COURSE DESCRIPTION

"Perspectives on Inquiry" is a course taken by all first-year students at Michigan Technological University so that they have the shared experience of a small, intellectually engaging class—and so that they are introduced to the intellectual habits of college-educated people. Although all sections of this class share the same goals (listed below), each section is designed around a specific theme.

The theme of our section of Perspectives is sight—and how, specifically, we know anything through the sense of sight.

It may seem odd to you to study this—after all, don't we just open our eyes and see? It may seem that our seeing is automatic and physical and out of our control, something that all people everywhere do in exactly the same way—and always have.

My use of the conditional "may seem" in the preceding paragraph, however, should indicate that some people hold more complex notions about sight. The writings we read in class will often argue that sight doesn't happen automatically and isn't purely a physiological phenomenon, but that we learn to see and that what happens around us historically and culturally can shape how and what we see.

The writings we read in class will either present or presume models of sight that are not automatic—and we need to question them. Our class work will thus take shape around these main questions:

• How does any model of sight or vision ask us to understand how we see and hence who we are? That is, does a model ask us to understand ourselves as constructed out of discrete but interworking biological systems, so that we are sort of like robots?

• What consequences follow from any model?

• What do different models of vision leave out? What can't they account for?

• Is it possible to have one satisfying model of vision?

CLASS GOALS

This course is intended to:

• Engage you as active learners through inquiry into interdisciplinary questions.

• Help you learn how knowledge from a variety of perspectives can be integrated to provide rich and complex insights.

• Introduce you to (or help you strengthen) the intellectual habits of critical thinking and reading; accuracy and thoroughness; creativity; using reasoning and evidence to support arguments; thoughtful consideration of others' ideas and positions; effective oral, visual, and written communication; textual, empirical, and other kinds of research; effective learning strategies; and time management.

• Help you understand the value of MTU's mission to promote diversity, creativity, leadership, and teamwork in order to meet the changing needs of our society.
COURSE MATERIALS

The following materials (all available in the campus bookstore) are required for this class:

- A journal whose shape and size pleases you, so that you enjoy writing in it frequently. I want you to bring this journal to each class.
- A dictionary. Find anyone you like, and bring it to class—and use it when you read.
- Some sort of notebook or folder or envelope for holding all the texts you produce in this class. Bring this to each class, so that you are sure to keep everything. (I do not care what shape this notebook takes—just that you have one.)

In addition, I will be handing out additional articles and poems for you to read.

WHAT WILL YOU BE PRODUCING THIS SEMESTER?

Take a look at the Class Calendar—this will give you a broad idea for the formal and informal writings and presentations I am asking of you. As due dates for work approach, we will be discussing each assignment so that you will know (I hope) my expectations for each assignment.

In addition to a number of readings and related writings, there are 2 main (and related) class projects:

1. You will produce a 10 page paper whose purpose is to encourage its audience to understand why some question you have about sight/vision is worthy of their concern as well as yours. This paper will go through several drafts and will involve library research and the production of an annotated bibliography.

2. A stand-alone visual argument that translates your paper (from #1 above) into a Flash animation, a website, or a video. You will choose which format to use; the only stipulation is that you cannot use words (either onscreen or in voice-over).

YOUR PORTFOLIO

At the end of this semester you will turn in to me a portfolio that will hold every text you make in this class. We will talk more about this portfolio over the course of the semester, but be aware that you need to keep every text you make in this class—and that I will be unable to turn a grade in for you at the end of the semester until I have your complete portfolio. (Your portfolio can be either paper-based or electronic, turned in on CD-ROM.)

CLASS RESOURCES

- Each other. You can only learn the matter of this class through taking seriously the opinions and thoughts (and criticisms...) of others. In addition, you'll feel most comfortable in this class and get the most done if you develop friendly, collegial, and respectful relations with others in class. You will also help make this college community be a community if you work towards such relations.
- Me. I want you to succeed in this class and to learn—so I want to be sure you always understand the hows and the whys of the work I ask of you. Please don't hesitate to ask questions in class, and please come to my office hours (you don't have to have some life-or-death problem to come to office hours—just come with any question or concern you have about our class). (And, in general, in college, people who talk with their professors do better.)
- The Writing Center (phone: 7-2207). The Writing Center is in Walker 107. The Writing Center is not about correcting spelling and grammar (although they can help you with this), but about helping you become a confident and thoughtful communicator: they can help you think about and get ready for oral and visual communication as well as written. You can make appointments to meet weekly with a coach, or you can take advantage of drop-in hours. People who visit the Writing Center do better in classes both because they receive friendly encouragement and support and also because such visits will help you gain even more confidence and seriousness in your communication practices.
CLASS ATTENDANCE

You are allowed to miss two classes per quarter; any subsequent absence will affect your final grade. If you miss a class, you are responsible for finding out from someone else in class what you missed and for making up any work you missed.

CLASS GRADING

Overall grading

If, at the end of the semester, you have earned a C in this class, it means you did what was minimally expected of you; you came to all classes and did all the work. (NOTE that you must complete all the class assignments if you hope to receive a passing grade in this class).

If you want a B or an A, you must not only come to all the classes and do all the work, but you must do the work with shining effort and attention. To earn a B or an A, your work must demonstrate to me that you have gone well above and beyond the basic requirements of each assignment; you will:

- Come to class with questions about assignments and readings, showing that you have thought about the work.
- Have thought about an assignment and come up with several different ways to do it and will have tried out several approaches before you are done. (I will happily go over different versions or drafts with you, to discuss your decisions and concerns.)
- Listen carefully and respectfully to others in class and consider how what they say can change how you approach your work.
- Take active and energetic and engaged part in class discussion, respecting the opinions of others.
- Turn in polished work. All the formal work assignments of class—the projects you turn in on paper and the oral presentations—are complete and elegant. You will have proofread your written work, and made sure (by having others read your work before you turn it in) that there are no typos or grammatical problems that will trip another reader; your oral presentations will show that you have practiced beforehand so that you can be at ease and as effective as possible for your audience.

It will be very hard to earn an A in this class, and it will also be hard to earn a B: if you do earn either grade, you will have good reason to be proud of yourself and your efforts. Earning a C is nothing to scoff at, either, because I have designed the work of this class to challenge you.

Grading on individual assignments

I will be grading your larger class assignments according to a rubric. Rubrics list my expectations of what I think should be in an assignment, of what is most important to me in how you do the assignment. I'll show you my rubrics before you do assignments, so that you know (I hope) exactly what I expect.

At three points during the semester, I will be asking you to do an assessment of the work you have done so far; I consider it part of my responsibility as a teacher to help you learn how to do fair and motivating assessments of your own work. At the end of the semester you will meet with me individually to determine, through discussion and assessment, the grade you have earned.

A NOTE ON YOUR TIME & THIS CLASS

It is an expectation of this university that for every hour you spend in a class there will be approximately three hours of time outside of class you will need to spend on the work of the class. Since we meet approximately two-and-a-half hours per week, I am expecting that you will put in, on average over the semester, close to eight hours per week on your work for this class. I have planned assignments with these expectations of you in mind.
MY RESPONSIBILITIES TO YOU
What I believe to be most of your responsibilities to the class and yourself are, I hope, made clear in the preceding sections. Here are what I think to be my responsibilities to you:

• To be prepared for class myself, having read or studied the day's work and having developed class activities that help you approach the work thoughtfully and carefully and often, even, I hope, with interest and delight.

• To work to develop a respectful class environment where we listen and respond to each other thoughtfully and respectfully.

• To be available and attentive to you immediately before and after class and during posted office hours, so that you can bring up and discuss issues that interest you or matters that concern you about how class and your work are going. I am also happy to make appointments to meet with you if I cannot attend my posted office hours.

• To be clear about my expectations about the work of the class. With each assignment, you should know before you start what I am looking for you to do and consider in that assignment; you should know how I will be assessing your work.

• To return your work to you in a timely manner. I will most often return short assignments to you during the following class. For longer assignments—any of the formal projects—I will take a week to respond. (Like most of you, I plan ahead to be sure I have time for work that is coming up. For example, when I know you will be turning in a long paper, I make sure not to schedule much other work for the week that I will be reading and carefully considering your work—so, if you turn in work late, my schedule will probably no longer be so set up, and it might very well take me longer to respond.)

One final responsibility I see you as having, then, is to help me in this work. I want to hear from you, for example, whether my assignments help you understand my expectations. Also, it is only with your careful participation that we can achieve a class that is enjoyable and challenging and engaging for everyone.

IMPORTANT UNIVERSITY POLICIES

MTU's policy on Academic Integrity
Plagiarism and cheating are serious academic offenses. MTU's Academic Integrity Policy defines plagiarism as "knowingly copying another's work or ideas and calling them one's own or not giving proper credit or citation," and the policy covers copying sections or entire papers from printed or electronic sources as well as handing in papers written by students for other classes or purchasing academic papers. Plagiarism and cheating are not only dishonest but they cheat you out of learning. If you ever have any questions about this issue, or about how to cite someone else's work properly, please talk with me or consult a coach in the Writing Center.

MTU's Policy on Discrimination and Harassment
MTU complies with all federal and state laws and regulations regarding discrimination, including the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990. If you have a disability and need reasonable accommodation for equal access to education and services at MTU, please contact Dr. Gloria Melton in the Dean's Office (phone: 7-2212). For other concerns about discrimination, you may talk with me, your advisor, a department chair, or the Affirmative Action Officer (phone: 7-3310).