Slides, ArcGIS, and the Adobe Creative Suite (Illustrator, Photoshop, InDesign) - although you are welcome to use equivalent software with which you are familiar. We strongly encourage all class participants to watch the tutorials listed in this Appendix, and to find other online and printed resources.

- ArcGIS is available through PSU's Virtual Computer Lab [[HERE](#)].
- Adobe's Creative Suite can be licensed [[HERE](#)].

SESSIONS, ASSIGNMENTS, and GRADING

Each week in this class will focus on a key planning product. At the end of the course, your final assignments will be to formalize your work in a Slide Deck and produce an Executive Summary that contains all of your previous graphic material configured in a well-designed document.

*(Note: We will **not** be gauging the ‘accuracy’ of the graphics you produce, nor judging the merits of the planning ideas or concepts you put forth; rather, we will be evaluating your abilities to graphically depict them (and, importantly, the degree to which your graphic skills improve over the course).)* Classes and assignments (and the % they represent in your overall grade) are listed below.

WEEK 1: INTRODUCTION / BASE MAPS (1/6/26)

Lecture: Overview / Syllabus, Goals, Introduction, Base Maps (*Google Slides, Illustrator, GIS*)

Assignment: Gather Map Examples, Determine Study Area, Begin Tutorials, Ladd's Addition

- Begin software tutorials as necessary (see below).
- Place at least five (5) example maps into your slide deck with your thoughts included in the “Comments.” Due 1/13/26.
- Recreate (and augment) the Ladd's Addition Base Map from Class 1 using this Illustrator file: [[LINK](#)]. Due 1/13/26 (5%).
- Screenshot at least one map of the geography you've selected for your graphic study throughout the course - use Google Slide shapes/text tools to add preliminary observations. Due 1/13/26.
- Begin any basemap data sourcing and collection (if necessary) and production.

WEEK 2: BASE MAPS (1/13/26)

Lecture: How to Create a Base Map (*ArcGIS, Illustrator*)

Crit Session: Review of Gathered Maps and Ladd's Addition

Assignment: Base Map (10%)

- Continue software tutorials as necessary (see below).
- Produce neighborhood-scale Base Map. Due 1/20/26.

WEEK 3: HAND-DRAWN ASSESSMENTS & LYNCHIAN LEGIBILITY (1/20/26)

Lecture: Hand-Drawing in Plan View & Kevin Lynch's *Image of the City (Pen, Trace)*

Crit Session: Review Base Maps

Assignment: Hand-Drawn Neighborhood Assessments & Lynchian Legibility Diagram (10%)

- Create two hand-drawn assessments of your chosen geography. Due 1/27/26.
- Create one Lynchian Legibility assessment of your chosen geography. Due 1/27/26.
- See “Supplies” list below.

WEEK 4: OPPORTUNITIES + CONSTRAINTS DIAGRAM / DIGITAL (1/27/26)

Lecture: Evocative Digital Diagrams (*Illustrator*)

Crit Session: Review Hand-Drawn Lynchian Map and associated assessments

Assignment: Digital Opportunities + Constraints Diagram (10%)

- Create a digital O+C Diagram at site or neighborhood scale. Due 2/3/26.

WEEK 5: MASTER PLAN GRAPHICS / MIXED-MEDIA (2/3/26).

Lecture: Mixed-Media Storytelling Diagrams (*ArcGIS, Illustrator, Photoshop, Collage*)

Crit Session: Review Digital O+C Diagrams

Assignment: Mixed-Media Master Plan Graphic (5%)

- Create mixed-media Master Plan Graphic at neighborhood scale. Due 2/10/26.

WEEK 6: STREET CROSS-SECTIONS (2/10/26)

Lecture: Informative and Compelling Roadway Cross-Sections (*Street Mix, SketchUp, Photoshop, Illustrator*)

Crit Session: Review Mixed-Media Master Plan Graphic

Assignment: Roadway Cross-Sections (10%)

- Create two+ roadway cross-sections - existing and proposed - in 2D or 3D. Due 2/17/26.

WEEK 7: INFOGRAPHICS (2/17/26)

Lecture: A Very Basic Intro to Awesome InfoGraphics (*Illustrator, InDesign, Google Slides*)

Crit Session: Roadway Cross-Sections

Assignment: Draft InfoGraphic (10%)

- Create on 11x17 InfoGraphic for your Study Area. Due 2/24/26.

WEEK 8: DOCUMENT LAYOUT (2/24/26)

Lecture: Creating Clear Document Layouts (*InDesign, Google Slides*)

Crit Session: InfoGraphics

Assignment: Draft Executive Summary Layout (5%)

- Create an 8+ page draft layout for your Executive Summary at 8.5"x11" with one 11"x17" foldout. Export pages as images and drop them into your slide deck. Due 3/3/26.

WEEK 9: PROCESS GRAPHICS (3/3/26)

Lecture: Introduction to Process Graphics (*InDesign, Illustrator, Excel*)

Crit Session: Executive Summary Layouts

Assignment: Two process graphics (10%)

- Prepare both an Organizational Chart and a Planning Process Diagram. Due 3/10/26.

WEEK 10: CATCH-ALL / WRAP-UP (3/10/26)

Lecture: Next-Level Graphics

Crit Session: Process and/or Schedule Graphics

Assignment: Final Executive Summary & Slide Deck (15%)

- Finalize all graphics you have generated to-date and include in Final Executive Summary (8.5"x11" portrait layout with at least one 11"x17" spread or fold-out). Due as a *.PDF by 5p on Wednesday 3/18/26.

- Reformat and finalize your Slide Deck into a final presentation that contains all draft and final versions of your products with section dividers and presented in timeline order (earliest to final). This deck should have a title slide, table of content, and divider slides per assignment. Due by **5p on Wednesday 3/18/26**.

CLASS ATTENDANCE AND PARTICIPATION (10%)

Please come to class and submit your draft deliverable graphics on-time per the instructions listed below under Assignment Delivery. It is crucial that you attend each class to benefit from instruction, shared learning with your classmates, and critique of draft graphics. One explained class absence is permitted (but not recommended). 5% will be deducted from your grade for each unexplained absence.

GRADES

A+: 97-100, A: 93-96, A-: 90-92, B+: 87-89, B: 83-86, B-: 80-82, etc.

ASSIGNMENT DELIVERY

Students will use one cloud-based Google Slides deck to submit all assignments save for the Final Executive Summary:

- Each student will create a Google slide deck through which to submit their assignments. Doing so will give each student and the instructors a common location to store and comment on products.
 - Begin in [\[THIS DRIVE LOCATION\]](#). Here you will find a deck template, which you should copy. Rename your deck with your own name using the format “USP573_LastName-FirstName_Winter2026” and place it into the “2026 Student Decks” sub-folder.
 - Please share your deck and give “Edit” access to: PSUgraphics2019@gmail.com
 - Please allow “Comment” access for everyone else.
 - Place all weekly assignments (save for the final Executive Summary) in this deck, and have each assignment clearly labeled and separated from other assignments by a divider slide. (*Hint: This deck itself is a visual presentation and its layout is part of your Final Deliverables....*)
 - Please add any commentary or questions you have by using the ‘Comments’ function in Slides and tagging PSUgraphics2019@gmail.com.
 - Assignments are due in your personal deck by the start of class every Tuesday.
- Your final Executive Summary containing final versions of all the work you generated this term - should be emailed as a *.PDF to PSUgraphics2019@gmail.com by **5p on Wednesday 3/18/26**. Your Slide Deck should be completed by this time as well.

ACCESS AND INCLUSION FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

PSU values diversity and inclusion. Our goal with this course is to create a learning environment that is accessible, equitable, inclusive, and welcoming. We are committed to fostering mutual respect and full participation for all students. If any aspects of instruction or course design result in barriers to your inclusion or learning, please notify us. Additionally, the Disability Resource Center (DRC) provides reasonable accommodations for students who encounter barriers in the learning environment. The DRC works with students who have physical, learning, cognitive, mental health, sensory, and other disabilities. If you have, or think you may have, a disability that may affect your work in this class and feel you need accommodations, contact the Disability Resource Center to schedule an appointment and initiate a conversation about reasonable accommodations. If you already have accommodations, please contact us to make sure that we have received your faculty notification letter from the DRC so we can discuss your accommodations.

The DRC is located in 116 Smith Memorial Student Union, Suite 116. You can also contact the DRC at 503-725-4150 or, drc@pdx.edu. Visit the DRC online [[HERE](#)].

TITLE IX SUPPORT AND RESOURCES

Portland State is committed to providing an environment free of all forms of prohibited discrimination and sexual harassment (sexual assault, domestic and dating violence, and gender or sex-based harassment and stalking). If you have experienced any form of gender or sex-based discrimination or sexual harassment, know that help and support are available. Information about PSU's support services on campus, including confidential services and reporting options, can be found on PSU's Sexual Misconduct Prevention and Response [\[website\]](#) or you may find information for contacting or scheduling a confidential advocate [\[HERE\]](#). You may report any incident of discrimination or discriminatory harassment, including sexual harassment, to:

- Albert Roberson, Title IX Coordinator. titleixcoordinator@pdx.edu, Richard and Maureen Neuberger Center (RMNC), 1600 SW 4th Ave., Suite 830
- Taylor Burke, Deputy Title IX Coordinator and Dean of Students, 503.725.4422 | askdos@pdx.edu, Smith Memorial Student Union (SMSU), 825 SW Broadway, Suite 433

Please be aware that all PSU faculty members and instructors are required to report information of an incident that may constitute prohibited discrimination, including sexual harassment and sexual violence. This means that if you tell us about a situation of sexual harassment or sexual violence that may have violated university policy or student code of conduct, we have to share the information with my supervisor, the University's Title IX Coordinator or the Office of the Dean of Student Life. However, the Title IX Coordinators will keep the information confidential and refer you to a confidential advocate. For more information about Title IX please complete the required student module *Creating a Safe Campus*. More PSU resources [\[HERE\]](#).

SOFTWARE TUTORIALS

Below are just a few resources to help you learn software tools. You will also benefit from online searching for specific techniques and examples.

Adobe Illustrator

Adobe Tutorials: <https://helpx.adobe.com/illustrator/tutorials.html>

Beginner Intro: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AinkCNooh2A&ab_channel=MattBorchert

Specific Tools: <http://vectips.com/category/tutorials/>

Image to Vector:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gyLSZIbXI0g&ab_channel=GraphicDesignHowTo

Adobe Photoshop

Adobe Tutorials: <https://helpx.adobe.com/photoshop/tutorials.html>

Beginner Intro: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pFyOznL9UvA&ab_channel=AlecMarkarian

Adobe InDesign

Adobe Tutorials: <https://helpx.adobe.com/inDesign/tutorials.html>

Basics: <https://tutsplus.com/tutorials/search/beginner+indesign>

Sketchup

Basics: <https://help.sketchup.com/en/sketchup/getting-started-self-paced-tutorials>

Google Slides

Basic Setup: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kYA6GLazz9A>

NON-REQUIRED READING + RESOURCES

David Banis + Hunter Shobe, *Portlandness: A Cultural Atlas* (Sasquatch Books, 2015)

William G. Loy, *Atlas of Oregon* (University of Oregon, 2001)

Katharine Harmon, *You Are Here: Personal Geographies and Other Maps of the Imagination* (Princeton, 2003)

Jill Desimini + Charles Waldheim, *Cartographic Grounds: Projecting the Landscape Imaginary* (Princeton, 2016)

Mark Monmonier, *How to Lie with Maps (3rd Ed.)* (University of Chicago, 2018)

Bally Meeda + Neil Parkyn + David Stuart Walton, *Graphics for Urban Design* (Thomas Telford, 2006)

Jacobs, Allen B., *Great Streets* (MIT Press, 1993).

Duarte, Nancy, *Slide:ology: The Art and Science of Creating Great Presentations* (O'Reilly, 2006).

Battle-Baptiste, Whitney and Britt Rusert (editors), *W. E. B. Du Bois's Data Portraits: Visualizing Black America (The Color Line at the Turn of the Twentieth Century)* (Princeton, 2018)

Information is Beautiful - <https://informationisbeautiful.net/>

Stamen - <https://stamen.com/>

Adventures in Mapping - <https://adventuresinmapping.com/>

“Your Map is Hiding Something” - <http://metrocosm.com/mercator/>

Color Palette Websites:

- [Paletton](#)
- [Color Brewer 2](#)

SUPPLIES

There are a couple of assignments that will require you to draw by hand. For these, you will need the following:

- 1 roll of 12" trace paper (white preferred)
- 1 pencil
- 3 black pens (of different thicknesses (*not* Sharpie or ballpoint))
- At least 3 pens of other colors (*not* Sharpie or ballpoint)
- Drafting dots or masking tape
- Access to a printer (preferably for 11"x17")

ACCESSING GIS DATA

To access Metro's RLIS GIS Data - the points, lines, and polygons for stuff like rivers, streets, buildings, and parks that are super-useful for creating Base Maps - you will want to navigate to PSU's I Drive: **I:\Research\samba\gisdata\PortlandRLIS**

Information about the I Drive and how to map to it can be found [[HERE](#)].

Please note that your instructor's 'real' day job is as a planner / urban designer with Toole Design; I am not proficient in PSU's inner-systems, so if you encounter any difficulties getting the VPN to work or accessing the I Drive, your best bet is going to be to contact PSU's Office of Information Technology (OIT).