

## COURSE SYLLABUS: SPRING 2026

# LA 498 / 498 H / 598 – Thinking on Paper: Concept Sketching in Design

T, Th 9:00-10:30am; AB 403

01.04.2026

### INSTRUCTOR

Craig Farnsworth, PLA, FASLA, Roan Distinguished Professor of Practice  
AB 208

[cdfarnsworth@bsu.edu](mailto:cdfarnsworth@bsu.edu)

(765)285-6218 (office)

Instagram: craig\_farns

Office hours: M 9-11am; W 9-11am

If emailing me, please use my @bsu.edu address rather than sending email through Canvas.

### DESCRIPTION

*An advanced-level course focused on drawing by hand at the Conceptual Design phase of the typical design process. Emphasizes two- and three-dimensional design and drawing with a variety of media for a range of project types in a short-duration time frame. 3 credits. Prerequisite: LA 281. Open only to Landscape Architecture majors or with permission of Instructor.*

### INTRODUCTION

*By drawing early, freely, quickly, and often, effective sketches and diagrams can be generated, thereby influencing early design directions.*

-William J. Johnson<sup>1</sup>, *Framework Thinking: Lessons in Community Planning and Design* (Johnson and Kan).

In this age of computer-assisted and -generated design, professional landscape architects still rely on freehand sketching to develop ideas. As Bill Johnson attested above, drawing is a key element in the design process. However, professional firms do not typically devote time for employees to develop and sharpen their drawing skills. So, despite its perceived value, employees need to learn what they can of freehand drawing skill while still in school or risk not attaining the skills and confidence needed to incorporate drawing into their personal work flows as professionals.

The type of freehand drawings most useful in professional practice are the exploratory graphics that lend themselves to searching out solutions while projects are undefined, nascent, or fuzzy, typically at the Conceptual or Schematic Design phases of the design process. (For this reason, your homework assignments will be “explorations” rather than “projects” or “problems.”) This class will not teach a prescriptive way of drawing or how to capture a finished “look and feel” for drawings. Rather, emphasis will be on an approach to drawing that is in service to solving problems, or “Thinking on Paper.” You will use short design explorations to develop sketch-level diagrams, orthographic projections, field notations, and other visualization methods using a variety of materials (e.g., pencil, pen, watercolor pencil, collage, paper types). These multiple “at-bats” will develop confidence in your drawing and ideation skills through repetition and refinement. Emphasis will be placed on process more than product, with craft and approach being foundational to success. In particular, the class will address:

- 1) Exemplars of landscape architectural hand graphics as used in ideation;
- 2) Materials, methods, and time-saving techniques;
- 3) Strategies for converting programmatic ideas into actionable design concepts.

### RATIONALE

As a student in Landscape Architecture, you must develop an ability to effectively express your design ideas by various means, including freehand drawing. By building on concepts such as line, tone, texture, and color initially covered in LA 281 and the design studio sequence, and then relating those concepts to conceptual design graphics, you will continue to develop the traditional graphic “vocabulary” needed to investigate and develop design ideas and to clearly communicate with other designers and the general public.

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<sup>1</sup> Bill Johnson (1931-2024) was a giant of our profession. Co-founder of the firm JJR (now SmithGroup), professor and Dean of the School of Natural Resources at the University of Michigan, partner with Peter Walker in the firm PWWJ, author, community activist, veteran of the armed forces, his list of accolades is long and impressive. His legacy to our profession is immense and I am honored to have known him as a colleague and friend. See The Cultural Landscape Foundation [website](#) and his [obituary](#) for more information.

### LEARNING OUTCOMES

Upon successful completion of this class, you will be able to:

- 1) Effectively use a range of drawing materials to communicate design ideas;
- 2) Analyze how scale and context inform the design communication process;
- 3) Align graphic results with the requirements of different design process phases and time constraints;
- 4) Learn time-saving techniques for graphic communication;
- 5) Apply a broad range of appropriate design communication skills clearly and effectively;
- 6) Apply graphic communication skills to illustrating basic design concepts and forms.

### CONTENT AND FORMAT

Course content will be delivered in an in-person (synchronous) format, will meet twice per week, and will be managed using Canvas (<https://bsu.instructure.com/>). Assignment statements, instructions, readings, due dates, grading criteria/ rubrics, and other course materials will be made available there. **Please check the Canvas course site regularly for announcements and new materials and to stay informed and on-track.** Please make it a priority to immediately scan and save a record file of each assignment. For this and all other courses, you should keep back-up copies of all course work in multiple locations (i.e., computer hard drive, external storage device, cloud storage) as both a fail-safe and a living archive.

The course will involve a variety of activities, including but not limited to:

- 1) Presentations by outside “Advocates” (AKA “passionate experts” on a particular subject) whose information will be the focus of a given Exploration;
- 2) Explorations that apply an Advocate’s presentation to a particular Program with media constraints and objectives;
- 3) Demonstrations, discussions, and pin-up reviews;
- 4) Engagement with texts and videos on an as-needed basis.

Projects will typically run for a week according to this repeating format:

- Tuesdays: Pin-up review of previous week’s Exploration; Skill demonstration and development
  - Homework assigned: 1-hour “engagement” with material before Thursday’s class.
- Thursdays: Meeting with “Advocate;” Introduction of Exploration
  - Homework assigned: 3-hour sketch problem (AKA “Exploration”)
- Sketchbook: this semester-long assignment will be the repository for all class notes and Exploration sketches.

The most current version of the course schedule will always be available on Canvas.

### ATTENDANCE AND EXPECTATIONS

The class environment is to always reflect **professionalism**. Class attendance is an expression of commitment and interest as well as professionalism. Students who miss a lecture or a demonstration will be responsible for the material covered in their absence. There will be no make-ups for missed lectures or demonstrations. The following are expected: regular and punctual class **attendance** and project submissions; diligent **participation** in all activities; authentic **respect** for peers, instructors, and staff; and genuine **commitment** to learning and improvement.

**Class will meet in AB 403 (or other locations as specified by me) on Tuesdays and Thursdays. Class will start at 9:00am and end at 10:30am.** It is important that you fully engage with all aspects of the course. Course components are designed to incrementally advance you toward achieving the course objectives—in other words, **students who miss class content or experiences will generally lack the opportunity to achieve/succeed in the class.** All students are expected to utilize the entire class time to advance their work. Attendance will be taken daily. “Flex time” (i.e. “tardy”) is missing up to the first 15 minutes of class. A “Flex day” (i.e. “unexcused absence”) is missing more than 15 minutes of class. Three “Flex times” equal one “Flex day.” Each student is allowed up to two Flex days without penalty. **The use of three Flex days will result in a final grade reduction of one-third of a letter grade (e.g., A to A-, C+ to C, etc.). Each two Flex days used thereafter will result in an additional one-third letter grade reduction.** Course attendance will be recorded in Canvas; you should refer to your Canvas attendance page (Assignments>Attendance) if you have any questions about your standing.

A note about “Flex days:” This is my term for “unexcused absence.” I understand that outside responsibilities or pressures may occasionally preclude you from attending class. Possible examples include everything from attending a cousin’s wedding to staying up late the night before to finish an assignment for another class. If you choose to use a Flex day or two, I won’t judge; that’s why they are Flex days. But use them wisely; the third Flex day will be penalized, even if it was for a seemingly good reason like “I didn’t feel well.” Of course, **any medical reason for missing class—supported by a note from a qualified health professional—will not count as a Flex day and will instead be considered an “excused absence.”** **University- or Department-sponsored activities, such as required field trips or athletic team obligations, will also be counted as “excused absences.”** Excused absences will not impact the final course grade. It is imperative that you communicate with me about attendance issues. In the event of an illness or personal issue resulting in a “Flex day” (unexcused absence), you should make every effort to notify me immediately, preferably before class.

Another note about “Flex days:” I feel strongly that class attendance is a good thing and I don’t want to set up a system whereby students get to the last week or two of class and decide to use their two Flex days just because they still have them. So, **students who have not used any Flex days during the entire semester will be eligible for Extra Credit that rounds their final grade up by 1%.**

### STUDENT LEAVES

Leaves and excuses by reason of bereavement/funerals, jury duty, and pregnancy shall comply with [university policies](#). Arrangement for completion of assigned work shall be made through consultation with me.

### LATE WORK

Assigned work must be submitted ON TIME for full credit. Any assignment submitted after the announced/published due date and time will incur a penalty equal to 10% of the given assignment’s point value. For each day late thereafter, the assignment will incur an additional 10% penalty. Any assignment submission made after the specified time will be considered a day late. Any assignment submitted more than 72 hours late will be assigned a grade of zero (0). These “Late Work” policies also apply to cases where a Flex day has been used. (IOW, the use of a Flex day does not automatically generate a “Flex deadline” extension.) *A project is not considered finished and ready to grade until it has been uploaded to the designated location on Canvas and/or other specified location(s).*

### EVALUATION

The final course grade is based upon a cumulative evaluation of all course Explorations and Sketchbook. Explorations are worth 80% of the final grade, the Sketchbook is worth 15% of the final grade, and overall Discussion and Participation are worth 5% of the final grade. There will be eight regular Explorations and one final or “Composite” Exploration in the class. At the end of the semester, the regular Exploration with the lowest grade will be removed from calculating the final grade. The “Composite” Exploration will not be removed from grading.

Your *performance* on Explorations and the Sketchbook includes how well you respond to assignment requirements with an emphasis on graphic communication. Your *discussion and participation* grade includes (but is not limited to) attendance, punctuality, productivity during class time, participation in course activities, regular response to instructor feedback, attitude, and professionalism. At my discretion, each will be considered in determining your final course grade.

### INCOMPLETES

Incomplete submissions of work will be evaluated on the face value of work completed unless you and I have made a prior arrangement. No Incomplete (“I”) will be given as a course grade without sufficient and compelling cause (e.g., documented illness, family crisis, etc.) and [as described by the Registrar](#). In such a case, I must be fully informed and agree to the appropriateness of the “Incomplete.”

### GRADING SCALE

A =	100% - 94% (Excellent)	B- =	<84% - 80%	D+ =	<70% - 67%
A- =	<94% - 90%	C+ =	<80% - 77%	D =	<67% - 64% (Poor)
B+ =	<90% - 87%	C =	<77% - 74% (Average)	D- =	<64% - 60%
B =	<87% - 84% (Good)	C- =	<74% - 70%	F =	<60% (Failure)

### TEXTS AND MATERIALS

The following are highly recommended texts that will be referenced throughout the semester: *Representing Landscapes: Analogue* (Amoroso); *Drawing and Reinventing Landscape* (Balmori); *Design Drawing* (Ching); *Drawing: A Creative Process* (Ching); *Form and Fabric in Landscape Architecture* (Dee); *Drawing for Landscape Architecture* (Hutchinson); *Drawn to Design* (Jenkins); *Framework Thinking* (Johnson and Kan); *Graphic Thinking for Architects and Designers* (Laseau); *Drawing Shortcuts* (Leggitt); *Landscape Graphics* (Reid); *Freehand Drawing and Discovery* (Richards); *Design Readiness for Landscape Architects* (Smith); *Green Architecture and the Agrarian Garden* (Solomon); *Field Sketching for Environmental Designers* (Sullivan); *Drawing/Thinking* (Treib); *Representing Landscape Architecture* (Treib); *Pencil Sketching* (Wang). These texts are available through the Architecture Library, either on physical reserve or as an e-book on the reading list in Canvas.

Please refer to the separate materials list for the supplies recommended for this course.

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Honesty, trust, and personal responsibility are fundamental attributes of the university community. Academic dishonesty and other forms of academic misconduct threaten the foundation of an institution dedicated to the pursuit of knowledge and will not be tolerated. To maintain its credibility and reputation, and to equitably assign evaluations of scholastic and creative performance, Ball State University is committed to maintaining a climate that upholds and values the highest standards of academic integrity. Visit the VPAA's [academic integrity website](#) (Students tab) for resources on understanding academic integrity, citing sources properly, and avoiding inadvertent academic dishonesty. To learn about BSU's academic integrity expectations and students' rights, please read the University [Student Academic Ethics Policy](#). Academic integrity violations include giving or receiving an unfair academic advantage (cheating), presenting someone else's ideas or work as your own (plagiarism), and falsifying academic records. Unless otherwise indicated, you must work independently by yourself. Check with me if you are unsure whether something constitutes academic dishonesty. Examples of academic integrity violations include but are not limited to:

- Using resources not authorized by the faculty member (including devices, AI tools, hidden notes, and open books)
- Using commercial study websites to find answers to graded assignments (Chegg, Course Hero, StudyPool, OneClass, etc.).
- Without the instructor's written permission, giving away, buying, or selling graded assignments class notes, exams, study guides, or other course materials to other students or to third-party vendors (Course Hero, Chegg, 24HourAnswers, etc.).
- Working with another person on any assignment other than authorized group projects.
- Sharing or allowing others to access your files, whether done with permission or not.
- Reusing your own work from another semester, course, or section.
- Sharing answers with others during exams (passing notes, texting, whispering, gesturing)
- Discussing exam questions and answers with students who have not taken the exam.
- Soliciting others to complete work for you.

*Note: The content of this course is often best learned by physically tracing or otherwise "copying" exemplars; doing this for this class will NOT be considered cheating. In fact, it is encouraged, for even a tracing will start to show graphic marks that individualize the work and show a unique style which is a major class objective. An example of "cheating" in the context of this class would be passing off the work of another student as your own. If you have any questions regarding academic integrity, please discuss them with me.*

### GENERATIVE ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE (AI)

Given that this class is focused on drawing by hand, it is unlikely that AI will be of use in completing assignments. However, if you have ideas about how AI can be useful in your workflow, please see me to discuss them.

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### UNIVERSITY STATEMENT

Ball State University is committed to ensuring that all members of the community are welcome, through valuing the various experiences and worldviews represented at Ball State and among those we serve. We promote a culture of respect and civil discourse. If you need course adaptations or accommodations because of a disability, please contact the instructor of record as soon as possible. Ball State's [Disability Services Office](#) coordinates services for students with disabilities; documentation of a disability needs to be on file in that office before any accommodations can be provided. Disability Services can be contacted at 765-285-5293 or [dsd@bsu.edu](mailto:dsd@bsu.edu).

### FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION

In this course, we are committed to fostering a learning environment that values intellectual diversity, encourages free expression, and promotes open inquiry. As members of the Ball State Community, we treat each person in the Ball State community with civility, courtesy, compassion, and dignity and respect and learn from differences in people, ideas, and opinions. Please review Ball State University's [Statement on Freedom of Expression](#), the resources on Ball State's [Freedom of Expression webpage](#), and [Ball State's Beneficence Pledge](#).

### TITLE IX

Ball State University is committed to providing a safe and inclusive learning environment for all students. If you or someone you know has experienced sexual harassment—including sexual assault, dating violence, domestic violence, or stalking, please know that you are not alone. The University offers support services and resources. For more information or to report an incident, please visit [bsu.edu/titleix](http://bsu.edu/titleix) or contact the Title IX Coordinator at 765-285-1545 or at [titleix@bsu.edu](mailto:titleix@bsu.edu)

**As your instructor, I am a mandatory reporter under the Title IX policy and required to report any information I receive about possible sexual harassment.** This includes information shared in class discussions, assignments, or private conversations.

**What happens after I report?** The Title IX Coordinator will email the person who experienced sexual harassment (complainant) and invite them to schedule a meeting. If the complainant **chooses** to meet with the Title IX Coordinator,

- Title IX Coordinator will offer supportive measures (e.g., counseling, extensions on deadlines, course-related adjustments, changes to work or class schedules, and/or referrals to campus offices), review the policy, and discuss options to move forward.
- If a complaint is filed by the complainant or the University, an investigation will begin following University policy.

### THE LEARNING CENTER

The Learning Center offers free Tutoring and Academic Coaching for many courses at Ball State. Students can make appointments for online (Zoom) or in-person (NQ 350) appointments. To make an appointment, visit [myballstate.bsu.edu](http://myballstate.bsu.edu) and click on "Navigate" in the Academic Tools section, or just go directly to [bsu.navigate.eab.com](http://bsu.navigate.eab.com).

### THE WRITING CENTER

The Writing Center is a community of trained Ball State students and faculty who value all types of writing. If you need help with writing, consider making an appointment to meet one-to-one with one of their enthusiastic and supportive staff. It is located in RB 291, 285-8387. To schedule a free appointment to discuss your writing, go to [bsu.edu/writingcenter](http://bsu.edu/writingcenter). Online and in-person appointments are available.

### THE COUNSELING CENTER

The Ball State University Counseling Center offers free and confidential services to all students. The Counseling Center is located in Lucina Hall, Room 320. To schedule an appointment, you can contact us at 765-285-1736. Ball State also offers a 24/7 Crisis Line, which can be reached at 765-285-HOPE (4673). The Crisis Line is a mental health resource for those who are struggling with any mental health concerns, including thoughts of self-harm and/or suicide. the Counseling Center sees students for a variety of reasons, some of which include homesickness, relationship concerns, anxiety, and depression. Students work with a therapist to create a plan that will connect them with resources

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that best fit their needs. The Center assists students with getting connected to therapy at the Center as well as connecting students to self-help resources, other on-campus resources, and community-based resources. All Ball State students also have access to several on-demand, self-help resources through a variety of different platforms. All of these resources, including a direct link to the Counseling Center website, can be found [here](#).

### BASIC NEEDS HUB

If you are having difficulty affording enough food, do not have a safe and reliable place to sleep, and/or experiencing an emergency or crisis, help is available through the [Basic Needs Hub](#). The Basic Needs Hub has information, resources, and provides individualized support to students. To talk with a supportive staff member about your experience, receive one on one assistance, or learn more about resources, you can submit a [Basic Needs Assistance Form](#).

### TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

If you need technical assistance with Canvas or other IT/hardware/software issues, please contact the BSU Help Desk at 765-285-1517 or toll-free at 1-866-771-3276. You may also visit the link below, and follow the *Knowledge Base* link to find useful how-to videos and answers to many frequently asked questions. They are available for walk-in support at Tech Center, Bracken Library, room 101. (<https://bsu.service-now.com/helpdesk>)

### OTHER IMPORTANT UNIVERSITY POLICIES

- Ball State Beneficence Pledge: <https://www.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/student-conduct/policiesandprocedures/beneficence>
- FERPA and privacy: [Ball State's FERPA and Privacy and Protection](#)
- Grade Appeal policy: <https://www.bsu.edu/about/administrativeoffices/vice-provost/student-services/grade-appeals>

### IN CASE OF EMERGENCY

If, for any reason, an emergency situation occurs during class and I am unable to coordinate a response, PLEASE IMMEDIATELY ACTIVATE THE NEAREST RED CALL BUTTON AND/OR ALERT THE ADMINISTRATIVE STAFF. You should also call 9-1-1 or University Police at 765-285-1111.

### CONTENTS SUBJECT TO CHANGE

This syllabus is subject to change. The most current version of the syllabus will always be available on Canvas.