

**Sam Fox School of Design and Visual Arts
Commons Course Proposal**

**Title: Furniture Design / Spring / 400 level / 3cr. / Proposed Contact hours : 4
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Course Description

The seat is an intimate interface between the building and the body. It embodies a complex set of structural conditions, material opportunities, and possibilities for expression. Architects, artists, and industrial designers covet opportunities to make the chair. The result is that seemingly infinite perfect solutions exist -- and still the seat remains a provocative challenge. In this course, students will design and build a chair. Emergent technologies will be combined with traditional techniques of metal fabrication, woodworking, and plastic forming in the design and making of the work. The course objective is for students to learn how to work directly with machinery and materials in the realization of their design. It is expected that students have basic shop skills addressed in the course prerequisites. Advanced techniques will be introduced in the course, and students will select those most appropriate to their work to build upon. There is a great deal of independent investigation required to excel in this course. Students will propose ideas and then to develop them using drawings, models, and mock-ups in order to realizes the best potential for their design.

Prerequisites:

- Completion of Fabrication Workshop Safety and Orientation seminar
- Arch 211 or equivalent.
- Permission of the instructor may override course requirements.
- \$50 materials fee.

Narrative:

This course would appeal to students in art and design for several reasons. For the architect, it is an opportunity to actually realize a design and in so doing learn directly and experientially about material and technology behavior. For the artist it is an opportunity to establish skills of developing an idea through a process of iterations. They will be working at scales to represent ideas to be developed and critiquing them in new ways. For both students it is the opportunity to develop innovative ways of working with materials and/or structures. Emergent technologies are integrated with traditional ones in this course largely dependent on individual student's problem definition.

Schedule :

Weeks: 1-3

Two study problems with specific materials and/or material families. Materials are predetermined and provided from lab fee. These assignments develop students' basic working skills with a variety of materials. Specific techniques are in demonstration / tutorial.

Then students are assigned a problem that is simple in scope but directed toward problems typical of furniture design.

Example Study Problem: Design and make a walking cane using steel and another material.

Design focus is on scaling to the body (references provided), design of the handle where the hand meets the cane, and the foot detail so that the cane provides a stable and attractive end that does not mar the ground plane.

Field Trips to material suppliers are scheduled:

Hibdon Hardwood

Shapiro Supply

Fehlig Box and Lumber, Gordon's Plastic, ACI, or other

Reading 1: *George Nakashima and the Mass Production of Craftsmanship*, Matilda McQuaid

Assign: 250 word summary followed by discussion

Reviews: Walking Cane and Body Supportive Device / In class review

Weeks 3 – 6

Preliminary Design: Sketches and study models using variety of materials. Materiality of model in relation to design is discussed.

Group Research: students research 2 – 3 designers and make presentations. Research requirements include: biographical information, description of the overall trajectory of the designers career, their main influences, primary materials, and most important contributions to contemporary design.

Independent Research: Study existing chairs. Sketch, measure, and evaluate. Make notes about seating experience as it relates to these measurements.

Reading 2 Assign : 250 word summary followed by discussion

Review: 3":1' model and full scale detail / Guest critics from school

Weeks 7 – 11

In class presentations: Guest presentation(s) followed by a question and answer session.

Review: Full Scale Prototype and Scale Drawings

Students make full-scale operational prototype.

Critics who make furniture are invited to critique the students' work.

Weeks 12 – 15

Field Trips: Centro Modern Furnishings

Review: Final Prototype and Graphics Package

For this review I like to have people from the retail and merchandising end of furniture design in addition to in-house critics.