INFORMATION DESIGN AND STRATEGY

Department website: https://www.sps.northwestern.edu/masters/information-design/

As digital output increasingly becomes the backbone of most business strategy, there is an acute need for professionals with a better big-picture understanding of information management, design, and technology. The Northwestern University online Master of Science in Information Design and Strategy (IDS) program teaches students how to translate information and data into meaningful visual forms, narratives, and interfaces.

This interdisciplinary program prepares students to step into a cross-functional or leadership role by developing a deep and holistic understanding of today’s sophisticated digital media. The program is particularly useful for people in creative fields who want a stronger grounding in business strategy to expand their career opportunities and make a larger impact on their organizations. The strong theoretical framework of the program and its focus on fundamental concepts makes the degree applicable to many diverse fields and types of organizations – business, the arts, government, healthcare, and education, to name a few – regardless of changes in technology. The IDS program aims to prepare students to take on leadership roles through a better understanding of business strategy and digital media. All classes in the IDS program are project-based, with a mix of individual and group projects. The experiential learning component of the program ensures that students are career-ready and well versed in tools commonly used in the field, with a strong foundation in theoretical concepts.

The Master of Science in Information Design & Strategy requires the completion of 12 courses to obtain a degree. These requirements cover nine core courses, including a capstone or thesis, and three elective courses. A specialization may be declared as part of the application process. There are four specializations: Content Strategy, Communication with Data, Learning Design and UX/UI. In order to demonstrate ongoing knowledge and skillset growth throughout the IDS program and establish a demonstrable body of work, students, with approval from faculty, will choose one project from each course and their capstone project to place into their ePortfolio. Throughout their studies in the IDS program, students will assemble, curate, and publish assignments and projects that represent their work across the core curriculum and selected courses. IDS faculty will identify assignments and projects in each course to be included in the ePortfolio. Current students can learn more about the ePortfolio program on the ePortfolio module on the IDS Canvas site. Current students should refer to curriculum requirements in place at the time of entry into the program.

The IDS program was developed in consultation with industry leaders in this emerging field. As a part-time and completely online degree, students anywhere in the world can access a program of this caliber while maintaining their personal and professional commitments.

Degrees Offered

- Information Design and Strategy, MS (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/sps/graduate/information-design-strategy/information-design-strategy-ms/)
- Information Design and Strategy, MS Communication with Data Specialization (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/sps/graduate/information-design-strategy/information-design-strategy-ms-data-science-analytics-specialization/)
- Information Design and Strategy, MS Content Strategy Specialization (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/sps/graduate/information-design-strategy/information-design-strategy-ms-content-specialization/)
- Information Design and Strategy, MS Learning Design Specialization (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/sps/graduate/information-design-strategy/information-design-strategy-ms-learning-specialization/)
- Information Design and Strategy, MS UX/UI Specialization (https://catalogs.northwestern.edu/sps/graduate/information-design-strategy/information-design-strategy-ms-ux-ui-specialization/)

Information Design and Strategy Courses

**MS_IDS 401-DL Models and Theories of User-Centered Design (1 Unit)**

The User-Centered Design course gives students hands-on experience with the latest design frameworks and methodologies that focus on the end user. Students will learn how a user-focused design process can be used to solve the most challenging problems facing businesses and organizations today. Students will be introduced to the latest trends in design thinking, the importance of iterative design frameworks, researching user needs, prototyping, collaboration and critical feedback.

**MS_IDS 403-DL Effective Communication (1 Unit)**

The course will evaluate personal communication strengths and weaknesses, how to determine audience, how to communicate effectively with different communication styles and in digital formats. Students will learn how to communicate their fundamental ideas productively – from developing to writing to delivering specifications, reports, and presentations. The course will examine collaboration, rhetoric, and storytelling in a professional context to assist in meeting our course goals.

**MS_IDS 405-DL User Research (1 Unit)**

Students will learn how to conduct quantitative and qualitative research of user behavior to inform the design, development, and ongoing maintenance of digital assets. The course will give students hands-on experience with the key tools of usability testing, including prototyping, interviewing, site surveys, and site analytics.

**MS_IDS 407-DL Information and Content Strategy (1 Unit)**

This course will explore how to plan and consistently execute content that supports an organization’s goals. Students will learn how to develop a content strategy, conduct a qualitative content audit, develop controlled vocabularies and lexicons, and choose the right medium (text, image, video, social interaction) for their message.

**MS_IDS 409-DL Data Science, Management, and Business Strategy (1 Unit)**

This course provides data practitioners and non-practitioners with tools and techniques in data science that will help guide them in business problems and analysis. As an introduction to the world of data science, the course combines business strategy, information technology, and data analysis to help students discover and tell the story that data shares. Students will explore techniques for using data to inform design & business strategy. Students will learn how data is useful information to support the decision-making process for information design and strategy. The course contains hands-on assignments and activities to provide the students with skills to inform design and business decisions. Students
should walk away from this course with a toolbox filled with the best practices.

**MS_IDS 411-DL Information Design and Architecture (1 Unit)**

Students will explore how to effectively design, organize, retrieve, and use information. Our goal will be to create structures that support the organization's content strategy and facilitate user understanding and navigation. Topics will include semantic analysis, content hierarchy, metadata, and search engine optimization. Students will also learn how to analyze, design, and implement service oriented architecture (SOA) solutions.

**MS_IDS 413-DL Visual Communication (1 Unit)**

Digital media rely on imagery and layout to communicate important and complex messages to users. In this course, students will learn how cognitive science, cartography, human-computer interactions, design, and typography affect the ways that we perceive and interpret visual messages. Students will also learn techniques for identifying good visual design.

**MS_IDS 422-DL Introduction to Learning Theory (1 Unit)**

Effective instructional design begins with an understanding of the learning process. In this course, students will learn behaviorist, cognitive, constructivist, and social learning theories, and their relationship to instructional practices and course design. Factors that influence learning, such as learning styles, motivation, and engagement, are also explored.

**MS_IDS 423-DL Instructional Design (1 Unit)**

Students learn the foundational principles and elements of instructional systems, from analysis through evaluation. They will explore commonly-used instructional design models and learn how to apply them in an education or training environment. Students will practice incorporating sound instructional strategies into the design and development of prototypes in real-world instructional settings.

**MS_IDS 425-DL Learning Environment Design (1 Unit)**

This course is an introduction to the ideas, principles, and techniques used in educational media or systems, focusing on both the theoretical and practical aspects of design. The design process will be guided by various frameworks and informed by current research on the study of learning environments. Students will learn how to assess interactive learning models and solutions. They will also learn how various technologies can affect the behavioral, cognitive, and social dimensions of learning.

**MS_IDS 426-DL Educational Technology (1 Unit)**

This course is an overview of the field of educational technology: highlighting current issues and the use of technology to meet goals in educational settings, workplace needs, and/or professional development goals. Students will identify and synthesize research of an educational technology tool; students will showcase current and emerging educational technologies.

**MS_IDS 432-DL Storytelling and Technical Writing (1 Unit)**

Students will experiment with a variety of writing techniques in order to communicate consistent messaging within a variety of mediums. Students will also explore hybrid writing and storytelling texts, as well as engage in discussions of weekly reading topics. Students will then produce experimental and informational design writing projects that give students insight into storytelling, as well as specific technical writing methods, for creating engaging content in organizations.

**MS_IDS 433-DL Social Media and Content Curation (1 Unit)**

This course will help professional writers effectively implement a social media strategy. It provides a detailed overview of each of the major social networking websites and how consumers and businesses use them. Students will also learn how to effectively identify, select, and share the best and most relevant online content for their audience.

**MS_IDS 435-DL Persuasion and Strategic Communication (1 Unit)**

This course will examine the different ways in which we observe and use persuasion in our communication. We will explore how we use communication strategically to facilitate persuasion. We will look at the foundations and ethics of persuasion, including how we process persuasion, as well as how digital media affects the use of persuasion. We will explore various mediums and modes of persuasion through a variety of assignments. The course will culminate in an overall assessment of how persuasion impacts us, as individuals and as a society, in a project that reflects influence in the workplace.

**MS_IDS 452-DL Intro to Data Collection and Analytics (1 Unit)**

This course will introduce students to the appropriate uses of analytics and its limitations and define how to approach the various stakeholders within an organization with analytic information. Included will be a review of the ethical, regulatory, and compliance issues related to a given business problem and/or solution. Time will be spent interpreting performance-based organizational issues while concurrently identifying solutions for these same performance-based organizational issues. In addition, time will be spent identifying best practices to plan for engaging, implementing, and sustaining organizational change.

**MS_IDS 453-DL Introduction to Techniques of Predictive Analytics (1 Unit)**

Students learn to apply statistical techniques to the processing and interpretation of data from various industries and disciplines. This course introduces statistical models as they are used in predictive analytics. It addresses issues of statistical model specification and model selection, as well as best practices in developing models for management.

**MS_IDS 455-DL Visualization of Data and Text (1 Unit)**

This course entails learning by doing—working with data and text, utilizing models of text and data, working within an open-source programming environment, and building interactive visualizations for the web. It reviews the psychology of human perception and cognition and best practices in visualization and web design. Assignments involve reviewing and developing interactive visualizations of text, time series, networks, and maps. This is a project-based course with individual and team assignments.

**MS_IDS 462-DL Experience Design (1 Unit)**

Experience Design is a quickly-evolving field where skilled information designers can make a huge impact. By understanding the people and contexts involved, Experience Designers craft pathways to user-success that also achieve business goals. Students in this course will learn theories and methodologies for designing or improving digital and hybrid experiences. They will map complex experiences in visual and narrative formats and learn to evaluate and refine the individual interactions that comprise them. The course provides flexible, human-centered techniques that are applicable to the design and evaluation of web, mobile, desktop, physical, and XR experiences across industries. **Prerequisite:** MS_IDS 401-DL and MS_IDS 405-DL.

**MS_IDS 464-DL Interface Design (1 Unit)**

Digital interfaces can be found just about everywhere in our world today, and they play crucial roles across business, government, industry, and beyond. Interface Designers apply visual design, information design, information architecture, human psychology, and artistic flair to create digital interfaces that are safe, enjoyable and, most of all, effective. By understanding the places interfaces are used and the people who use them, designers make pivotal choices that impact the effectiveness of systems. This course explores tools and techniques for the design and evaluation of digital interfaces across industries. Students are exposed to
a variety of design tools, though the course focuses more on theory and strategy than software-mastery.

Prerequisite: MS_IDS 401-DL and MS_IDS 405-DL.

**MS_IDS 466-DL Design Systems and Operations (1 Unit)**
Design-thinking isn’t just effective for creating delightful products and services. Design teams themselves can be optimized for performance, quality, and scalability through the application of design systems and operations frameworks. The course explores case studies of how innovative organizations and design teams across industries have successfully scaled their operations while maintaining creativity, innovation, and output. Various design systems are explored and evaluated as students gain the strategic mindset necessary to lead design teams to success in a wide range of fluid and complex organizational settings.

Prerequisite: MS_IDS 401-DL and MS_IDS 405-DL.

**MS_IDS 481-DL Leadership and Business Strategy (1 Unit)**
This course will explore fundamental leadership behaviors coupled with business strategies that enable people to excel in their field, in order to help student-professionals apply these behaviors to careers in IDS. The course will examine leadership styles, the role of vision, integrity and ethics, as well as how to lead organizational change and solve problems, using effective teamwork and organizational strategies.

**MS_IDS 498-DL Capstone Project (1 Unit)**
The capstone project course is the culmination of the IDS program and demonstrates to faculty a student’s mastery of the curriculum and core competencies in the information design and strategy field. Working individually, students complete a comprehensive project chosen in conjunction with their instructors. Students are individually assessed and graded throughout the duration of class. Students should retain all course material from previous classes in the program, including textbooks, to successfully complete assignments. Students should have completed 10 of 12 courses in the program, with all core courses completed.

**MS_IDS 499-DL Independent Study (1 Unit)**
An independent study is a customized course of study undertaken by a single student under the guidance of an instructor. Independent studies are comparable in their demands to other graduate-level courses. Please see the SPS Graduate Student Handbook and your academic advisor for more information about independent study registration.

**MS_IDS 590-DL Thesis Research (1 Unit)**
This final project is meant to represent the culmination of students’ experience in the program and must demonstrate mastery of the curriculum and ability to conduct sustained independent research and analysis. The project may be applied or may be a traditional scholarly paper; in both cases a write-up following the paper’s program-specific guidelines is required. Students must submit a proposal and secure a first reader in order to register; for further details students are advised to review the student handbook and contact their academic adviser.