

University of Montana

ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Syllabi

Course Syllabi

1-2014

JRNL 494.03: Pollner Seminar - Critical Thinking About Design and Disruption

Ronald L. Reason
ron.reason@mso.umt.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi>

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Recommended Citation

Reason, Ronald L., "JRNL 494.03: Pollner Seminar - Critical Thinking About Design and Disruption" (2014).
Syllabi. 2767.

<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi/2767>

This Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the Course Syllabi at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.



“J494: Critical Thinking About Design and Disruption”

The Spring 2015 Pollner Seminar
Tues-Thurs 12:40-2 pm
Don Anderson Hall 210

Instructor: Ron Reason
Don Anderson Hall 429
Email: ron.reason@mso.umt.edu
Office: 406-243-2256 Mobile: 773-562-7464
Office Hours: Tues-Thurs 2-4 or by appointment
Twitter: [@ronreason](https://twitter.com/ronreason)
Blog: [“Design With Reason”](http://www.ronreason.com/designwithreason/) (www.ronreason.com/designwithreason/)

“The mission of The University of Montana School of Journalism is to provide students with a professional education in journalism; to teach them to think critically, act ethically, and communicate effectively; to help them understand the challenges and changes in the news media; and to inspire them to use their talents to improve journalism and enhance a diverse and democratic society.”

WHY THIS COURSE?

Journalism right now is a nonstop wonderland / maelstrom of DISRUPTION: news publications in all media are starting up, redesigning, reinventing, realigning, adding products and platforms, reorganizing newsrooms, creating alliances, and rethinking strategies for advertising revenue, marketing, audience development and more. Smart media thinkers - including students - know they have to hop on the change bus, perhaps drive it, or be left behind.

All of that stuff has to be ... designed. We will address DESIGN in the sense most people approach it – typography, color, logos, the grid, photography, graphics and illustration (graphic design) – but also in the broader sense: the “design” of ideas, strategies, objectives, values, teams, practices, processes, newsrooms, and the larger companies that house them. Design is creation, vision, management and leadership.

OUR APPROACH

We'll go deep inside a wide array of news organizations, many of which currently or have recently enjoyed/ survived/ endured the presence of your instructor as change agent. We will investigate the state of each publication through the following phases of design and disruption:

1. **BEFORE** change: when strong publications know they have to take action, sometimes radically, to stay on top; the weak have to take big chances to remain viable; and the newcomers realize an opportunity to enter the marketplace, to make money or make a difference.
2. **DURING** the prototyping process: exploring new visual identities, editorial voice, revenue streams, or other strategies.
3. **AFTER** relaunch: where we look at the finished product, its reception in the marketplace, and degree of success or failure.

This course offers a unique chance to explore case studies of change, in real time. You will be provided with complete samples of publications “before and after” redesign, prototypes, and other physical evidence of the change process, shared generously by the instructor's clients. Because print, and the process of holding and reading it, still remains so important (and, for many news publishers, remains the most lucrative part of their business) you will be expected to read and analyze these thoroughly – their design, editorial strategy, “voice,” advertising, distribution, marketing. Equally important, you will be expected to explore each brand's publishing efforts and presence via websites, apps, video channels, email blasts and other digital channels, as applicable. It is your responsibility to investigate beyond the materials and links provided in class. Google is your friend.

Students will be required:

1. to study actual printed copies, and digital publishing, of publications identified by the instructor
2. to learn how to apply critical, constructive and optimistic thinking and language to the review and critique process
3. to read specific assigned news or feature stories that were or are intended for actual publication, and to generate ideas for their display and dissemination
4. to keep up with blog entries, articles, the Twitterverse and other resources discussing media disruption today – assigned as well as those you find on your own – and sharing what you learn in class
5. investigate and report back on one major case study of change happening elsewhere in the industry, via the final project

OUTCOMES

After successfully completing this course, students should expect the following:

1. Your thinking about disruption will be sharper and smarter. You'll know who the change agents are, and understand why and how they are taking chances, shaking things up and moving forward.
2. You'll be better equipped to act as a change agent, which will help your career. Any newsroom worth working for is currently in some state of disrupting and designing, or will be soon. Almost always, they will assemble a team to help navigate the process, consider options, make decisions about the future. In your first job or next internship, if you're asked to help the conversation, you will be ready to hit the ground running after you successfully complete this course. Not asked? You should feel empowered to knock on the boss's door and invite yourself into the process. (Those most heavily involved in change processes are those who move ahead.)
3. You'll have a smarter understanding of design fundamentals: page architecture, color, typography, logos and other brand elements, navigation, interaction.
4. You'll have a smarter understanding of design processes: leadership, teamwork, planning, communication.
5. You'll have a smarter grasp on your own work roles and responsibilities. You will think and work with more clarity in whatever job or task you take on next, by questioning: Why am I here? What's really being asked of me? How might I approach this in a more efficient, creative, profitable way? How does my work fulfill the objectives of the mother ship? Where is this ship headed, anyway, and do I want to stay on board?

POLICIES

Assignments.

Unless otherwise specified, all assignments are due in two forms: email as an attachment to the instructor BEFORE start of the next class, as well as a printout ready to hand in AT start of the class.

Attendance/Absence/Lateness.

If you have a legitimate excuse to be late or miss a class, notify the instructor in advance via UM email. Not legit? Whether notified in advance or not, each unexcused absence will result in a loss of 5 points toward your final grade.

Equipment Checkout Procedures.

If you require field gear (audio recorders, still and/or video cameras), see Ray Ekness, Professor, Radio-TV Department (4088; DAH 402) for assistance.

Gadgets.

Because this course will enjoy a challenging, rich discussion of real-time publishing in digital media, it makes sense to allow gadgets at your desk. That said, please show respect to the class and yourself by adhering to the following: phones should be put away or turned over or in their case on your desk; ringers should be turned off; tablet cases and laptop covers should be closed when not in use for course discussion.

Plagiarism.

The content of this course is so unique that it's unlikely this will come up much, but just in case, you know the drill: No stealing, no exceptions. Assignments will include original reporting and analysis, which will require accurate citations of previously published material. You will be expected to quote, reference and attribute sources professionally. All students need to be familiar with the Student Conduct Code. The Code is available for review online at <http://www.umt.edu/SA/VPSA/Index.cfm/page/1321>. And, more on academic honesty, is available here:

http://life.umt.edu/vpsa/student_conduct.php

Same Work for Multiple Classes.

You may not submit for this course any assignment that has previously or will be concurrently submitted for another class, unless you receive prior approval from the professor for this course. To do so without permission will result in an "F" for the assignment, and could result in an "F" for the course.

Students with Disabilities.

This course is accessible to and usable by otherwise qualified students with disabilities. To request reasonable program modifications, please consult with the instructor. Disability Services for Students will assist the instructor and student in the accommodation process. For more information, visit UM's Disability Services web site: <http://www.umt.edu/dss/orx2243>

FACEBOOK

A private Facebook page called "J494 Pollner Seminar: Design and Disruption" has been created. Please friend your instructor and you will be added to the page. On this page you will be reminded of deadlines, provided with direct links to assigned readings, enjoy other items of interest, and communicate/collaborate. You will get tips on being more efficient and creative in the class as well as ideas for strengthening your portfolio and networking connections.

GRADING

How the grading breaks down:

- Class presence and participation: 25%
- Assignments: 35%
- Final project: 40%

SCHEDULE

Following is the week-by-week schedule with the case studies, topics, assignments and readings. Because this is a very tumultuous time in the news industry (remember: there's never been a better time to be a student journalist!!!), this agenda will update as we go. I will keep you informed about changes but you need to be on top of this, too. The most current version of the document will remain in Moodle, and it is your responsibility to check in weekly and see what's coming next.

Week One

Tuesday Jan. 27

Topic: What is design and disruption, and how should we think about it? Who are the designer-disruptors?

Assignments, due at next class:

Assignment 1: "Twitter Up!"

Identify and add 4 Disruptor People – and – 4 Disruptor Organizations to your Twitter connections.
Estimated time this should take you: 10-20 minutes.

Assignment 2: "Alumni Disruptors."

Reach out to a recent alum (J-school or relevant field) on his/her experience with disruption.
Estimated time this should take you: 15-30 minutes.

Readings, complete before next class:

Charles Bethea, Outside.com: "[Why did Lonely Planet purchase Teton Gravity Research?](#)"
Estimated reading time: 3 minutes

Mathew Ingram, Gigaom: "[The year in media: 12 reasons why we should be optimistic](#)"
Estimated reading time: 6 minutes

Ron Reason, "[Design With Reason](#)" blog: Poke around and learn a bit more about your instructor.
Suggested reading time: 15-30 minutes.

Thursday Jan. 29

Topics: Joining in the disruption conversation – strengthening your Twitter profile and connections. The language of critique and construction. Leading disruption: Project strategy, mission statement, goals, teams, timelines.

Assignment, due at next class:

You will put yourself in the role of a new young resident of Chicago after completing the assigned readings below. From either the printed copies provided, current online publishing or recent archives, identify one particular story or review, one recurring column or feature, and one Tweet that speaks directly to you, and consider who is advertising, or should want to advertise, in the paper because of that feature. Bonus: if you were publisher, is there anything you'd change? Why?

Estimated time this should take you to write: 15 minutes (not counting the readings, additional, as follows)

Readings, complete by next class:

Chicago Reader: Scan and read the post-relaunch print issues of The Reader provided to each of you, visit the website chicagoreader.com and explore at least six pages/features there, and scan the last two weeks of [@ChicagoReader](#) Tweets. Estimated reading time: 45 minutes.

Ron Reason, "Design With Reason" blog: "[Chicago Reader redesign: Will it get me to pick up the paper?](#)"
Estimated reading time: 4 minutes

Ron Reason, "Design With Reason" blog: "[Chicago Reader redesign: A new music section to flip for](#)"
Estimated reading time: 4 minutes

Ron Reason, "Design With Reason" blog: "[Chicago Reader redesign: Questions/background on the project](#)"
Estimated reading time: 6 minutes

Week Two

Tuesday Feb. 3

Topic: We'll go inside the change process at the Chicago Reader, one of the nation's first and most influential alternative new weeklies, on whose redesign/reinvention your instructor served as consultant. Discussed will be: editorial and brand innovation, revenue resuscitation and generation, audience development, events and marketing efforts, social media strategy, and partnerships and alliances.

Assignment, due at next class:

Select at least one story from a variety of the nation's alternative news media linked from the following article. Prepare to discuss its presentation.

Readings, complete before next class:

Jason Zaragoza, Association of Alternative News: "[More Alt Than Ever: Best Publishing of 2014.](#)"
Estimated reading time: 6 minutes. Estimated additional time analyzing linked story: 10-20 minutes

Missoula Independent: Read latest issue, in print, [on the web](#) and at Twitter.
Estimated reading/scanning time: 20 minutes

Thursday Feb. 5

Topic: Chicago Reader and alternative news publishers, continued. Discussion/dissection of our local alt, Missoula Independent.

Assignment, due at next class:

Looking ahead to next week, read, scan and study the pre-redesign issue of Champion, the magazine of the NCAA, provided to you in class, and write a critique of its strengths and weaknesses given the change objectives discussed at the end of class today.
Estimated time this should take you: 45 minutes

Readings, complete before next class:

Brian Hendrickson, editor, Champion magazine: "[Magazine, sporting new look, aims to be more visible to a wider range of readers who love college athletics](#)"
Estimated time this should take you: 1-2 minutes

Ron Reason, "Design With Reason" blog: "Inside the redesign of Champion, the magazine of the NCAA" (link to come)

Week Three

Tuesday Feb. 10

Topic: This week we look at Champion, The Magazine of the NCAA, which just this month releases its redesign to appeal to an expanded audience.

Assignment, due at next class: To be announced.

Readings, complete before next class:

Read the first post-redesign issue of Champion magazine, distributed to the public just this month.

[Visit their website](#) and review their online offerings.

Thursday Feb. 12

Topic: Fundamentals of typography; the role of type in creating brands.

Assignment, due at next class: to be announced.

Readings, complete before next class:

Read copies of Modern Healthcare (real copies and/or links to PDFs to be provided) and visit [ModernHealthcare.com](#) and [@ModernHealthcare](#) to review current coverage, marketing, audience development. Google the title of the magazine to see what might have been written recently in the industry press about its strategies, goals, disruption, etc.

Week Four

Tuesday Feb. 17

Topic: This week we go inside Modern Healthcare, a weekly magazine with a robust website, email blasts, data sales and slate of events and other marketing efforts worth looking at. In 2013 your instructor worked on the magazine's second revamp in 7 years, and produced a marketing campaign for the same. In 2014 he created a marketing campaign for a sweeping rethink of all digital platforms for the brand.

Assignment, due at next class: To be announced.

Readings, complete before next class:

Roger Yu, USA Today: "[Selling advertisers on reader attention, not clicks](#)"

Steven Perlberg, The Wall Street Journal. "[Write ads? Conde Nast staff is wary.](#)"

Thursday Feb. 19

Topic: Sponsored content, custom publishing or native advertising – is it the salvation or death of journalism? Depends on who you talk to. We will go deep inside the debate today.

Readings, complete before next class:

Pick one issue of the three post-launch issues of Capital Ideas magazine, or their web publishing including YouTube video channels, and answer the question: How well does this brand speak to its various audiences? What might appeal to them most? Why does it work?

Week Five

Tuesday Feb. 24

Topic: *Capital Ideas* magazine is the quarterly magazine – and website, social media onslaught, YouTube channel and events – from the University of Chicago's Booth School of Business, one of the top business schools in the world. The very small circulation goes to an important audience, and serves the school, its instructors, and the university in diverse

ways. Your instructor served as consultant on the magazine's 2013 redesign and since then, has served as creative director for each issue.

Assignment, due at next class:

Thursday Feb. 26

Topic: Capital Ideas magazine (continued)

Readings, complete before next class:

Read the previously published issue of Crain's Detroit Business provided to you in class. Critique its content, design, voice, and be prepared to discuss in class.

Week Six

Tuesday March 3

Topic: *Crain's Detroit Business* is leading a conversation about not only the business climate and opportunities in the southeast Michigan region, but for the city of Detroit as a whole, which has just emerged from bankruptcy. Find out how editorial strategy, digital publishing around the clock, events and alliances all make for an often imitated publishing model.

Thursday March 5

Topic:

Assignment, due at next class:

Spend time reviewing stories and audio at DNAInfo.com (Chicago) and review two weeks of @DNAinfoCHI on Twitter.

Readings, complete before next class:

Michael Miner, Chicago Reader: "[DNAInfo launches in Chicago](#)"

DNAInfo newspaper: Review recent copies provided in print and/or PDF.

Ron Reason, "Design With Reason" blog: "[Designing a new weekly newspaper for Chicago's Lincoln Park](#)"

NiemanLab: "[Can Ratter turn local news into national headlines?](#)"

Week Seven

Tuesday March 10

Topic: DNAInfo is a startup news brand (short for Digital News and Information) that's expanding and experimenting. In early 2014 your instructor designed a weekly newspaper version of DNAInfo for one of Chicago's most dynamic neighborhoods, Lincoln Park, repurposing material published online and on social media. In recent months this print edition was expanded into half a dozen new weekly editions for additional neighborhoods; the website is experimenting with audio files and more.

Thursday March 12

Topic: To be announced.

Week Eight

Tuesday March 17

Topic: Sometimes, bold and innovative ideas are put forth when the need for change is dire, but for various reasons, they don't take off in the marketplace. These valiant efforts of disruption are still worth examining. We'll look at GRID, a glossy weekly on networking and career advice for young professionals; the launch of NEXT, a multiplatform news brand in Lagos, Nigeria; and the remakes of the San Francisco Examiner and the Emirates Evening Post in Dubai

Thursday March 19

Topic: To be announced.

Readings, complete before next class:

DailyNorthwestern.com: "[Donate to the Daily Northwestern](#)"

High Country News. Read samples provided, explore their presence online.

Week Nine

Tuesday March 24

Topic: Many startups and even longstanding news publications are passing the hat for public or private funds to continue operating. But High Country News has been doing it for decades, and making a difference in issues relating to the environment, wildlife and land and water use in the west.

Assignment, due at next class: To be announced.

Readings, complete before next class: To be announced.

Thursday March 26

Topic: To be announced.

Spring Break

No Class - Spring Break (March 30-April 3)

Week Ten

Tuesday April 7

Topic: The Weather Channel was once just that: You turned it on, got the forecast, and maybe special reports or features on extreme weather conditions. In recent years it has expanded dramatically, with robust cable offerings, on-demand programming on topics like adventure travel and photography, digital publishing and video, and apps including a mobile site that's raking in the ad dollars. A look inside how it all works, with guest speaker Patty Cox, managing editor of The Weather Channel via Skype.

Assignment, due at next class: To be announced.

Readings, complete before next class: To be announced.

Thursday April 9

Assignment, due at next class: To be announced.

Readings, complete before next class:

NiemanLab: "[The leaked New York Times innovation report is one of the key documents of this media age](#)"

Estimated reading time: 9 minutes

Advertising Age: "[The Upshot Emerges as Potentially Lucrative Franchise at The Times](#)"

Estimated reading time: 3 minutes

Mark Wilson, Co.DESIGN/FastCompany.com: "[The Upshot: Where The New York Times is Redesigning News](#)"

Scan several days of nytimes.com, become familiar with its content and navigation strategies, including channel The Upshot.

Week Eleven

Tuesday April 14

Topic: Later this week, Dean Baquet, Executive Editor of The New York Times, is visiting campus to give the annual Dean Stone Lecture. You will be expected to attend the lecture and to take this opportunity to learn more from one of the most dynamic, and challenged, news organizations in the world. Tentative guest speaker: Larry Buchanan, graphics / multimedia journalist for The New York Times.

Assignment, due at next class:

Based on your reading assignment from last Thursday, regarding The New York Times, prepare three smart, focused questions about design and disruption occurring now or within the last six months at The New York Times, in the organization, their business model or what they publish.

Readings, complete before next class:

Drone Journalism Lab: "[New York Times in media coalition to test drones at FAA site](#)"

NYTimes.com: "[The Year in Interactive Storytelling, Graphics and Multimedia at The NYTimes](#)"

Thursday April 16

Topic: We continue our discussions and dissection of The New York Times.

Assignment, due tonight:

Tonight, attend Dean Stone Lecture by New York Times Editor Dean Baquet. Take notes, and prepare to discuss in class next Tuesday.

Readings, complete before next class:

Continue following NYTimes.com, @NYTimes and related channels of interest.

Week Twelve

Tuesday April 21

Topic: Workshopping your final project.

Thursday April 23

Topic: Workshopping your final project.

Week Thirteen

Tuesday April 28

Topic: Workshopping your final project.

Thursday April 30

Topic: Workshopping your final project.

Week Fourteen

Tuesday May 5

Topic: Workshopping your final project.

Assignment, due at next class:

If Thursday May 7 is your finals presentation day, a copy of your written report and supplemental materials – Powerpoint, Keynote, video, etc. – is due before start of the May 7 class.

Thursday May 7

Last Regular Class

Topic: Presenting your final projects – the first half of the class will present today.

Assignment, due at next class:

If Tuesday May 12 is your finals presentation day, a copy of your written report and supplemental materials – Powerpoint, Keynote, video, etc. – is due before start of the May 12 class.

Week Fifteen

Tuesday May 12

FINALS WEEK

Topic: Presenting your final projects – the final half the class will present today.

Assignment, due at next class:

To be determined.

Thursday May 14

FINALS WEEK

Concluding discussion, farewells, lunch, etc.

DRAFT – UPDATED JAN. 28. FINAL VERSION WILL BE POSTED ON MOODLE BY FRIDAY, JAN. 30

