

Guidelines for Developing a Visual Literacy Course

Visual Literacy has been recognized within a growing number of academic disciplines as a necessary component of a comprehensive education. Of the seven literacies included in the IUSB General Education plan, “Visual Literacy” connotes the greatest variety of interpretations. A review of relevant terms is therefore useful here.

- **Visual Culture** is *the field of study* devoted to visual images and messages. It is “a community of cultural and social practices that communicates meaning via mediums like television, advertising, fashion, dance, architecture, scientific imagery, news, photography, painting, language, and so forth.”
- **Visual Literacy** is *the ability to understand meaning* in a visual message/image. It becomes the student’s “ability to read, perceive, understand, create/produce, use, and appreciate visual images in a variety of settings.”
- **Visual Communication** refers to *the techniques used to create* these messages. More specifically, it is “the deliberate arrangement of visual images, with or without text, using the principles and elements of graphic design in order to communicate an intended, or unintended, message.”
- **Visual Media** focuses on *the media that transmit* visual messages, including (but is not limited to) television, film, books, newspapers, advertising, dance, architecture, songs, computer programs (e.g., PowerPoint, Photoshop, etc.), and so forth.

General Characteristics

Visual representations that transmit data, communicate information, construct knowledge, and/or express emotion are subjects of study in many disciplines. Although courses that fulfill the requirement for Visual Literacy may be taught in a variety of disciplines under various course numbers, any such course must promote general skills acquisition through study of the role of images in a variety of disciplines or with reference to knowledge, forms, and practices familiar to a variety of disciplines. The course should promote an understanding of visual media as a means of understanding the world and should prepare students to apply methodologies derived from the study of visual literacy in future research, classroom activities, and everyday life. Courses that meet the Visual Literacy requirement shall:

- *provide a foundation for an historical understanding of visual conventions, including (whenever possible) both western and non-western cultures.*
- *introduce the grammar and expressive potential of visual forms.*
- *apply methods developed by social sciences, sciences, and/or the humanities for the study of perception and interpretation of the visual world.*
- *require students to be makers as well as interpreters through the fabrication of visual statements (including, for example, visual essays) and expressions using new or traditional media.*
- *prepare students to view and understand information presented in modes used in a variety of disciplines and areas.*