

The Business of Design

What this course is, and how it runs.

SESSION 01
08.24.26

Workhorse Collective

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ART 418 · Fall 2026

Meets Mon + Wed, 1:30 to 2:50
Today Session 01 · 08.24.2026

Today.

PART	WHAT	YOU LEAVE WITH
1	Introductions. Your name, what you design, and one brand you can't stop noticing.	The names in the room
2	Who is teaching this. What I do outside this room, and why I teach this course.	Who to ask, and how to reach me
3	What the course is about. Why people buy what a product means, and where design comes in.	The idea the whole semester rests on
4	The project. One product, carried through the whole semester in two parts.	What you will make by December
5	The semester map. Four milestones and the checkpoints between them.	Every date that matters
6	How it runs. Grading, AI, studio days, and revisions.	The rules, in plain words
7	The studio's work. Four projects, and what each one has to do with yours.	A picture of where this work leads
8	Before Wednesday. Two readings.	What to do next



Abraham Garcia, your instructor. abe@wrkhrrs.co

YOUR INSTRUCTOR · ADJUNCT PROFESSOR OF GRAPHIC DESIGN

I'm a designer, creative director, and educator, based in Charleston.

I've led Workhorse, a design studio in Washington, D.C., since 2014. My work crosses brand, product, and engineering. Over the past few years I've rebuilt the studio's process around AI, with Claude, ChatGPT, and Cursor in daily use.

THE STUDIO

Brand identity, websites, products, and exhibitions, for clients like PBS Kids, DC Public Library, and the DC/DOX film festival.

TEACHING

MICA and George Mason, and now Charleston Southern.

MEANING LAYER

My research library on design and meaning. Many of this course's readings come from it.

What the course is about

People buy a product for what it means to them, as well as for what it does.

Two bottles can hold the same water and sell for very different prices. The difference is what each one says about the person carrying it.

A **brand** is how a company decides what its product means, and then shows it: in a name, a look, a voice, and a promise.

Making that decision, and making it visible, is the **business of design**. This semester you make it for one product.

You carry one project through the whole semester.

It starts the way a startup starts: with a product or a technology that works, and no customers yet.

Pick a product

Some are offered in class, real ones from biotech, hard tech, and software, each with a real problem attached. You can bring your own, as long as enough has been published about it to research for a whole semester.

Find its people

You don't redesign the product. You find the people it is for, and you describe the business problem in design terms.

Make its case

You build the brand, write it down as rules an AI tool can follow, and make the brand book and the landing page that could sell it.

The semester has two parts.

PART 1 · AUG 24 TO SEPT 21

Brand from business data

You take on a product with no market. You find the problem it poses, research who could want it, and choose an audience. Then you build the argument for what you want to make.

Part 1 ends with the pitch, which you record on video and turn in on September 21.

PART 2 · SEPT 23 TO DEC 7

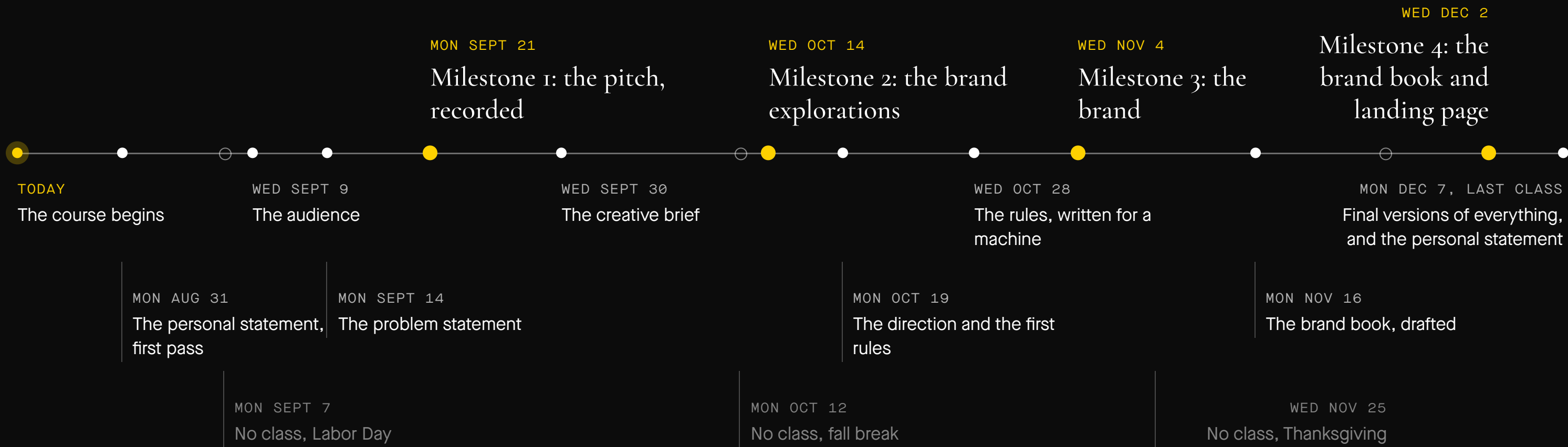
Brand as foundation

The pitch becomes a creative brief, written in class. The brief drives two weeks of exploration that set the brand's direction. Then you build the identity and write it down as rules a machine can follow.

The brand becomes the foundation for selling the product: a brand book with the plan for finding its market inside it, and a landing page where people can sign up.

The semester map

Four milestones, and the checkpoints that lead to each one.



MILESTONES ARE PRESENTED TO THE ROOM AND GRADED. CHECKPOINTS ARE THE SMALLER STEPS ON THE WAY TO EACH ONE. NOTHING IS DUE AFTER THE LAST CLASS.

How your grade is made.

WHAT	WHEN	WEIGHT
Milestone 1 · the pitch	Sept 21	15%
Milestone 2 · the brand explorations	Oct 14	15%
Milestone 3 · the brand	Nov 4	25%
Milestone 4 · the brand book and the landing page	Dec 2	25%
Presentations · every milestone, the first one on video	All semester	10%
Personal statement · written twice	Aug 31 and Dec 7	5%
Participation · discussion, critique, and the stand-up	All semester	5%

Every milestone is graded on the same four things.

Each one is a quarter of the grade, so how you got there counts as much as how it looks.

25%

Process

You take part in discussion and critique, and the work gets better because of your research and your revisions.

25%

Concept

You answer the problem in a way that is your own, and you think hard about the work in light of critique and the readings.

25%

Resolution

The work does its job, and it fits its idea and the place it will live.

25%

Craft

The work is made with care, and with real technical skill.

You can use AI on anything in this course, and you say what it did every time.

Write it down. Keep a short log of what you decided and what the machine did. Two lines a work session is enough.

Say it. Every checkpoint and milestone names the tools you used and what they did, even when the answer is none.

Own it. You defend everything you turn in as your own decision. If the machine made a mistake and you turned it in, the mistake is yours.

Free is enough. Every assignment can be done on free tools. Don't put a real organization's private material into one.

How class runs.

WHAT	HOW IT WORKS
Studio days	Work sessions open with a stand-up. Each of you takes three minutes, with your screen up, to say what you made since the last one, what is stuck, and what you will have done by the next.
Revisions	Nothing is turned in only once. Each version goes on Blackboard as a dated PDF, and when a piece comes back to the room, the earlier version goes up first.
Late work	A missed checkpoint isn't made up later. A milestone turned in late loses a letter grade, and one that comes in more than a week late gets a zero. If you tell me before the deadline, we can usually find a date that works.
Attendance	Missing a quarter of the classes fails the course under university policy. In this course, that is seven classes.

The studio's work

Four projects from Workhorse

and what each one has to do with yours.

PROJECT

Neurogazer

WHAT WE MADE

Brand strategy

Identity

Website

A neuroscience company building AI and MRI tools to treat brain disorders. We designed the first brand, the marketing site, and a prototype patient platform. Like your project, it started as a technology without an audience.

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PROJECT

DC/DOX Film Festival

WHAT WE MADE

Brand strategy

Identity

Posters and signs

Website and social

Washington's documentary film festival. Brand identity, a design system, and the web, print, and motion work that runs on it.

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PROJECT

Epic Curing

WHAT WE MADE

Brand strategy

Identity

Packaging

Photography

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PROJECT · IN PROGRESS

The Resume Place

WHAT WE MADE

Brand system

Books

Website

The first federal resume writing service. They hired us to give fifty years of authority a system: identity, program marks, a rebuilt website, and campaigns. All of it follows one written set of design rules, like the ones you write in October.

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Before Wednesday.

READ

WHAT IT IS

DUE

Lorraine Wild, "That Was Then, and This Is Now: But What Is Next?"

A short essay on what designers kept and what they lost the last time a new tool changed the field, and why knowing where your habits came from is useful. 8 pages.

Wed Aug 26

Douglas Davis, *Creative Strategy and the Business of Design*

The foreword, and chapter 1 through the section on segmentation. Read chapter 1 closely. About 20 pages.

Wed Aug 26

Close

**This semester you decide what one
product means, and you show it.**

See you Wednesday.