

ual:

An evaluation of the Responsible Design Unit

Embedding of responsible design principles in BA DAD-Y1 (LCC)

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Executive Summary

The Responsible Design Unit (RDU) is a Design School wide unit at London College of Communication (LCC), University of the Arts London (UAL). From February 2025 the unit was embedded in year one of seven undergraduate communication design courses and was delivered to approximately 500 + students. The unit was designed to introduce core principles in responsible design, including the role of environmental and social responsibility, and the UAL Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice, across multiple design subject specialisms. During the unit, students engaged in contemporary debates and explored approaches, tools and frameworks for understanding and practicing how social and environmental responsibility is enacted across visual communication practices.

In the 2024-2025 academic cycle we conducted an evaluation of students' experiences with the unit as delivered in BA Design for Art Direction, using an embedded, qualitative methodology that predominantly focused on interviewing students.

This unit was delivered over 10 weeks between February and May 2025 with 4 hours of scheduled teaching and learning per week. Delivery included a combination of taught and self-directed learning sessions to encourage research, collaborative ideation and the creation of a 'Responsible Design Playbook'. Sessions included a local site visit, food tasting, review and discussion of online resources, visualisation of responsible design tools, frameworks and principles, discussion of practical examples within the design industry, and artists' practices, practical group and independent ideation, feedback and reflection.

Evaluation Aims

1. To identify areas of teaching that were successful for students, and areas of challenge that may be further developed by the teaching team
2. To explore with students their perspectives on the unit and on the embedding of the principles for climate, social and racial justice

Core Findings

Student responses to the Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice, and aligned concepts and frameworks varied based on prior knowledge. Those already passionate about issues of climate, social and racial justice found the unit validating, while those less familiar appreciated the exposure but didn't always commit to changing their practice.

The Role of Food as a Topic: Food was used as a central theme to anchor complex environmental and social issues. Most students found this accessible and relatable, though some felt it was "made up" for the course or difficult to connect authentically to art direction.

Conceptual Confusion: Students expressed confusion around some of the concepts involved and how to relate them to the central assessed task, often feeling a gap between high-level theory and practical application. Despite this some students gained confidence from working through this confusion to find their own perspective and voice.

Critical Tensions: Some students critiqued the university's own institutional inequalities, while others felt the CRSJ principles were framed from a Western, liberal perspective that lacked cultural nuance.

Differing Orientations: Disparity in the extent students understood, or cared about, the issues raised through exploring responsible design could create emotional tension and frustration during collaborative tasks.

Recommendations

We suggest creating "brave spaces" for debate, utilising non-violent communication tools, and maintaining a permissive environment where confusion is treated as a necessary step toward creative confidence.

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Background: Responsible Design Unit

The Responsible Design Unit (RDU) is a Design School wide unit delivered to approximately 500+ students at London College of Communication (LCC), University of the Arts London (UAL). From February 2025 the unit was embedded in year one of seven undergraduate communication design courses¹. The RDU was designed to introduce core principles in responsible design, enabling students to explore the role of environmental and social responsibility across multiple design subject specialisms to inform and further promote the development of student's own creative practices. Through the unit, students engaged in contemporary debates and explored approaches, tools and frameworks for understanding and practicing how social and environmental responsibility is enacted across visual communication practices, from within organisational structures to the design of digital and analogue products, services, and images.

Students had the opportunity to learn from existing industry practitioners' examples and gain an understanding of how ethics, politics and cultural contexts influence design decisions to develop strategies for their own practice. Students were invited to respond to questions that provoked discussions about what responsible design meant for different communities, and to engage in developing their own values concerning social and climate justice in design.

The Unit has three main purposes:

- To introduce key principles and approaches in responsible design and how these are currently practiced in diverse ways by creative practitioners.
- To develop, prototype and iterate students' own design practice focusing on values, self-awareness and reflection on their approaches and methods.
- To enable students to situate their design practice within contemporary debates about responsible design while understanding the historical contexts of environmental, social and political design movements and diverse audiences.

In this evaluation we explored how students experienced the responsible design unit as embedded in the BA (Hons) Design for Art Direction course.

BA (Hons) Design for Art Direction

The Design for Art Direction undergraduate course has the core aim of developing practical, conceptual and leadership skills needed for a career in art direction and creative production. The course is interdisciplinary with a focus on collaboration, storytelling and experimentation across a

¹ Embedding of the unit occurred for the following courses: BA Design for Art Direction, BA Design Management, BA Graphic, Branding and Identity, BA Graphic Media Design, BA Illustration and Visual Media, BA Interaction Design Arts, BA User Experience

range of media and practice areas; print publication, filmmaking, CGI, web design, curation, editorial, photography and sound; to prepare students to be adaptable for a range of professional roles in the creative industries. There is a strong commitment to ethical and critical research and practice in developing student projects and their creative capabilities.

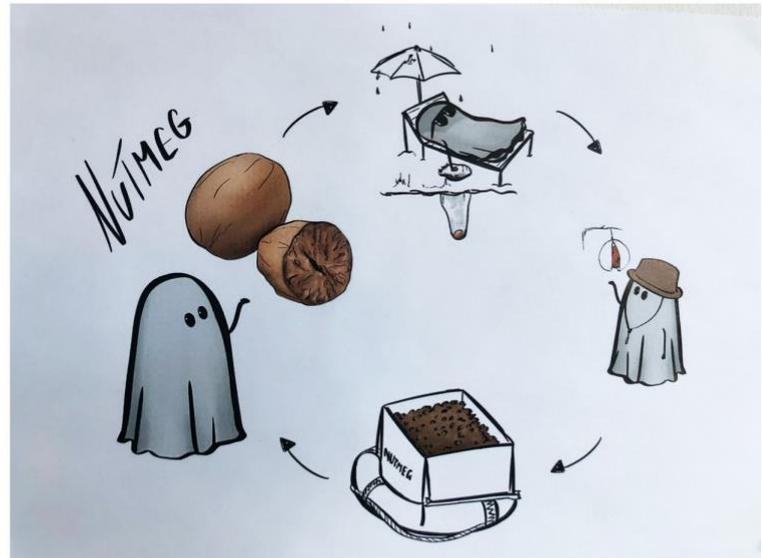
Overview of delivery:

This unit was delivered over 10 weeks between February and May 2025 with 4 hours of scheduled teaching and learning per week. Delivery included a combination of taught and self-directed learning sessions to encourage research, collaborative ideation and the creation of a 'Responsible Design Playbook'. Sessions included a local site visit, food tasting, review and discussion of online resources, visualisation of responsible design tools, frameworks and principles, discussion of practical examples within the design industry, and artists' practices, practical group and independent ideation, feedback and reflection.

The core topic used as an example to illustrate issues at the core of responsible design (e.g. systems thinking, sustainability, the UAL Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice) was communication of future food and food systems. Students were required to produce a designed 'playbook' featuring their weekly engagement with responsible design principles and how they related to their own experiences of food and re-imaginings of alternative food futures. To facilitate greater connection with the food theme and consider relevant contexts beyond UAL, the teaching team also worked with Community Engagement Officer at Mercato Metropolitano, Elephant and Castle, one of London's largest sustainable community food markets, to facilitate student visits and provide external feedback to student work through a mid-point review.



Collective word cloud generated by students in Slido to communicate core concepts significant to the theme of responsible design and to their own design practice.



Examples of student work during the unit. **Top left:** Mercato Metropolitan visit in the first week exploring food cultures, taste and flavour. **Top right:** Designing a collaborative future food menu. **Middle left:** Group activity communicating the planetary boundaries. **Middle right:** Lifecycle analysis and illustration of ingredient. **Bottom left and right:** Earth Day more-than-human mask making.

Responsible Design Timetable W318A

DATE	ACTIVITY
Tuesday 18 th February 10 am – 2pm	Unit Introduction: Taste and Flavour @ Mercato
Tuesday 25 th February 10 am – 2pm	Ecoliterate Design: RD Principles + Frameworks
Tuesday 4 th March 10 am – 2pm	Fair food and life cycles
Tuesday 11 th March 10 am – 2pm	Ingredients systems map: Ideating a tasting menu
Tuesday 18 th March 10 am – 2pm	Tasting menu and food photography
SPRING BREAK	
Tuesday 15 th April 10 am – 2pm	Your Food Story: Presentation and feedback
Tuesday 22 nd April 10 am – 2pm	Earth Day: Activities UAL wide: Values and Principles
Tuesday 29 th April 10 am – 2pm	Values and Principles: Presentation + Feedback
Tuesday 6 th May 10 am – 2pm	Reflection and Bibliography
Tuesday 13 th May 10 am – 2pm	Presentation + Feedback
Tuesday 20th May 3pm Submission on Moodle	
Wednesday 28 th May 3pm Extenuating Circumstances (EC) Submission on Moodle	
Wednesday 4 th June 3pm ISA / AA Submission on Moodle	

Mandatory Technical Sessions W233

DATE	ACTIVITY
Tuesday 18 th February 3-5pm	Illustrator
Tues 25 th February 3-5pm	Illustrator
Tues 4 th March 3-5pm	Illustrator

Optional Technical Sessions W233

DATE	ACTIVITY
Thursday 17 th April 3-5pm	Photoshop
Thursday 24 th April 3-5pm	Photoshop
Thursday 1 st May 3-5pm	Photoshop
Thursday 8 th May 3-5pm	InDesign
Thursday 15 th May 3-5pm	InDesign

Student Timetable for the Responsible Design Unit.

Pedagogical Approach

The pedagogical approach was developed drawing from the teaching team's expertise, alongside knowledge drawn from eco-literacy and design research, institutional frameworks to embed the UAL Climate, Racial and Social Justice Principles (Knight, 2024) and the localised course context. The course has embedded nonviolent communication into curriculum delivery since 2021 (Tolino, 2024), which helps to support more compassionate and connected student and staff communication. This is used from the setting of assessment briefs to sharing feedback with students and in-class discussion.

While the teaching team was committed to a critical and constructivist pedagogy foregrounding the diversity of students' lived experiences (hooks, 1994), there were three main concerns; first the need for a balance of both experiential and critical ecological literacy that seeks to engage students in embodied changemaking practices (Boehnert, 2021). Secondly a desire not to exacerbate any potential feelings of eco-anxiety and instead look towards supporting connection and belonging between students and staff (Barker, 2023) supported through a practice of nonviolent communication (Tolino, 2024). Thirdly developing new resources relevant to the discipline; there is no responsible design for art direction guidebook as yet.

While LCC has a strong tradition of developing responsible design projects (UAL, 2017) research literature in design and sustainability highlights the pedagogical challenges and resistance faced when teaching responsible design at undergraduate level within the traditions of graphic and communication design in the UK (Boehnert, Sinclair and Dewey, 2022). Whereas architecture and fashion explicitly embody a range of material practices and sensibilities that have been readily adapted to sustainable and regenerative approaches, communication design pedagogy can often fall behind these material practices due to the reliance on the ephemeral delivery of communication strategies. Collective movements such as Design Declares (2024) and the Design Council's Design for Planet programme (2025) have invested in programmes to mobilise, support and train designers across a range of disciplines to further develop skills and mindsets, that move beyond material sustainability to consider issues of inequality, systems change and values.

The pedagogical approach taken was therefore woven together from these different perspectives to deliver the unit.

Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice

The Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice were co-developed by staff and students to provide an ethical framework that surfaces the connections between climate, social and racial justice to guide student's creative practice and professional development. The embedding of these principles in teaching across UAL aligns with both the Climate Action Plan and the UAL Strategy (Knight, 2024). The Responsible Design Unit was a new unit at the time of this evaluation, which sought to actively embed these principles, scaffolded by relevant theories, frameworks and tools. The aim of the Unit was to activate these principles and provide students with opportunities to explore creative application of the principles in practice through class-based activities and the learning outcomes set for this unit.

Our embedded evaluation approach

This evaluation involved a collaborative partnership between Dr Rose Thompson (RT), the Evaluation and Evidence manager from the Social Purpose Lab, and the Course Leader for the BA Design for Art Direction programme, Dr Rachel Clarke (RC). It was also supported by the Academic Discourse and Learning Committee (ADAL) who initially developed the Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice. As this is a new unit our approach was to explore with students, through qualitative interviews, their experience of studying through the RDU. We had the following aims:

1. To identify areas of teaching that were successful in supporting students to develop their own creative practice through a responsible design lens, and to identify areas of challenge that may be further developed by the teaching team
2. To explore with students their perspectives on the unit and on the embedding of the principles for climate, social and racial justice

Through partnership working, RT and RC discussed areas of the unit that may benefit from an understanding of the student perspective, which informed the questions that were asked during student interviews. RT conducted all interviews with students under conditions of anonymity. A collaborative approach to analysis was then adopted in which RT anonymised all data and did initial thematic analysis through which she identified key themes and curated a selection of extended quotes in a Miro board. RC and RT reviewed the Miro board together and RC added her reflections which added a further layer of understanding to the data. This enabled RC to have access to key insights from the evaluation early enough to inform the next iteration of the RDU.



Methods

Evaluation design:

This was a predominantly qualitative study that drew on one-to-one interviews with students and course documentation; the unit descriptor from the course handbook and the assignment brief to explore how students experienced the RDU.

Qualitative interviews:

All students taking the RDU in the 2024-2025 cohort were invited to participate in a one-to-one interview with RT in the last 4 weeks of the RDU. They were offered a £10 voucher as a thank you payment for participating.

Students were asked questions about their experiences with the RDU, including their experience of taught content and producing the core set output, a playbook. They were also asked about aspects of the unit that they thought were successful and where they experienced challenges, and how they responded to the Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice.

Interviews were conducted, recorded and transcribed through the Microsoft Teams Application. RT anonymised all transcripts by hand and checked them against the audio recordings of the interviews for accuracy, correcting errors in transcription where they were found.

Data analysis and interpretation:

Qualitative data was analysed using a thematic approach which used the following procedure:

1. RT familiarised herself with the transcripts through the process of anonymising and checking the transcripts against the audio recordings for accuracy.
2. RT did initial thematic analysis through by identifying key words or related ideas and perspectives that appeared repeatedly through the interview transcripts
3. RT consolidated these ideas into an initial set of key emergent themes and curated a selection of extended quotes in a Miro board, which RC and RT reviewed together
4. RC added her reflections which added a further layer of understanding to the data
5. RT further developed the themes identified in Steps 2 and 3, and described them in an initial draft of this report

6. RC and RT reviewed the draft together, and further developed the themes through conversation and writing of a final draft of this report

The proposal for this evaluation was approved as part of an evaluation programme by the UAL Research and Knowledge Exchange ethics committee (application ref: 026-25-01 'Evaluation of Student Experiences of the Climate, Social and Racial Justice Framework')

Findings:

Participants:

45 students studied the Responsible Design Unit within the BA Design for Art Direction course. From this cohort of students, we completed 10 interviews with 3 male and 7 female students, 6 of whom were home students and 4 were overseas. This is representative of the overall student cohort for year one students in the academic year 24/25.

About the cohort:

All students completed and submitted the final outcome, and submitted their playbook PDFs on Moodle. 9 students submitted with Independent Support Agreements (ISAs) or Extenuating Circumstances (EC) on the relevant later dates as requested. All students passed the assignment. This is the first graded assessment year one students take and even where students struggled with attendance, they were still able to submit work that met the learning outcomes and marking criteria.

- 7 (16%) students received an A (A-, A, A+)
- 22 (49%) students received a B (B-, B, B+)
- 11 (24%) students received a C (C-, C, C+)
- 5 (11%) students received a D (D-, D, D+)

In the following section we discuss students' comments on their perceptions of UAL's Climate, Racial and Social Justice Principles, thematic connection and disconnection with the food topic, their navigation of creative practice with responsible design principles and the emergence of political orientations and critical tensions.

Student perceptions of the CRSJ Principles

In the RDU the Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice were scaffolded with several aligned academic concepts, frameworks and readings. They were more explicitly introduced as a framework in Week 1 as part of the Unit briefing alongside other concepts. They were explicitly discussed again in Week 6 as part of a mid-point review with tutors and students to evaluate each other's progress and provide feedback as to which principles most aligned with their concepts and choices of visual communication. When speaking with the students about the CRSJ principles specifically during interviews, few could remember what they were or when they were first introduced into the teaching delivery.

On reviewing the CRSJ principles during interviews, students framed their responses in ways that related to the ideas that aligned most with them, but it is difficult in some of these responses to

disentangle the impact of the CRSJ principles themselves on students from the other concepts and frameworks that were taught alongside them.

Students who were more familiar with the issues encapsulated within the CRSJ principles spoke about the relevance of them to their own creative practice and how they want to develop these in the future, particularly in areas of inclusivity and reaching minority audiences.

"[...] these are the things that I think are quite important, I mean as in art direction, [...] [to be like] who? What kind of people or what kind of group is omitted or [...] in a minority. [...] I think it's just good, for example, when I design anything, if I wanted to produce a book or magazine, I think it kind of helps me think 'is this for everyone?' Or like 'who are our audience' and also [...] narrowing it down to be 'is it inclusive?' So I just think [the principles] is a way to keep in mind for my future designs [...]" (RD08)

Students who entered the unit with a pre-existing strong interest in these issues were more likely to express strong agreement with them, and some frustration with existing design practices. Some students even suggested that other students should be 'made' to think about these issues in more depth to avoid what they saw as perpetuating ongoing challenges in art and design to just make 'stuff':

"I don't think it [art and design] can be inherently just about making stuff [...] I think a lot of other educational places would focus on the technical aspect [of sustainability] more than the teaching aspect. I see the value [of the CSRJ principles] that despite it [responsible design] being a design course on the specific unit [...], I really value that a lot of people are just forced to think about these things, even if they don't want to, because you have to, you know?" (RD07)

Despite some students appreciating the value of the CRSJ principles on creative practice, discussions also surfaced more critical perspectives with regards to the position of the principles and the unit within the broader UAL system. For example, one student highlighted how the principles seemed to be at odds with how she saw the university operating as an institution and its approach to admissions and inequality:

"I do value that they're trying to do this, but, I would say, UAL [as] an institution could, perhaps use those values when [...] looking at their submissions or bringing up new students because I feel there would be a benefit from potentially bringing students from the local community or [...] home students who are from working class backgrounds and stuff because [...] I think they could add something to this responsible design [unit] because a lot of the issues that [the CSRJ principles] mentions would be [valuable to hear] that from their [community and home student's] perspectives because they're the ones who [are] often impacted the most" (RD05)

Another student also suggested that the principles were framed from a Western, liberal perspective that may be difficult to put into practice within other cultural contexts without a more situated, nuanced and sensitive understanding:

“Yeah, I think they're good, good concepts, you know. I think, yeah, move with urgency, but also [...] I think one thing that that always plays on my mind when these kinds of issues come up and stuff is sometimes people are not ready for that conversation. And so a lot of the time, like for example I come from [name of country], right, and it's an Islamic country. You know, there's a lot of issues with homophobia, racism and all of these issues. And of course, we want to move with urgency and we want to, you know, dismantle these issues and stuff. But a lot of times, if [...] the country's not ready for that conversation, and if you're not ready for that conversation, moving with that urgency might actually create more issues. [...] that is the only thing I will say about it is I think preparing people for these conversations and like almost building, it's about building a foundation for it rather than implementing it right away.” (RD01)

Another student expressed a degree of cynicism about the principles, suggesting that they were ‘obvious’, and unlikely to have an impact on her practice:

“[...] it's kind of obvious that we have to follow that, it's not something new, [...] it's just telling us how serious problems are. But [...] what we have to do is kind of obvious that we all know, so we were saying that [...] it kind of feels like we're just repeating [...] something that we already know and trying to make [this into] harder words.” (RD09)

For some students the CRSJ principles, along with related content in the unit, was completely new for them. Where this was the case students did not necessarily express commitment to changing their creative practice to align with the principles, however some did suggest that it was helpful to know about these ideas:

“[For me it is] uninteresting, you know environmental responsibility. [...] But I don't think as a designer, I never really saw myself, I probably still don't really see myself focussing in heavily on those topics, but to be educated in them more is not a bad thing, is it?” (RD02)

Food as a Topic

Due to the complexity of the ideas in the responsible design unit, and to anchor a range of concepts that were relatable to students while relevant to the climate, racial and social principles, food was chosen as the topic of enquiry for the unit.

When asked what students thought about the use of food as a topic, most students reported positive perceptions of this as a choice. For some individuals this was because they felt that food was an accessible topic that most people could relate to in some way:

“I think it was accessible [...] because when we first started the first couple of assignments that we had [these were] on quite heavy political stuff. So it's like intersectionality and stuff like that, and it can be quite a like I say, a heavy topic and it requires like a bit of understanding, a bit of reading. I think food is way more accessible.” (RD02)

Some students identified food as making accessible the problems that the thinking that underpins the RDU seeks to address:

“I liked how it wasn't just like generically about ethics, like how it's specified food, because there is a lot to talk about food, whether it's about something that's more personal in terms of like cultural food or something.” (RD03)

However, some students found food as topic in a course on design difficult to connect with in an authentic way:

“I wasn't a big fan of it, I'll be honest. I mean, I understand the sustainable design and stuff like that in terms of art direction, but food just felt like a bit of a weird place to go” (RD01)

“[...] the course wanted us to make our personal story and connected with that. But it like, yeah, it's hard to just [...] do it without making up things 'cause we're not thinking about [...] the climate when we eat something [...] in our actual life, we don't do it. We did it for the course, but then it kind of felt like made-up for the course.” (RD09)

For some students who had challenging and complex relationships with food, being encouraged to reflect on personal experiences with food sometimes created conflicting emotions related to responsible design principles that students felt were often difficult to build into the playbook. Despite these challenges students reported finding interesting ways to develop their own narrative around this.

“Actually for me [the food topic] kind of helped me [...] personally for my art direction value[s], but I didn't [...] reflect [on] it in any way in my playbook [...] because [...] they also gave a template about food, so I had to [...] stick to that too. So I just [...] chose to keep my food narrative 'cause I already had, like an interesting narrative [...]” (RD09)

Navigating Creative Practice

Many students highlighted the challenges of navigating their creative learning journey through prior experience, building confidence and experimentation while connecting with the complexity of the themes and confusion over the required submission format for the unit.

Prior Experience

When speaking with students it was clear that the extent to which they were familiar with ideas relating to sustainability, systems thinking and responsible design varied significantly, with some expressing little interest or prior knowledge, while others describing a long-held interest. How the topics introduced were discussed in relation to the impact these ideas had on their creative practice therefore also varied.

For students who described themselves as having little prior experience or knowledge, encountering these ideas and frameworks gave them new factors to consider in their practice in areas of materiality and physical making. For example, in one of the first sessions a tutor presented her work on community mural making on food using paints made from natural materials rather than oils and plastics. This stood out for one student as an important consideration.

*“So even if I'm not necessarily my end product isn't a big banner to encourage recycling, for example. Just gives an extra level of consideration and how I'm producing the work that I am.”
(RD02)*

For students who were more familiar with the concepts, the responsible unit had the impact of validating the ideas they already had about the way they wanted to practice:

“[...] I consider a lot of the stuff that like the responsible design suggested anyway, but I think it almost validated those thoughts that I had.” (RD05)

Experimentation in the Classroom

One of the core teaching components was to make space for students to experiment with different ideas and processes. While this was seen as a positive aspect of the unit. Students noted that as this unit comes in the first year of the BA, many were still figuring out what their own creative practice looks like, and found it difficult to engage with creative forms of experimentation:

“I think the scope so far, the scope for experimentation has been present in throughout the course, I think regardless of the unit, I think because we're still in first year. We're still kind of figuring out what's possible or where we'd want to go, and so I don't think we quite take advantage of it as much as we probably can. [...] However, I will say that it's a great introduction to what is possible.” (RD02)

Students also highlighted the opportunity to be able to experiment as being helpful in developing their sense of themselves as art directors:

“I think the experimentation was quite good, because we did, we were asked to, I think bring an item [...] for our playbook and kind of like went with what kind of food we wanted to select, and you know what are basic for everyone. So we were divided into groups and it was interesting because we have to work with what we have on the spot. I mean, as simple as it is for like, you know, just photographing a food, we are in Art Direction students so we kind of have to make it look a bit nice and trying to kind of like know the message. So I think it was for us, [...] a topic that we touch upon under Art Direction that [...] helps us to think more creatively into like putting all of those concepts of like circularity and stuff in design.” (RD08)

Students reported feeling like there was an open and supportive environment around these activities, which enabled students to play with different ideas and concepts:

“I think that the photoshoot week where we had to photoshoot specific food was really strong as well just because we were given a lot of ingredients for free and everyone was doing you know everything. And I felt like that was that was a really strong moment in the course because people were showing up and like doing it, you know?” (RD06)

“So I think it was quite fun. Yeah. And we were working on groups so. We all have, you know, our own, like, taste and like, what kind of, like we wanted to portray, but we made it happen. It was quite messy in the sense of, like, just the table because we put food everywhere, but I think it was quite nice to kind of like, play around with it and, you know, experiment around.” (RD08)

However, some students highlighted factors that they felt limited by in how they were able to participate in experimentation. One highlighted the complexity of the subject matter they were dealing with, noting that it took them a while to understand it and so take advantage of the opportunities to experiment:

“Yeah, in class there was, yeah, like you said, like a lot of experimentation and there were like sort of projects to facilitate, like us experimenting with stuff. But by the time I'd like wrap my head around the concepts, I felt like we were wrapping up on the like on that thing that we were working on. So I ended up like finishing most of the work at home just because it takes me a while like to understand things so yeah.” [student mentioned elsewhere in interview that they have dyslexia] (RD05)

Building Confidence in Creative Practice

For some students, engagement with responsible design principles did not influence their own creative practice through directly incorporating those principles, despite engaging in experimentation. Rather engagement with the principles helped them build confidence in their own art direction practice. One student described how she was broadly in favour of many of the responsible design principles, but found the dominant aesthetic within literature and design that focused on sustainability to be off-putting, and explained it as in conflict with her own preferred tastes and creative practice. However, once she worked through her own design she came to a realisation that this helped her in her art direction practice:

“[...] as art directors and as people who chose this course, we all wanted to make it look cute like the playbook. We don't want to just design it bad, so what we were all saying is it's so hard to design like the climate and the academic things cute. It's so hard like the graph and everything is so like ugly, it doesn't look cute in the playbook. So we were all struggling for that. [...] I think I solved it in my playbook and that was all, that's also like how I kind of learned that I can just do it in my own way. But because I like I did what they wanted to me to put in the elements, but my design doesn't look responsive, like my design is really kitschy and it looks like a plastic toy. Like it doesn't look really environmentally responsible.” (RD09)

Confusion and Learning from Playbook Design

Despite a sense of an open and supportive environment being discussed there was also significant confusion in how to communicate complex ideas through the submission and assessment format. The core task for students on this unit was to create a ‘playbook’ in which they used visual communication skills to explore themes related to responsible design. Playbooks are used in a variety of ways as guides for designers and organisations to set out ways of working in teams and with collaborators. Each week students were set specific tasks in order to create new pages of their own playbooks. Several examples of playbooks were shared with students online via Moodle and in class, but the format of the playbook prompted many questions and uncertainty around how students should apply their learning to the format of the playbook itself as it was unfamiliar to them.

Confusion around the playbook format therefore emerged quite strongly in the interviews. For some the confusion centred on the playbook task and the purpose of it, and how it did not relate to their usual creative practice due to a lack of emphasis on producing an outcome.

“As a task, I didn't really understand it to begin with, honestly, I thought it was an interesting one because we don't really come up with an end product. I guess the playbook is the end product, right? [...] Like I'm very used to like explaining why and stuff, which is part of the playbook, and then coming up with an end project, like product for it, and that made more sense to me. So this was something a little bit different from that. (RD01)

Others found it difficult to connect the complex ideas, constructs and frameworks that were presented to them within the taught aspects of the class to the work they were set in creating the playbook, which often involved reflecting on personal tastes and experiences:

“But I think I [...] struggle just with how to connect [concepts]. For example, like I would know sustainability, I would know what is circularity but I wouldn't know like what would be the right example or how to bring up that in you know just the connections like. I'm not sure if mine was or not really strong enough.” (RD08)

However, some students described a creative practice journey which may have started with confusion, but later led to them being able to explore the responsible design concepts and come to a conclusion about what this meant for them personally, rather than following more general perspectives:

“I think, yeah, before, I would say before literally just a day or two before the final hand in I wasn't really understanding how all of it is making sense together. So I think that was probably the biggest hurdle, but I realised [...] this unit sort of like pushes you to make sense of it on your own, which I, after being done with that, was really grateful for. [...] I think final reflection specifically was really helpful with that.” (RD07)

“So I was following along and I had produced work, but I wasn't really happy with it. I still wasn't completely clear up on what I was doing. [...] So it's purely that I'd figured out what I wanted to say through the brief, and understand the brief a lot better after going through it at my own pace and I realised the work that I had to that point wasn't the best I could produce and so I started again.” (RD02)

Concerns, Contradictions and Critical Tensions

While some students highlighted the accessible way the food topic enabled them to connect to responsible design themes, some students reported caring deeply about these issues whereas others didn't. Other students also expected the unit would deal with wider political issues such as class and inequality and some experienced contradictions in how theory was put into practice. These different orientations to the topic of responsible design and the care and expectation on what responsible design should be created points of critical tension and emotion for students.

Differing Orientations and Care

Students who felt they cared deeply about issues discussed in class described feeling emotionally sad when interacting with others who didn't seem to be as passionate. This caused a particular point of tension where students who felt strongly about these issues found themselves working alongside students who did not and were perceived to express their lack of interest by not showing up.

“I wish there was some way to engage [students] more. [...] this was one unit I definitely felt people lose focus [...] just stop engaging, stop coming to class. A lot of people [were] like just ‘I will just submit my work’ sort of thing. [...] that was really sad to see. [...] food can have so many implications, I wish there's any way for people to actually tap into that [...], I think on an individual level, [...].” (RD07)

One student explained that she felt that trying to follow responsible design principles limited her ability to push her creativity and advance her work. This was not due to the theme, but more associated with her interactions with other students who were less focussed on the topic. They highlighted how at times this caused tensions with other teammates:

“[...] 'cause I'm quite passionate on all those issues. And I feel like there is a slight disconnect, especially with the students, like no disrespect for them whatsoever, but quite often you'll try and get in a conversation with people and like they'll care briefly, but [...] I try and be as careful [...] with what I'm creating as possible, and then I see other people and they definitely they don't really seem to care. And then I felt feel like I'm held back in my work slightly because they can create these things and I was like, oh, wait, but I thought we were meant to be considering this, this and this...” (RD05)

For the same student who put a lot of work into considering how to apply responsible design principles within their playbook, it led to tensions where they felt other students hadn't done so, and this did not appear to be reflected in the feedback they received:

“So like say, they've yeah created something that isn't potentially considering a lot of things, but [...] it's seen as fine, whereas I'm like, oh, I've done all this work, considered all these people, but, obviously because I want to as well, and they're still able to get, like really good feedback and like, there's no criticism of that.” (RD05)

Relationship between theory and practice

Some students perceived that there was a significant gap between the theoretical frameworks and principles they were taught about responsible design, and the extent to which the unit expected students to apply those principles in practical sessions, some of which were seen as contradictory:

“I don't grasp the concept if I don't apply it and we weren't applying it, and actually in a lot of ways I felt like we kind of contradicted the stuff that we were trying to learn about, you know? Like, for example, with the food waste with, you know? I don't know, just things around the playbook just didn't really make sense when we were learning about things and then not doing them.” (RD01)

Another student spoke about feeling the need to choose between the political theoretical issues she cared deeply about and other ideas she had about the food system that were also important to her:

“That I didn't want to compromise on the ideas of like the community and anti-capitalist stuff that I was talking about in my playbook. I didn't want to bring in any elements of, for example, culture or health. But those are also really important to me in in relation to food, but I just could not talk about them.” (RD07)

For others the unit brought to the surface issues around income inequality that they had already been thinking about and grappling with on a personal level but were not explored in class

“I often feel like that isn't much talk around class [...] I don't know if this is relevant, but especially when I first joined, I was like I think I was just in a bit of shock, I was like ‘I don't know what I'm doing here’ and I just couldn't really believe they're like gap in the wealth and I thought that would be more conversations on that just because I know university is seen as that like perhaps a space to talk about that. [...] I don't know what I was expecting, but, yeah, it wasn't that.” (RD05)

Key learnings and Recommendations

1. *Readiness of students coming to responsibility and justice*

Students came to the unit from differing starting points with respect to their prior familiarity, enthusiasm for the issues, and political orientations. Some students arrived having little or no familiarity with the issues or their interconnections, while in contrast other students arrived with pre-existing knowledge of, and passion for, the ideas inherent in responsible design. Working together may surface differing expectations in the extent to which students are invested in understanding the principles and the different intersectionalities, and exploring them through practice. This creates tensions for students and may have a knock-on effect on student's confidence in their own outputs.

Recommendation – Expect a range of student experiences with these topics, from those very engaged with the language of CSRJ and related frameworks right through to students who have not encountered them before. Build in time to allow for debate while encouraging respectful recognition of differences in position.

Stretch recommendation - Development of a game or toolkit that may facilitate students to recognise those different starting points to engage in these issues together. This could even be set as a student project to see how students would want to approach these issues from their standpoint.

2. *Anchoring principles through relatable and accessible topics*

Student feedback was in general positive towards the use of food as a topic to anchor some of the very complex ideas inherent in responsible design and the CSRJ principles. Students described it as accessible and relatable, and something that everyone has some kind of relationship with, even when there is complexity and difficulty. We suggest that using a topic that is accessible for students can be an effective route into the complexities inherent in considering weighty issues such as sustainability, environmental impact, social and racial justice and circular economies.

Recommendation – Choose subjects that can anchor and connect students together such as food , nature, entertainment, while also respecting that students will inevitably have very different prior experiences, some of which can create discomfort and disconnection.

Stretch recommendation – Create or curate a collection of resources and activities to scaffold the content with tools that may enable students to navigate their position in relation to topics. Examples of successful activities for students in this cycle of delivery were; experimenting with food and photography in a setting that was time bound, tactile, playful, collective and practical; and in contrast structured reflections that were personal and private that helped students consolidate their individual learning experiences.

3. The value of navigating confusion and complexity for creativity

Where supported well, experiences of navigating confusion and complexity through experimentation and reflection are valuable to student creativity and confidence. However, some students found it difficult to consider opposing ideas or experiences at the same time, and holding these together (a form of cognitive dissonance) can be uncomfortable. This should be acknowledged and students supported to find their own way of navigating this discomfort.

Recommendation – Hold time and space within the classroom and within the resources for confusion and complexity to be recognised and discussed. Create a permissive environment in which students can express confusion and misunderstanding, allowing different ways for students to ask questions in (and out) of the class. Balancing the need for clarity with the need to enable students to discover answers that are meaningful for themselves can be difficult, especially in a first-year unit, but it is important that we are not fearful of challenging students to work through confusion, discomfort and even boredom.

Stretch recommendation – Non-violent communication tools or similar could be used to think about issues of climate and planet to allow for emotions such as confusion and cognitive dissonance to be explored in a non-judgemental way.

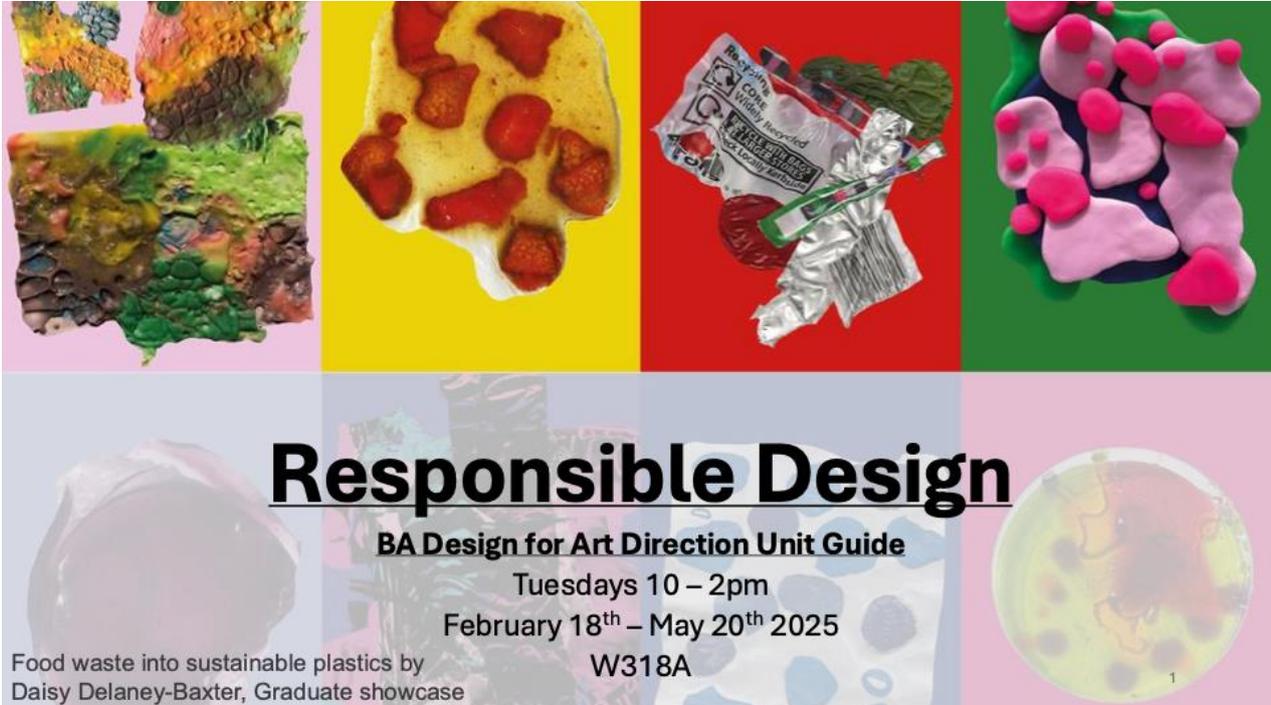
Concluding comments

Students were broadly supportive of learning about the Principles for Climate, Social and Racial Justice and the aligned concepts and frameworks that are relevant to Responsible Design. Many students spoke of finding the experience valuable, and of allowing them to think more carefully about their practice and the kind of designer they may want to be. Through delivery and evaluation of the unit we found that confusion and tension was largely inevitable, but how this was explored with students also built confidence in their emerging creative practices.

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Appendix: BA Design for Art Direction Unit Guide



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Extenuating Circumstances (extensions)

[LINK](#)

Authorised Absences

[LINK](#)

Mental health and wellbeing support

[LINK](#)

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Unit Introduction

The unit is an introduction to core principles in responsible design. You will explore the role of environmental and social responsibility to inform and further develop your own creative practice.

You will engage in contemporary debates and explore approaches, tools and frameworks for understanding and practising how social and environmental responsibility is enacted across visual design and communication practices.

You will learn from existing industry practitioners' examples and gain an understanding of how ethics, politics and cultural contexts influence design decisions to develop strategies for your own practice.

You will respond to questions that guide what responsible design means for different communities and engage in developing your own values for social and climate justice in design.



Food waste mass by Daisy Delaney-Baxter, Graduate showcase

Brief: Future Food

Food is an essential aspect of life on earth, whether you are an ant or an elephant, a microbe or a monkey, a flower or a fly.

While food sustains life, mass produced food increasingly presents harms for both humans and other species. How food is produced, consumed and distributed across the globe is increasingly considered problematic from a social, economic and ecological perspective.

Communication design has a role to play in how food is experienced. Future Art Directors and creatives also have a role in how food is presented and the stories we promote and share.

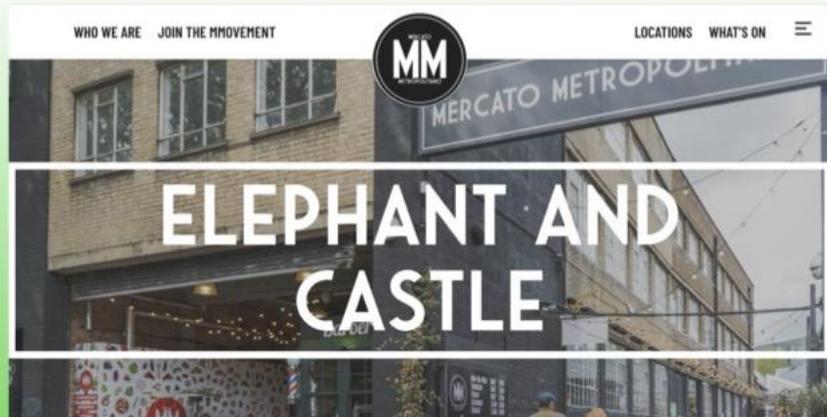


<https://superflux.in/index.php/work/mitigation-of-shock/#installation>

Brief: Future Food

We will be working with Mercato Metropolitano in Elephant and Castle to generate ideas for a future food offering for the local area.

“MM’s values of community, quality and social responsibility are maintained throughout every touchpoint of the site; from the recycled materials to the no-frills layout. It’s entirely based on a sustainable economic model that is socially responsible and an asset to the local community.”



<https://mercatometropolitano.com/elephant-castle/>

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Unit Assignment

For the unit assignment you will produce a **Responsible Design for Art Direction Playbook**.

Your playbook will be a 10-12 page PDF submission due 3pm 20th May.

We will explore what responsible design for art direction means to you through the theme of **future food**.

Each week we will focus on a different aspect of **future food** and responsible design, through visits, talks, and workshops.

You will document your exploration, engagement and iteration each week. You will be continually creating and selecting content that will be collected and submitted in a single PDF of work that will become your

Responsible Design for Art Direction Playbook.

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Unit Assignment

Your Playbook will capture your engagement with **responsible design** in the context of **Design for Art Direction**. This will include readings, examples explored in class and from your own research.

You will document your **learning journey** within the theme future food which will include **systems thinking, ecological literacy, and design justice**.

You will apply these approaches through the **design and art direction of visual media** by generating **illustrations, diagrams, photographs and stories**.



Megan Cox Window Painting Murals for Earth Day 2023, Graduate Showcase

Unit Assignment

Your Playbook should **demonstrate in-depth reflection** on what you consider as key **values, principles, frameworks and tools** related to **responsibility in design**.

These should be supported by **resources from class** and from your learning journey on the theme and from your **extracurricular activities and reading**.

Sources and resources in the Playbook should be accompanied by relevant and appropriately **cited references**.



Megan Cox Window Painting Murals for Earth Day 2023, Graduate Showcase

What is a Playbook?

A playbook can be many things, but usually guidelines and tools for how people want to work.

Playbooks are useful ways of communicating a set of values, principles, approaches and methods to develop consistency and shared resources for future collaboration. The Nesta and UNDPs examples below are playbooks produced by large organisations, to help communicate principles and methods with collaborators.

The Graphic Design Play Book by Aurélien Farina and Sophie Cure (available in the library) also offers more design oriented and playful approaches to visual communication.



What is Art Direction?

A brief reminder of emerging roles ...

Storytelling across different creative disciplines.

Interdisciplinary + experimental skills in core discipline (e.g. graphics, photography, film) accompanied by additional skills.

Lead teams of creatives to **collaborate** on projects.

Create a **vision, concepts** and consistent **visual language** communicating these to clients and collaborators.

Seek out and establish new **trends** and **critically** evaluate ideas.

<https://www.dandad.org/en/d-ad-become-art-director-new-blood-advice/>

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What is Art Direction?

You will be demonstrating growing expertise in Art Direction through

Contextualising your emerging practice (**enquiry**)

Developing your **voice** as a designer and art director (**communication**)

Experimenting with different practices of **storytelling** (**process**)

You are embedding and exploring skills and knowledge developed in previous and concurrent Units ...

Moodboards, print design layout + guides

Experimental storytelling + collaboration

Critical thinking + visual analysis

Unit Assignment Submission

The unit assignment is the submission of a

Responsible Design for Art Direction Playbook.

Your playbook will be **10-12 page max 100 MB PDF.**

Name your PDF file: FIRST NAME_SURNAME_RDUPlaybook.pdf

Submit your PDF on Moodle

Main Submission Deadline: **Tuesday 20th May 3pm**

Extenuating Circumstance (extensions EC) Submission Wednesday 28th May 3pm

You will need to apply for an EC before the main deadline [LINK](#)

ISA / AA Submission (email bdi@arts.ac.uk to activate) Wednesday 4th June 3pm

You will already need an ISA in place disability@arts.ac.uk

Assessment Marking

Assignments are assessed and graded A-F with increments e.g. +/-

Grades A-D = pass Grades E-F = fail

Late submissions lose incremental marks e.g. if you receive a B grade but submit an hour late the grade becomes B-

Grades and feedback released 3 weeks after submission deadline

i.e. 10th June onwards unless you have EC or ISA/AA

Year 1 grades do not contribute to your final degree classification. It is a useful time to experiment, take risks and learn! As long as you pass you can progress to Year 2.

[Read more about UAL Assessment online HERE](#)

Assessment Marking

Learning Outcomes

Demonstrate your exploration of ethical and responsible design principles, how these are creatively practised and their potential impacts on environmental and social challenges and / or opportunities. **(Enquiry)**

Evidence engagement with and articulation of your own values in relation to different audiences, using relevant methods and choice of media to communicate your ideas and situate your work. **(Communication)**

Demonstrate your creative journey and iterative development within your design concepts and creative process in response to particular needs and audiences. **(Process)**

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Your Playbook should include the following contents

FRONT COVER: Student name and number, unit title, name of document

PART 1

Future Food Guide

Pages 1-5

- Taste and Flavour
- Fair Food
- Ingredient Systems Map
- Tasting Menu
- Your Food Story

PART 2

Ingredients of Responsible Art Direction

Pages 6-10

- Earth Day Example
- Principles, Frameworks and Tools
- Your DAD Values
- Reflection
- Bibliography

(see Unit Assessment Guide for further detail for each page)

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Timetable

DATE	ACTIVITY	OUTCOME	PAGES OF PDF
Tues 18 th February 10am – 2pm	Unit Introduction Taste and Flavour @ Mercato	Illustrations + photo- documentation	Taste and Flavour
Tues 25 th February 10am – 2pm	Ecoliterate Design: RD Principles + Frameworks	Photograph / illustration of group poster	Principles + Frameworks
Tues 4 th March 10am – 2pm	What did you have for your breakfast? Fair food and life cycles	Illustration of life cycle of breakfast	Fair Food + Ingredients Systems Map
Tues 11 th March 10am – 2pm	Ingredients systems map and design tasting menu	Moodboard	Tasting Menu
Tues 18 th March 10am – 2pm	Tasting menu and photography	Moodboard + Social Media Story	Tasting Menu + Your Food Story
SPRING BREAK			

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Timetable

DATE	ACTIVITY	OUTCOME	PAGES OF PDF
Tues 15 th April 10am – 2pm	Your Food Story	Examples, concepts and illustrations	Your Food Story
Tues 22 nd April 10am – 2pm	Earth Day Activities UAL wide	Your Responsible Design Principles	Earth Day
Tues 29 th April 10am – 2pm	Values and Principles Presentation + Feedback	Feedback to incorporate into Playbook	Values
Tues 6 th May 10am – 2pm	Reflection and Bibliography	Reflection + Bibliography	Reflection and Bibliography
Tues 13 th May 10am – 2pm	Presentation + Feedback	Draft PDF + feedback Add to Playbook	Feedback and iteration
Tues 20th May	3pm Submission on Moodle Celebration		
Weds 28th May Extenuating Circumstances (if approved) 3pm Submission on Moodle			
Weds 4 th June ISA / AA 3pm Submission on Moodle			

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Technical Sessions (Mandatory)

DATE	ACTIVITY	OUTCOME	PAGES OF PDF
Tues 18 th February 3-5pm (W233)	Illustrator	Digital Illustrations + photo-documentation	Taste and Flavour
Tues 25 th February 3-5pm (W233)	Illustrator	Digital photograph / illustration of group poster	Principles + Frameworks
Tues 4 th March 3-5pm (W233)	Illustrator	Digital Illustration of life cycle of breakfast	Fair Food + Ingredients Systems Map
Tues 11 th March 3-5pm Digital Space	Premiere (Image Practices)	Importing Footage	Not Applicable – Image Practices
Tues 18 th March 3-5pm Digital Space	Premiere (Image Practices)	Importing Footage	Not Applicable – Image Practices

SPRING BREAK

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Technical Sessions (Optional)

DATE	ACTIVITY	OUTCOME	PAGES OF PDF
Thurs 17 th April 3-5pm W233	Photoshop	Photo-editing and compositing	ALL
Thurs 24 th April 3-5pm W233	Photoshop	Photo-editing and compositing	ALL
Thurs 1 st May 3-5pm W233	Photoshop	Photo-editing and compositing	ALL
Thurs 8 th May 3-5pm W233	InDesign	Preparing your PDF layout and design	ALL
Thurs 15 th May 3-5pm W233	InDesign	Preparing your PDF layout and design	ALL
Tues 20th May	3pm Submission on Moodle		
Weds 28th May Extenuating Circumstances (if approved) 3pm Submission on Moodle			
Weds 4 th June ISA / AA 3pm Submission on Moodle			

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Weekly Schedule⁺

Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday
Responsible Design Rachel & Ramia	Image Practices Hans & Floriane	Image Practices Hans & Floriane	
10am -2pm W318A	10am -2pm W318A	10am -2pm W318A	
Technical Sessions Marco		Technical Sessions Marco	Language Development Matthew
3-5pm W233		3-5pm W233 (From April optional)	3-5pm W214

+ We will be **signposting optional extra activities** when available.

+ There will be **work to do between each session** to complete for the following week.

If you miss a session ...

Review slides in Moodle

Email us to let us know

Talk to your classmates

because ...

slides do not always cover everything we do in class.

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Further Reading

Boehnert, J. (2021) *Design, Ecology, Politics: Towards the Ecocene*. Bloomsbury Press (Main Reading)

Boylston S. (2019). *Designing with Society: A Capabilities Approach to Design Systems Thinking and Social Innovation*. Routledge.

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UAL Responsible Design Framework (2017) https://www.arts.ac.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0023/63716/ResponsibleDesignFramework.pdf

Wise, S. (2022) *Design for Belonging: How to Build Inclusion and Collaboration in Your Communities*. Ten Speed Press.

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College Resources

Unit Moodle [LINK](#)

LCC Technical Resources [LINK](#)

Booking Technical Resources [LINK](#)

ORB Equipment Booking [LINK](#)

Library Resources [LINK](#)

Attendance [LINK](#)

Attendance Monitoring [LINK](#)

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