

Collaborative Design Studio: Experience Design – Location-Based Entertainment and the Design of Fun

AD 463-001 – Fall 2025; Monday and Thursday; 1:00 PM – 5:20 PM

New Jersey Institute of Technology

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“It’s fun to have fun, but you have to know how... If you never did you should. These things are fun and fun is good.”

Dr. Seuss

“When you are inside a theme park, while you are watching one of its shows or spinning aboard one of its rides, you are thinking about the theme park, not about your humdrum life, relationship problems or issues with the boss at work...theme parks represent extraordinary spatial and social forms, they offer some of the most basic needs, reflect deep and powerful emotions and cognitive modes, and present some of the most telling and controversial representations of the world. Unlike cinema and theatre, in which audience members passively watch the action on the screen or stage, and unlike the narratives of television and books, which are static, the theme park uses drama as the basis of its unique form. The theme park, as it expands beyond its proper site – as an enclosed space that contains thrill rides, shows, restaurants and food, and other attractions that are all tied to thematic landscapes that reflect our most popular fantasies – becomes a fully-fledged social and architectural form that continues to impact more and more people throughout the world, even if they do not realize it.”

Scott A. Lukas

PREREQUISITES:

DD 364, ID 364, INT 364, or ARCH 364 and PHYS 102. For A+D majors only. Architecture majors may register with departmental approval.

INTRODUCTION:

There is a general consensus that spending money on experiences is better than spending money on accumulating stuff. And as more than one anonymous writer said, the stuff gets old, but the experiences get better every time you talk about them. Author and psychologist, Professor Richard Wiseman of the University of Hertfordshire in the UK wrote in *59 Seconds: Think a Little, Change a Lot*:

“Buy Experiences Not Goods. Want to buy happiness? Then spend your hard-earned cash on experiences. Go out for a meal. Go to a concert, cinema or theatre. Go on holiday. Go and learn how to pole dance. Go paintballing. Go bungee jumping. In fact, get involved in anything that provides an opportunity to do things with others, and then tell even more people about it afterwards. When it comes to happiness, remember that it is experiences that represent really good value for money.”

Krispy Kreme was founded by Vernon Rudolph in Winston-Salem, North Carolina who discovered that having people wait in line while watching (and smelling) fresh doughnuts being made, contributed enormously to sales. He elevated the purchase of a doughnut to an experience in the 1930’s.

People paid a lot of money to see the Beatles in 1964, and a lot more to see Taylor Swift in 2024. And a whole lot of money was spent on concerts between those two tours. It’s not like that was the only way to listen to the music from those artists.

The cost of attending a Super Bowl is significant. Yet they sell out every year. People who could easily watch the game for free on TV, travel to a game to be entertained, to feel “part of the action,” and to be with others. They want to have fun, and have an experience.

Theme parks, games, rides, and toys can all contribute to experiences facilitating fun. Fun is important. It allows us to relax, recharge, recalibrate. Theme parks (in contrast with amusement parks which are often a collection of unrelated rides or experiences) have a message: they can inspire us, teach us, allow us to escape to a world that does not exist (yet).

Parks built on a theme can be based on existing intellectual fictional property like “The Wizarding World of Harry Potter” at Universal Studios, “Star Wars: Galaxy’s Edge” at Disneyland, or “Pandora: The World of Avatar” at Disney’s Animal Kingdom. Or they can be based on original content created by the designer. They can be created and inspired by a work of art (e.g., a world inspired by the art of Picasso, Mondrian, Bosch, or Van Gogh). They can be created and inspired by a book (that has not yet been made into a movie or television series), or they can be designed to teach (think about various museums of natural history, or the many science or industry-based/inspired exhibitions or pavilions at world expos and world fairs). They can be an art-focused collection of interactive experiences (e.g., Superblue Miami, teamLab Borderless and teamLab Planets in Tokyo). They can be for a general audience, or for a smaller targeted audience (like Sesame Place). The common element is that these are collective experiences that exist in a location and there is a social/group component. Even VR/AR/XR experiences are located in a place.

This course explores the theory and practice of experiential design (primarily) through the vehicle of theme park environments in a broad sense, which represents some of the most sophisticated examples of multidisciplinary design integrating architecture and interior design, landscape design, industrial design, digital media, performance, and narrative. The course combines critical analysis with project-based learning and will emphasize human-centered design, collaborative practice, and the application of current and developing technologies.

PROJECT:

This studio will design multidisciplinary experiences as a type of location-based entertainment. The studio will start with research and investigation into a narrow-scope targeted list of historical and “family-friendly” ways of having fun outside the home and to look at the variables that affect location-based experience design. (Criminal, anti-social, and inappropriate activities are excluded from the investigation and design project.) The studio will take an expansive view of what a theme park is or can be. Specifically, this preliminary investigation will include interactive venues, theme parks, and other imaginary worlds (including world fairs and expositions) that are already visualized that “could be” built as a place for entertainment from sources like graphic novels/comic books, movies, art, or history. Short team-based sketch problems will add a creative element to the preliminary and preparatory research and prior to the full project the studio will have a team-based sketch problem exploring the design of a themed pavilion experience. Student teams, after identifying the theme and/or purpose of their park, shall design the park and ride(s) contained therein. NOTE: The final selection or theme must be approved by the instructor, and the nature of the project’s scope and development shall be discussed with the instructor prior to approval.

Roles team members take in any project may vary. However, as a *preliminary* method of organization, it can be assumed that Architecture and Interior Design students will likely design the layout of the park (which may be housed in a single “building” or be a collection of buildings on a larger site, depending on the type of rides proposed, the theme/purpose, and the demographic nature of the group membership) and any structures contained within (including those buildings that are part of rides). Digital Design students are likely to design interactive and other visual components of the project (which may include onscreen or game interactivity as well as physical interactivity) that may be make up discrete experiences or part of other, larger, more comprehensive experiences. Industrial Design students shall be designing

associated merchandise as well as physical artifacts from toys to transportation that are part of the park and entertainment experiences. It is expected that all members collectively determine the overall direction and purpose(s) of the proposed project. It is entirely permissible – and may prove to be desirable or even necessary – that students from one program design, or assist in the design of, portions of the project that may not typically be considered part of their “jurisdiction” (like an interior designer creating a spaceship). After competence and honesty, flexibility has been identified by industry representatives (SIGGRAPH 2025) as the most important character trait of any prospective employee. The most successful teams in past Collaborative Design Studios were made up of people who were flexible and considerate of one another. In other words, people who worked collaboratively, helped one another, and worked diligently throughout the project.

All final work shall be submitted as directed by the instructor and placed on Kepler for archiving.

DISABILITIES AND ACCOMMODATIONS:

Students with documented disabilities should inform the instructor during the first week of the semester to receive appropriate accommodation(s). Any chronic/permanent disability for which accommodations may be required – whether taken or not by the student – must be documented with, and confirmed by, the NJIT Office of Accessibility Resources and Services (<https://www.njit.edu/accessibility/>). Students are not required to avail themselves of any accommodation to which they are entitled. Temporary disabilities that are obvious (e.g., broken arm) may be preliminarily assessed by the instructor but must still be documented by the Dean of Students. Accommodation sought after the start of the semester will only be offered to students in those instances where the disabilities are (diagnosed or have the first instance of occurrence during the semester. No retroactive accommodation(s) are available.

ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI):

Artificial Intelligence is already integrated into many of the tools a designer typically uses (including, but not limited to, Adobe Photoshop). The important question is not if we use it, but *how* we use it. Generative artificial intelligence has the potential to improve decision-making and enhance creativity. While it does not have to be used at all times or for all problems, it is certainly a tool that could be used to benefit the project. To uphold academic integrity with the use of AI, students must consider the limitations of AI and use it critically. Be aware of the possibility of bias, incomplete and/or inaccurate information, plagiarism, and issues of data privacy. Students are responsible for any information or work presented that is generated in any capacity with AI tools (e.g., Firefly, Spring.ai, ChatGPT, ideogram.ai). Students must cite the use of generative AI and document intermediate design steps showing text and prompts along with any images generated by AI. Tool(s) used must be cited. Do not simply copy and paste AI-generated material and claim it as your own. Modifications made by the designer and the way AI-generated work is used must be made clear and documented. In other words, the design and presentation processes must be documented when AI-generated work is incorporated at any step. ***For your own protection and to respect the privacy rights of others, do not use your personal data (including NJIT UCID), or that of others, in any prompts for AI generated material. Ever.***

There ARE ways to keep your work original AND take advantage of AI and generative AI capabilities. In collaboration with Spring.ai – a company founded by NJIT A+D Industrial Design alumna Jabeen Zaidi – students will be attempting to train AI to help them design with their own style, independent of the project or prompts. Students will therefore be able to train generative AI for ethical use and without (presumably) relying on work that belongs to others. It must be acknowledged, however, that most design work grows from other work. Ideas are not proprietary, but individual designer’s interpretation of an idea is. The line between what you can and cannot do, should and should not do, is not always entirely clear. This collaboration and experiment will help us collectively determine how generative AI can help us design without infringing upon the rights of others.

ATTENDANCE:

Attendance is required whether working onsite or remotely. This means that on those days for which studio critiques are scheduled, students will have (new) work to critique by the instructor and/or visiting guest critics. After three unexcused absences, students may incur a ½ grade penalty for each additional unexcused absence. Beyond the attendance requirements, participation will be considered as part of the final semester grade. Be on time! Should remote work be required or permitted, and desk crits are scheduled, it is important to be present at the start of class. Try logging on a few minutes early to make sure there are no problems. (NOTE: If you have trouble getting a complete connection with Zoom, restart/reboot your computer and the problem may clear. Be prepared to jump onto alternative applications like Google Meet if necessary.) To take advantage of online opportunities for additional/external criticism, it is recommended that students have headphones and a webcam.

NOTE: Absences for religious observances are considered excused but generally these are not spontaneous and are scheduled in advance (even those based on the lunar calendar that rely on visual sightings have a range of expected dates identified by the start of the semester). As such, any expected absence due to a religious observance must be communicated to the instructor during the first full week of class and accommodation will be made accordingly. Religious holidays recognized by the State of New Jersey Department of Education are listed at the Department of Education website (<https://www.nj.gov/education/holidays.shtml>; then follow the link to 2025-26 Observances). It is also acknowledged that specific holidays may vary in significance and degree of observance within a religion. The decision to be present for one holiday does not prejudice any decision, one way or the other, for subsequent or preceding holidays of the same religion. Students should communicate to the instructor how observations will affect personal schedules. While it is acknowledged that some blended families may celebrate holidays of multiple religions, too many absences can lead to a situation where a student falls behind and is unable to effectively and/or equitably contribute to the team effort required in the Collaborative Design Studio. In those instances, the student should see the instructor at the start of the semester. In general, however, it is expected that an individual student may have excused absences for only one religion during the semester. While absences may be excused for religious holidays, work must still be completed in a timely manner. When a religious holiday conflicts with a due date for an assignment, that assignment shall be submitted no later than the start of the first class following the holiday unless other arrangements are made with the approval of the instructor (with an acknowledgement that some holidays last for extended periods).

CELL PHONE USE AND MISCELLANEOUS CLASS POLICIES:

As of September 1, 2025, NJIT is a smoke/tobacco/vapor-free campus. That means neither you nor any guests (for whom you are responsible) may smoke on campus.

Use common sense and courtesy when considering cell phone use (including texting). Do not use cell phones when you are in a room with others who are presenting or with whom you are collaborating if you are supposed to be “present” (i.e., paying attention). There is a difference between using the phone as entertainment and using it as a tool to look up information pertinent to a project, or to use the camera to record images and work. Please do not be rude. Students may use cell phones to make or receive calls and texts during studio time when not directly involved in a critique with the instructor or peers. Do not abuse this policy and do not disturb your colleagues. If necessary, go into the corridor to speak. Use of cell phones during periods of student presentations or faculty instruction is not approved at any time. Please set your phones to silent or vibrate, even outside of class time when working near others who do not want to hear your phone ping every time you get a message.

Food may be consumed in studio at your own risk to your equipment. Students may not eat “over” the equipment (including keyboards) belonging to any other student. But KEEP THE STUDIO CLEAN. The studio is a shared, public space. Be respectful of one another. There shall be no posting of any material at one’s desk or on one’s computer desktop (or any lab computer) as wallpaper or screensaver any images or material that may be deemed offensive

to individuals or groups in this public space including (but not limited to) material considered offensive based on gender, race, religious preference, sexual orientation, or physical disability. The nature of politics (global and domestic) and political campaigns are also controversial and unless the specific topic of discussion within the class, should be avoided. Private discussions are fine but remember your point of pride may be another person's irritant. It is our collective responsibility to make the spaces and places we share conducive to learning the subject of the class without distraction.

While food and drink is permitted in the studio, there are times when there will be group reviews or presentations in labs or spaces (e.g., Weston 650) where food or drink are not permitted. Students are expected to respect the requirements of any space in which they happen to find themselves during the semester.

The work in this studio is collaborative and each member of the student team is expected to contribute. While it is the intent to grade a project based upon team performance, the instructor reserves the right to distinguish between efforts and final production when it comes to semester evaluation and grading. Students will also be required to provide a 360° evaluation at the end of the semester.

OBJECTIVES:

- To learn to work collaboratively in teams within a multi-disciplinary environment towards a common goal in support of a single project.
- To provide an opportunity for students to better understand the relationship between narrative and designed products. To provide an opportunity for students to apply narrative and storytelling experiences to the design of spatial and environmental experiences.
- To explore, in a limited fashion, the role of designers (from all represented disciplines in HCAD) in the entertainment industry.
- To practice developing a conceptual narrative that can be expressed spatially.
- To explore the relationship between form, circulation, and user experience.
- To provide an opportunity to consider multi-sensory design strategies (sight, sound, texture, smell, taste).
- To demonstrate an understanding of the historic development, cultural significance, and professional practices of theme park and experiential design.
- To provide continued practice in the employment of a reflective and iterative design process.
- To provide an opportunity to use generative AI as part of the design process and to train an generative AI model with personal work in support of ethical use of AI.
- To provide continued practice in effective graphic communication appropriate to the purpose and audience. Students are expected to demonstrate an understanding of what is useful, usable, effective, and desirable with respect to user/audience-centered digitally based communication, objects, and environments.
- To comply with NASAD (National Association of Schools of Art and Design) professional standards as they apply to all majors that include: demonstrate a developed visual sensitivity in work; gain functional competence with principles of visual organization, including the ability to work with visual elements in two and three dimensions, color theory and its applications, and drawing; analyze of works in art and design and the establish an ability to critically evaluate these works; development of an understanding of the common elements and vocabulary of art and design; understand the use and integration of technology in art and design; and be afforded the opportunity to experience in critiques and discussions of their work and the work of others.
- To comply with CIDA (Council for Interior Design Accreditation) 2024 Professional Standards listed below:
 - **4d – GLOBAL CONTEXT:** Students have exposure to current and emerging issues that are shaping contemporary society and the world.
 - **4f – GLOBAL CONTEXT:** Students have opportunities for developing multi-cultural awareness.

- **5a – COLLABORATION:** Students have awareness that multiple disciplines and stakeholders are involved in creating an interior environment.
- **5c – COLLABORATION:** Students understand the terminology and language necessary to communicate effectively with members of allied disciplines.
- **5d – COLLABORATION:** Students understand technology-based collaboration methods specific to the problem-solving process for the built environment disciplines.
- **5e – COLLABORATION:** Students understand the dynamics of team collaboration and the distribution and structure of team responsibilities.
- **5f – COLLABORATION:** Student work demonstrates the ability to create environments that are informed by multiple disciplines, stakeholders, and clients in developing design solutions.
- **6c – BUSINESS PRACTICES AND PROFESSIONALISM:** Students have an awareness of the breadth and depth of interior design's impact and value.
- **6i – BUSINESS PRACTICES AND PROFESSIONALISM:** Students have exposure to career opportunities an interior design education can afford and the options for advanced study.
- **7b – HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN:** Student work demonstrates an understanding of the relationship between the designed environment and human experience, wellbeing, behavior, and performance.
- **7d – HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN:** Student work demonstrates the ability to analyze and synthesize human perception and behavior patterns to inform design solutions.
- **7f – HUMAN-CENTERED DESIGN:** Student work demonstrates the ability to apply wayfinding techniques to design solutions.
- **8b – DESIGN PROCESS:** Student work demonstrates the ability to apply knowledge and skills learned to solve progressively complex design problems.
- **8e – DESIGN PROCESS:** Student work demonstrates the ability to apply knowledge and skills learned to use precedents to inform design concepts or solutions.
- **8f – DESIGN PROCESS:** Student work demonstrates the ability to explore and iterate multiple ideas.
- **8g – DESIGN PROCESS:** Student work demonstrates the ability to design creative and effective solutions.
- **8j – DESIGN PROCESS:** The interior design program includes exposure to a range of problem identification, idea generation, and problem-solving methods.
- **8k – DESIGN PROCESS:** The interior design program includes opportunities for innovation and risk taking.
- **9b – COMMUNICATION:** Students are able to effectively express ideas and their rationale in oral communication.
- **9d – COMMUNICATION:** Students are able to express ideas and their rationale developed in the design process through visual media: ideation drawings and sketches.
- **9e – COMMUNICATION:** Students are able to effectively express project solutions using a variety of visual communication techniques and technologies appropriate to a range of purposes and audiences.
- **9f – COMMUNICATION:** The interior design program provides opportunities for exposure to evolving communication technologies.
- **9g – COMMUNICATION:** The interior design program provides opportunities for students to develop active listening skills in the context of professional collaboration.
- **11b – DESIGN ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES:** Student work demonstrates the ability to explore design solutions through the use of a variety of media.
- **11c – DESIGN ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES:** Students effectively apply the elements and principles of design and related theories throughout the interior design curriculum to two-dimensional design solutions.
- **11d – DESIGN ELEMENTS AND PRINCIPLES:** Students effectively apply the elements and principles of design and related theories throughout the interior design curriculum to three-dimensional design solutions.
- **12a – LIGHT AND COLOR:** Students are aware of the impact of illumination strategies and decisions.
- **12f – LIGHT AND COLOR:** Student work demonstrates an understanding of color principles, theories, systems, and terminology.
- **12g – LIGHT AND COLOR:** Student work demonstrates an understanding of color in relation to materials, textures, light, and form.
- **12i – LIGHT AND COLOR:** Student work demonstrates the ability to appropriately select and apply color to support design decisions.
- **12j – LIGHT AND COLOR:** Student work demonstrates the ability to appropriately use color solutions across different modes of design communication.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY:

“Academic Integrity is the cornerstone of higher education and is central to the ideals of this course and the university. Cheating is strictly prohibited and devalues the degree that you are working on. As a member of the NJIT community, it is your responsibility to protect your educational investment by knowing and following the academic code of integrity policy.

Please note that it is your professional obligation and responsibility to report any academic misconduct to the Dean of Students Office. Any student found in violation of the code by cheating, plagiarizing, or using any online software inappropriately will result in disciplinary action. This may include a failing grade of F, and/or suspension or dismissal from the university. If you have any questions about the code of Academic Integrity, please contact the Dean of Students Office at dos@njit.edu” <John A. Pelesko, Provost>

Information about the Academic Integrity Policy and links to the code may be found at:

<https://www.njit.edu/dos/academic-integrity>.

To be clear, do your own work within the context of the group and/or collaborate with your group members by contributing original design, and cite sources properly when writing or presenting research. Unless explicitly permitted (and properly cited), students may not use downloaded images from the internet or work created by others into creative work. The use of generative AI shall be permitted when approved by the instructor within the parameters set in class. Any use of generative AI must be identified and the process documenting its use shall be provided with the project deliverables (including at interim presentations/reviews). Once generative AI is used, its accuracy and quality shall be the responsibility of those who use it. Self-trained generative AI is expected to be used but should still be identified/cited appropriately. (In case future questions arise in interviews or reviews, it is a good idea to document the training process of the generative AI used.)

RESOURCES:

Lukas, Scott A. *Theme Park: Objekt Series*. (London, UK: Reaktion Books, 2008). ISBN: 978-1-86189-394-9

Lukas, Scott A. *The Immersive Worlds Handbook: Designing Theme Parks and Consumer Spaces*. (New York: Focal Press/Routledge, 2013). ISBN: 978-0-240-82093-4

Lupton, Ellen. *Design is Storytelling*. (New York: Cooper Hewitt/Smithsonian Design Museum, 2017). ISBN: 978-1-942303-19-0

Norman, Don. *The Design of Everyday Things/Revised and Expanded*. (New York, NY: Basic Books, 2013). ISBN: 978-0465050659

Pine II, B. Joseph and James H. Gilmore. *The Experience Economy/Updated Edition*. (Boston, Massachusetts: Harvard Business School Publishing, 2011). ISBN: 978-1-4221-6197-5

The Imagineers. *The Imagineering Field Guide to Disneyland*. (New York, NY: Disney Enterprises, 2008). ISBN: 978-14231-0975-4

Younger, David. *Theme Park Design & The Art of Themed Entertainment*. (Spennymoor, England: Inklingwood Press, 2016). ISBN: 978-0-9935789-1-5

Students are also encouraged to visit theme parks far and near as their budget and schedule allow.