advanced research seminar: fashion
plfs 3500 | crn 14922 | 3cr
spring 2026
parsons   school   of   design
school of art, design history, and theory
class location: 6 east 16th street,
room 1108

instructor: molly davy
contact: molly.davy@newschool.edu
office hours: by appointment

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overview

course description

this course approaches research as a resource of imaginative and critical inquiry for artists and designers. students will embark on their own semester-long research project, directly related to their creative practice, that engages visual and narrative history, as well as critical theory. students will assemble and analyze historical and contemporary information, images, objects, materials, and data of all sorts to compile a collection or "archive" practical for their own use as both researchers and practitioners. each seminar section will be assigned a thematic inflection that aligns with the research approaches used within the different schools at parsons: visual culture, fashion, constructed environments, and open: art and design practice.

advanced research seminar will be staged to address and explore the practical and conceptual issues of historical research. topics include: observation and description as primary research; defining research area(s); identifying research methodologies most useful to a particular subject area; locating appropriate historical sources for the student's project (these may include photographs, films, primary and secondary literature, archives, and museum exhibits, etc.); posing critical questions about that material or source; developing an artist/designer/project statement; and writing a formal academic research paper developed out the research conducted over the course of the semester. the identification, collection, and critical examination of historical, critical, and theoretical sources will provide a deeper and broader context for each student's creative visual and material practice, and for his or her parsons thesis project, specifically.

the fashion inflection explores fashion as object, image, text, practice, theory, and concept. using a range of interdisciplinary research methods, students will develop a critical understanding of fashion and its manifold global intersections with identities, histories, and cultures. how does fashion speak? what information do we derive from the vast system of material, image, body, history and site within the social and global sphere? students will engage with such complexities while interrogating new ways to approach topics such as form, beauty and sustainability.

overview of course schedule

weeks 1-5: research interests and strategies
weeks 6-9: primary and secondary sources: history & theory; archives & interviews; objects & sites
weeks 10-11: managing your archive: collecting and organizing data
weeks 12-14: final research projects: work-in-progress presentations & final research papers

learning outcomes

1. we will become familiar with a wide range of historical research methodologies and the databases and archives that hold historical information.
2. we will learn to develop critical questions in relation to historical and contemporary sources, and to accurately evaluate the validity of the context of these sources.
3. we will be able to take historical information and to translate and adapt to a more contemporary understanding and appraisal of that same information.
4. in the development of a semester-long, sustained project, we will work through all the steps of the research process, e.g. brainstorming, assembling, drafting, editing, critically analyzing, and finally synthesizing our assemblage of information through the writing of a formal research paper.
5. within the context of their research, we will refine our existing artist/designer/project statement to generate a professional artist/designer/project statement that we can use in conjunction with and to promote our work as artists and designers.

assessable tasks

three short papers, one short presentation, one final paper, one final presentation, engaged participation during live class sessions, engaged and prepared in the two mandatory individual conferences and demonstrations of process work including planning documents, research findings.

in-class discussions, workshops, and lectures lay the groundwork for hands-on work that requires each student to be resourceful, drawing upon their beliefs, life experiences, and prior education. the emphasis is on deeper, more immersive learning experiences that are process-oriented. outcomes, while important, do not define success; instead, assessments are weighted on the learning process and growth achieved through effort. all assessments will include written feedback to help guide your ongoing efforts.

evaluation and final grade calculation

attendance & participation	15%
short papers	20%
midterm project	15%
final presentation	20%
final paper	30%
total	**100%**

grading in this class is done in a multitude of ways that relies heavily on critical feedback and formative guidance. While some assignments will be graded in the traditional A, B, C, etc. Many other assignments provide critical feedback and will be graded as complete/incomplete. rhis provides each of you with comprehensive guidance and feedback that better prepares you for graded assignments. it also allows me to better understand your performance and learning needs.

- attendance is especially important as many assignments will be given and completed in class.
- evidence of the student's comprehension of the assignments and course material
- evidence of research in the development of assignments
- participation in-class activities and discussion, including self-and peer assessment
- improvement in the student's research, comprehension, and evaluation skills
- quality of work as evidenced in in-class exercises, drafts, final assignments
- attendance in class and the timely completion of assignments

grading standards
A student's final grades and GPA are calculated using a 4.0 scale.

A [4.0, 95 - 100%] Work of exceptional quality, which often goes beyond the stated goals of the course
A- [3.7. 90 - <95%] Work of very high-quality
B+ [3.3; 87 – <90%] Work of high quality that indicates higher than average abilities
B [3.0; 83 – <87%] Very good work that satisfies the goals of the course
B- [2.7; 80 – <83%] Good work
C+ [2.3; 77 – <80%] Somewhat above-average work
C [2.0; 73 – <77%] Average work that indicates an understanding of the course material; passable. *Satisfactory course completion is considered a grade of C or higher.*
C- [1.7; 70 – <73%] Passing work but below good academic standing
D [1.0; 60 – <70%] Below-average work that indicates a student does not fully understand the assignments; Probation level though passing for credit
F [0.0,0 – <60%] Failure, no credit

class policies and our classroom community
1. **communicate! If, for any reason, you are having difficulties that are affecting your performance, contact me immediately.** I can help or direct you to helpful resources and/or support as needed. there is no reason to suffer for any reason. as your professor, i can help you develop a plan for success.

2. **share your thoughts, your ideas, and questions.** these are an important part of the learning

process—your perspective is equally important. diversity of thought, and values are created as a result of this process and, as such, I encourage everybody to be respectful of that diversity.

3. **learning is not a spectator sport-** listen and talk! go deeper in your search and you will be greatly rewarded with insight and experience.

4. **feedback is essential to growth-** this classroom is a professional workspace. share constructive feedback and be open to hearing feedback. it is all done with positive intent and to improve.

5. **my expectations are high**- i believe in your capabilities. i will come to each class and be 100% present and professional. i will share what i know and in return, i expect you follow through accordingly.

6. **late work is graded down** half a grade for the first day and 10% daily. a zero in any assignment has a tangible impact on your participation and final grades. for that reason, you are strongly encouraged to submit **all assignments,** no matter how late.

required course readings
required readings are posted on canvas, along with other texts that may be useful over the course of the semester. the required readings for the advanced research seminar will be comprised of a diverse selection of texts exploring the methods, history and theory relevant to visual culture and research methods of the field. the course readings will combine selections from the seminar's core reading list and individual texts chosen by the instructor.

course outline

this is an outline; changes and additions are inevitable, always check canvas for confirmation on exact due dates for assignments

phase one: weeks 01-05
how does fashion speak? what counts as a research question? how do we write our way into inquiry?core goals: identifying research interests, framing questions, understanding fashion as a system, developing scholarly voice

01

jan 23

what is fashion? what can it do?
lecture: introductions, about ARS, syllabus and expectations, introduction to fashion as a system of meaning, social practice, and cultural production. **workshop:** collective discussion mapping personal interests in fashion
read: Samuel George, "Fashion," *American Journal of Sociology* (1957). Malcolm Barnard, "Introduction" & "Fashion and Fashion Theories," in *Fashion Theory: A Reader* (2020).
assignment: research interest statement (1–2 pages): identify a broad area of interest in fashion and explain why it matters culturally, historically, or politically.

02

jan 30

fashion as language, system, and method
lecture: fashion as language, code, and institutional system.
workshop: close-reading exercise using Barthes and Kawamura.
read: Roland Barthes, "History and Sociology of Clothing," in *The Language of Fashion* (2013). Yuniya Kawamura, *Fashion-ology* (2005), Chapter 1. Heike Jenss, "Locating Fashion/Studies," in *Fashion Studies*
assignment: annotated reading (2 entries): write short annotations identifying each author's research question, method, and key terms.

course outline con't

03

feb 06

body, identity, and cultural power
lecture: fashion's relationship to the body, identity formation, gender, race, and power.
workshop: case study analysis in small groups (e.g., masculinity, gender presentation, racialized aesthetics). groups report on how theory informs interpretation.
read: Joanne Entwistle, *The Fashioned Body* (2015), Chapter 2.
Susan Kaiser, *Fashion and Cultural Studies* (2012), selected chapter.
Alex Abad-Santos, "Performative masculinity is making American men sick," Vox (2020).
assignment: critical response (2–3 pages): apply one theoretical framework to a contemporary or historical fashion example.

04

feb 13

writing, research questions, and failure
lecture: writing as thinking, the role of uncertainty, and how research questions evolve over time.
workshop: writing lab focused on drafting and revising research questions. peer feedback emphasizes clarity, scope, and feasibility.
read: Wayne Booth et al., *The Craft of Research* (2003), "From Problems to Sources." Anne Lamott, "Shitty First Drafts," in *Bird by Bird* (1995).
Elizabeth Wilson, *Adorned in Dreams* (2003), Introduction
assignment: revised research question + rationale (1 page): articulate a focused research question and explain what kind of sources it will require.

05

feb 20

fashion, modernity, and critical positions
lecture: fashion's entanglement with modernity, beauty, spectacle, and desire.
workshop: timeline exercise linking fashion movements, cultural shifts, and theoretical texts.
read: Caroline Evans, *Fashion at the Edge* (2003), 3–14.
V. Steele, "A New Theory of Fashion," in *Fashion and Eroticism* (1985).
assignments: preliminary bibliography (6–8 sources): mix scholarly texts, objects, archives, and media sources with short justifications.

phase two: weeks 06-09
history & theory; archives & interview; objects & sites
core goals: distinguishing source types, working with theory, material culture,
ethnography, and archives

06

feb 27

revolution & social change in primary & secondary sources
lecture: how fashion history and theory function as secondary sources.
workshop: comparative analysis of historical texts: how different authors frame similar phenomena.
read: Roland Barthes, *The Fashion System* (1967), selected excerpts.
Dick Hebdige, *Subculture* (1979), selected chapter.
Tanisha C. Ford, *Liberated Threads* (2015), Introduction.
assignments:
source analysis (2 pages): compare two theoretical or historical sources relevant to your project.

07

march 06

objects, material culture & archives
lecture: fashion objects as primary sources. methods for analyzing garments, textiles, and archival materials.
workshop: object-based analysis using museum collections, archival images, or physical garments.
read: Alexandra Palmer, "Looking at Fashion," in *Handbook of Fashion Studies* (2014).
Lou Taylor, *The Study of Dress History* (2002), Chapter 1.
Deirdre Murphy, "Dialogues Between Past and Present," *V&A Online Journal* (2011).
assignments: object analysis (2–3 pages): conduct a close reading of a fashion object or archival artifact.

course outline con't

08 march 13	**ethnography, interviews & reflexivity**

08
march 13

ethnography, interviews & reflexivity
lecture: ethnographic and interview-based research in fashion studies. reflexivity, positionality, and ethics.
workshop: mock interview exercise and reflexive writing practice.
read: J.L. Deveau, "Examining the Institutional Ethnographer's Toolkit" (2008).
Faye V. Harrison, "Auto-Ethnographic Reflections" (1995).
Sophie Woodward, *Why Women Wear What They Wear* **(2007), selected chapter.**
assignments: method proposal (2 pages): describe one qualitative method you will use and its ethical considerations.

march 20

spring break
no class

09
march 27

industry, commerce & cultural production
lecture: fashion as labor, industry, and cultural economy. tensions between creativity, commerce, and precarity.
workshop: Industry mapping: trace the systems surrounding your research topic (production, labor, media, consumption).
read: Melissa Taylor, "Fashion's Cultural Dialogue Between Commerce and Art" (2005). Angela McRobbie, *Be Creative* **(2016), selected chapter.**
Irene Alois Alexander, "Sweatpants Forever," *The New York Times* **(2020).**
assignment: context essay (2–3 pages): situate your topic within an industry, institutional, or economic framework.

phase three: weeks 10-11, managing your Image Archive
collecting, organizing, and interpreting visual/material data

10
april 03

images, visual culture & power
lecture: fashion images as data: photography, social media, advertising, and digital platforms.
workshop: image archive building session: students organize visual materials using thematic, conceptual, or methodological frameworks.
read: *The Internet* **(2015), selected chapter.**
Sarah Pink, *Doing Visual Ethnography* **(2013), selected chapter.**
Monica L. Miller, *Slaves to Fashion* **(2009), selected chapter.**
assignment: curated image archive: 15–25 images with captions explaining relevance and analytical value.

11
april 10

looking back: archives, memory & reuse
lecture: fashion's relationship to memory, revival, reuse, and historic reference.
workshop: peer critique of image archives, focusing on coherence, argument, and gaps.
read: Alexander Fury, "In Fashion, the Beauty (and Challenge) of Looking Back," *NYT Style Magazine* **(2017).**
Rachel Syme, "The Age of the Big Shirt," *The New Yorker* **(2023). Pier Vittorio Aureli,** *Less Is Enough* **(2013), Introduction.**
assignment: archive reflection (2 pages): explain how your image archive shapes or shifts your research question.

12
april 17

student presentations I
workshop: student presentations with structured peer feedback.
no readings
assignment: presentation + feedback summary: submit slides and a reflection on feedback received.

course outline con't

13 april 24	**student presentations II** no readings assignment: revised research outline: updated thesis, structure, and source list.
14 may 01	**the artist/designer/project statement** **lecture:** the project statement as a critical and professional document. translating research into practice. **workshop:** drafting and peer-reviewing project statements. **assignment:** project statement draft (1–2 pages): articulate the conceptual framework of your work.
15 may 08	FINAL PAPER DUE : MONDAY MAY 11 BY 11:59PM

school policies

resources
the university provides many resources to help students achieve academic and artistic excellence. these resources include:

the university (and associated) libraries [link]
the university learning center [link]
university disabilities service [link]

in keeping with the university's policy of providing equal access for students with disabilities, any student with a disability who needs academic accommodations is welcome to meet with me privately. all conversations will be kept confidential. students requesting any accommodations will also need to contact student disability service (sds). sds will conduct an intake and, if appropriate, the director will provide an academic accommodation notification letter for you to bring to me. at that point, i will review the letter with you and discuss these accommodations in relation to this course.

making center
the making center is a constellation of shops, labs, and open workspaces that are situated across the new school to help students express their ideas in a variety of materials and methods. we have resources to help support woodworking, metalworking, ceramics and pottery work, photography and film, textiles, printmaking, 3d printing, manual and cnc machining, and more. a staff of technicians and student workers provide expertise and maintain the different shops and labs. safety is a primary concern, so each area has policies for access, training, and etiquette with which students and faculty should be familiar. many areas require specific orientations or trainings before access is granted. detailed information about the resources available, as well as schedules, trainings, and policies can be found at resources.parsons.edu. if you are planning curriculum that makes use of specific resources should contact the making center in advance to coordinate.

grade of W
the grade of W may be issued by the Office of the Registrar to a student who officially withdraws from a course within the applicable deadline. There is no academic penalty, but the grade will appear on the student transcript.

grades of incomplete
the grade of i, or temporary incomplete, may be granted to a student under unusual and extenuating circumstances, such as when the student's academic life is interrupted by a medical or personal emergency. this mark is not given automatically but only upon the student's request and at the discretion of the instructor. a request for incomplete form must be completed and signed by student and instructor. the time allowed for completion of the work and removal of the "i" mark will be set by the instructor with the following limitations for graduate students: work must be completed no later than one year following the end of the class. grades of "i" not revised in the prescribed time will be recorded as a final grade of "n" by the registrar's office.

canvas
all assignments, grades, and feedback can be found in Canvas. attendance is in starfish.
all required readings will be provided through Canvas. a Canvas student quick start guide is available at
http://guides.instructure.com/m/8470 for specific questions direct your email to Canvas@newschool.edu
there is an Information Technology page to support you with your questions regarding New School
services. http://www.newschool.edu/information-technology/

zoom and electronic devices
assuming in-person learning is not interrupted, Zoom will not be available as an acceptable substitute for
attendance. the use of electronic devices (phones, tablets, laptops, cameras, etc.) is permitted when the
device is being used in relation to the course's work. all other uses are prohibited in the classroom, and
devices should be turned off before class starts.

responsibility
students are responsible for all assignments, even if they are absent. late assignments, failure to complete
the assignments for class discussion and/or critique, and lack of preparedness for in-class discussions,
presentations and/or critiques will jeopardize your successful completion of this course.

active participation and attendance
attendance is especially important as many assignments will be given and completed in class.
class participation is an essential part of class and includes: keeping up with reading, assignments, projects,
contributing meaningfully to class discussions, active participation in group work, and coming to class regularly
and on time.

parsons' attendance guidelines were developed to encourage students' success in all aspects of their
academic programs. full participation is essential to the successful completion of coursework and enhances
the quality of the educational experience for all, particularly in courses where group work is integral; thus,
parsons promotes high levels of attendance. students are expected to attend classes regularly and promptly
and in compliance with the standards stated in this course syllabus.

while attendance is just one aspect of active participation, absence from a significant portion of class time may
prevent the successful attainment of course objectives. a significant portion of class time is generally defined
as the equivalent of three weeks, or 20%, of class time. lateness or early departure from class may be
recorded as one full absence. students may be asked to withdraw from a course if habitual absenteeism or
tardiness has a negative impact on the class environment. i will assess each student's performance against all
of the assessment criteria in determining your final grade.

course recordings
recordings of synchronous class sessions are **only** available to students enrolled in the class and are to be
used to review coursework. recordings will only be shared in a secure manner with other students enrolled in a
given class. class recordings will never be posted on a publicly accessible website or similarly unsecured
locations.

academic honesty and integrity
compromising your academic integrity may lead to serious consequences, including (but not limited to) one
or more of the following: failure of the assignment, failure of the course, academic warning, disciplinary
probation, suspension from the university, or dismissal from the university.

students are responsible for understanding the university's policy on academic honesty and integrity and
must make use of proper citations of sources for writing papers, creating, presenting, and performing their
work, taking examinations, and doing research. it is the responsibility of students to learn the procedures
specific to their discipline for correctly and appropriately differentiating their own work from that of others. the
full text of the policy, including adjudication procedures, is found on the university website under policies: a
to z. resources regarding what plagiarism is and how to avoid it can be found on the learning center's
website.

the new school views "academic honesty and integrity" as the duty of every member of an academic
community to claim authorship for his or her own work and only for that work, and to recognize the

contributions of others accurately and completely. this obligation is fundamental to the integrity of intellectual debate, and creative and academic pursuits. academic honesty and integrity includes accurate use of quotations, as well as appropriate and explicit citation of sources in instances of paraphrasing and describing ideas, or reporting on research findings or any aspect of the work of others (including that of faculty members and other students). academic dishonesty results from infractions of this "accurate use". the standards of academic honesty and integrity, and citation of sources, apply to all forms of academic work, including submissions of drafts of final papers or projects. all members of the university community are expected to conduct themselves in accord with the standards of academic honesty and integrity. please see the complete policy in the parsons catalog.

citations
the required style guide for all parsons classes is the chicago manual of style. please consult the following guide for citation style.

turabian, kate. *a manual for writers of term papers, theses and dissertations*. 7th ed. chicago: university of chicago press, 2007.

intellectual property rights
The New School (the "university") seeks to encourage creativity and invention among its faculty members and students. In doing so, the University affirms its traditional commitment to the personal ownership by its faculty members and students of Intellectual Property Rights in works they create. The complete policy governing Intellectual Property Rights may be seen on the [university website, on the Provost's page](#).

student course ratings (course Evaluations)
during the last two weeks of the semester, students are asked to provide feedback for each of their courses through an online survey. They cannot view grades until providing feedback or officially decline to do so. Course evaluations are a vital space where students can speak about the learning experience. It is an important process that provides valuable data about the successful delivery and support of a course or topic to both the faculty and administrators. Instructors rely on course rating surveys for feedback on the course and teaching methods, so they can understand what aspects of the class are most successful in teaching students and what aspects might be improved or changed in the future. Without this information, it can be difficult for an instructor to reflect upon and improve teaching methods and course design. In addition, program/department chairs and other administrators review course surveys. Instructions are available online [here.](#)