

Designer Roles: Beyond the Visual Expert

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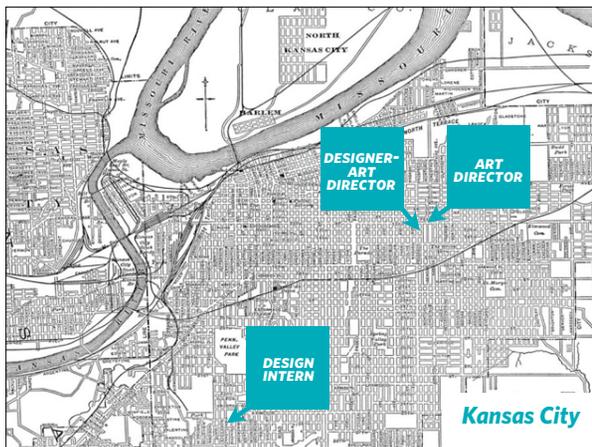
Rebecca Tegtmeier

ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, GRAPHIC DESIGN
DEPARTMENT OF ART, ART HISTORY, AND DESIGN
MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY



Hello.
I am Rebecca Tegtmeier and like most of you I am a design educator

Before I was in academia I was in professional practice for a little over 8 years. During this experience I was continuously challenged by the various roles and responsibilities that required more than my visual expertise.



My career began during my senior year as an undergrad. I was a design intern at a small boutique studio in Kansas City. Then I moved on to be an art director at an advertising firm, eventually ended up at Hallmark Cards Inc. for 7 years.



At Hallmark I had several roles that enabled me to exercise my visual aesthetic skills as well as navigate the corporate system. Obviously as I moved up I was given more responsibilities.

I worked on consumer communications, loyalty marketing campaigns, in-house marketing and branding, and retail branding. I learned to collaborate with writers, photographers, marketing experts, external design firms and other creatives to create engaging work.



Needless to say my experience was nothing close to resembling this scene of an "artists" work life in the 1930s



My experience isn't that uncommon, often designers are working in other roles that go beyond being the visual expert.

Designers are often faced with tasks related to research, writing, and presenting. They work in teams with people coming from different areas of expertise. They are required to know the ins and outs of several software programs. They are expected to think like entrepreneurs, innovators, engineers, and artists. Designers often become the event planner, project manager, or business manager in a given project.



Whether a designer is situated in an in-house department, a small boutique studio, a large agency, a non-creative workplace, or even if they choose a path as a freelancer; the expectations and responsibilities expand past skills in visual aesthetics. For designers new to the profession, these roles and expectations can be difficult to navigate while maintaining the expert visual designer status.



When I became a full-time design educator I took on the daunting task to prepare students for their future career in design. I was eager to teach students how to craft meaningful designs as well as be critical of the visual environment.



I was equally eager to introduce students to a design process that involves methods for making a visual plan as well as methods that practice other skills necessary for the other roles they will ultimately face when they become practicing professionals.



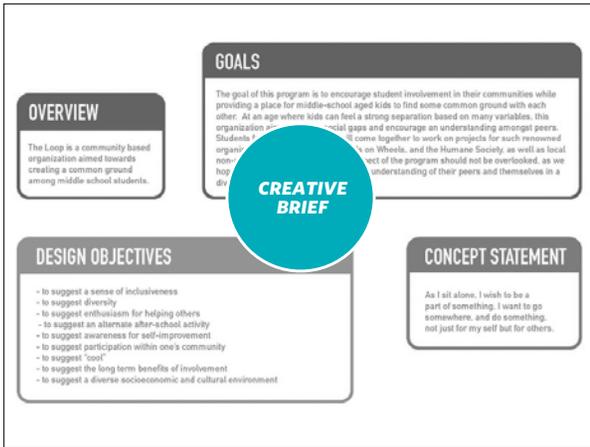
I teach in a variety of courses at Michigan State University. At the senior level I teach Corporate Imagery, Senior Seminar, Time & Motion, and Interactive Web Design. At the sophomore level I teach an introduction to Typography course. I will share some of the process methods from selected projects.



Rather than going from of my own experiences as a professional designer, I surveyed some of my former students about the roles they do in their current jobs. I also asked about specific process methods they learned in school that they have found to be the most helpful in navigating these roles. Their insights proved to be informative and true to my speculations. Designers do work beyond visual aesthetics.



In the professional context, a creative brief serves as an agreement between the client and design team which outlines goals, positioning, strategy, deliverables, and a schedule prior to creating or viewing any visual solutions. The brief writing process can be done by a team of individuals representing various roles. Ultimately, it serves as the "road map" for the creative team. In some cases a young designer might find them selves writing major portions of a creative brief or writing small details to sell an idea. Often the designer is left to manage the project from different angle whether it be from the creative perspective, from a scheduling perspective, or they might be the primary contact for the client.



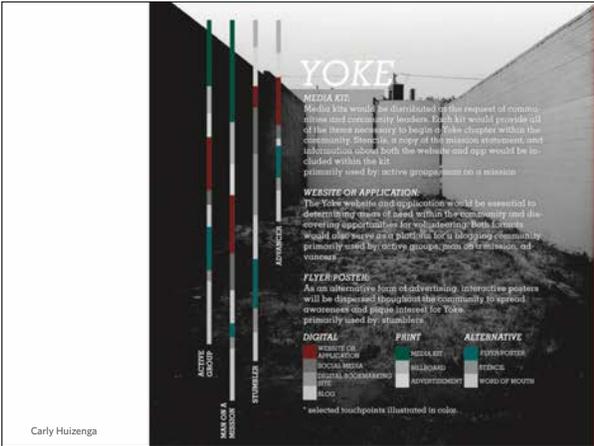
For an intensive project in my corporate imagery course I engage students in writing their own creative brief as the first phase of the project. They develop a socially relevant initiative focused on providing one of the following: a service, product, or event. They then identify goals and a mission specific to their initiative as well as design objectives and a concept statement that will inform their design decisions.



As students carry out the execution phase of the project we are constantly referring back to the brief they wrote for validation that their design decisions are accurate to the mission and goals they initially developed. This initiative connects community members to neighborhood renewal projects.



Carly worked out who the audience is as well as their common activities



Carly Huizenga

as well as develop a touchpoint strategy. All touch points are meant to be conversational and interactive.



Carly Huizenga

This is the media kit for members to note areas of need in their community



Carly Huizenga

The poster uses tear-away labels to mark spaces in need of renewal

The iPhone application connects people to a project based on their skills

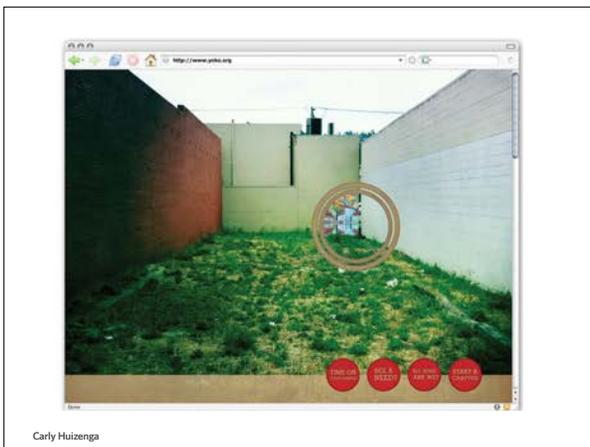


Carly Huizenga

The web site does the same and offers a space to mark projects on a map



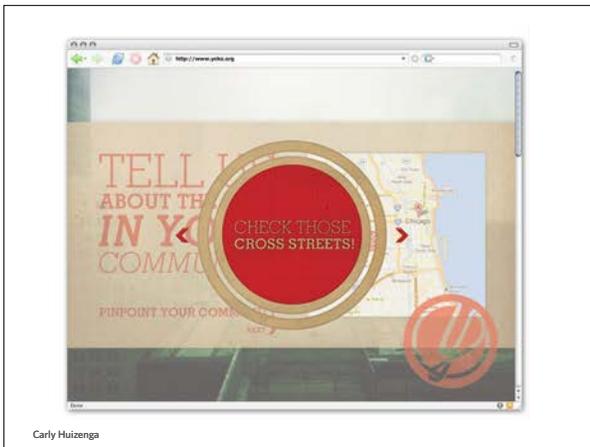
Carly Huizenga



Carly Huizenga



Carly Huizenga



Carly Huizenga

Giving students exposure to writing a creative brief puts them in the position to effectively manage a project from various roles. On student said,

"Many times I find my mind is everywhere with ideas coming from every angle. The only way for me to organize my thoughts is to write a project brief so I can focus and see clearly on paper what I'm trying to achieve. It allows me to ensure that I just don't create something pretty, but something that clearly gets the message across." (Amy Kue)

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Amy Kue, Graphic Designer / Marketing & Advertising Assistant
Capital Imaging, Lansing, MI
Class of 2012



"Learning how to write a brief during corp. imagery class was very useful, since I have to write short briefs when I am pitching my idea."
Gosha Nurseitova)



In the professional context engaging team members and clients in the creation of a mood board is a quick way to get at any of their preconceived visions. Selecting appropriate colors, images, patterns, and photos that might capture the essence of the "mood" that needs to be portrayed by the brand or project is a good way to negotiate the start of a design direction.



This method is a process of thinking about style before structure that I introduce students to as the next step in the brand identity project I mentioned earlier, students created a set of different mood boards as a way to begin thinking about the look and feel of their branding identity. It also creates an exercise in doing "trends research", getting students to look at design and see what is current (as well as not current) is a good way to set up the discussion of what are they going to do that is unique and different than what has already been done.



In this example we can see how the mood board set up a feeling for the student to build from. This is his mood board and then his final identity.

SHUO LI MOOD BOARD
SHUO LI DESIGN IDENTITY



Y



Hand and Hand is an independent woodshop, exhibition space and design company. It is intended to be a member-based experience.

+TYPOGRAPHY+		+GRAPHICS+	
DIN PRO		ICONOGRAPHY	
Light.....	8 pt		
Light Italic.....	8 pt		
Regular.....	10 pt		
Italic.....	12 pt		
Medium.....	14 pt		
<i>Medium Italic</i>	18 pt	PATTERN	
Bold	24 pt		
Black	36 pt		
Shuo Li			

Y



Shuo Li



Shuo Li



Shuo Li

WOODSHOP

MEMBER FROM CONCEPTION TO PRODUCTION EXCLUSIVE TO THE MEMBERS

INTRODUCING THE MEMBER ADVANTAGE

- STONE KITCHEN
- TOTAL ACCESS
- RESERVATION
- MENTORSHIP
- EXCLUSIVE

WORKING WITH PROCESS

Each idea is unique to the individual. The ability to shape an idea with the use of tools and craftsmanship is what sets the idea apart from concept to product, a sense of pride emerges. The satisfaction of labor is evident in an individual's vision and completion. At Hand & Hand, our independent woodshop provides customers with convenient accessibility to various construction materials needed for personal project production.

Share a creative commons while working in a relaxed and well-equipped atmosphere with fellow designers and hobbyists. Made from a "home away from home" workshop environment, our specialized consultants are available to assist in helping you find the right solution for your project.

A product is more than just a utilitarian object, it's a complete work of an individual's identity and intellect. At Hand & Hand, we are here to help you every step of the way to establish your own mark.

GENIUS IS 01% INSPIRATION

99% PERSPIRATION

Shuo Li

"Mood boards definitely play a big role in the beginning stages of both my professional and personal works. I think it's a great way to gather resources and inspirations that'll help set a visual direction and goals for the project at hand. The things I look for when composing mood boards are concepts, visual aesthetic, and typography."

Shou Li, designer
Moosjlaw, Madison Heights
Class of 2012

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Designers are clearly not "mind readers" so using this as a tool helps us to manage expectations of everyone involved.

CONCEPT
STATEMENTS

PERSONAS

DESIGNER as WRITER

This is a big one. I had a student once tell me he took design courses so he wouldn't have to read, well I informed him he would have to write as well. It makes sense that young designers should also be comfortable communicating in written form. There will be times the young designer will have to edit copy that isn't fitting into a layout or they won't get any copy at all. We assume there is a copy-writer in place but they aren't always sitting right beside the designer to make changes, it always helps if the designer knows how to edit and write copy.

CONCEPT
STATEMENTS

In the corporate imagery course students write their own creative brief, concept statements, design objectives, content for their pieces, and they write a style guide. The concept statement is the most challenging piece to write because they do it before creating any visuals. A well written concept statement should function as a foundation for all future design decisions. It creates a visual picture and a feeling that their design should represent in an abstract way. Where as the design objectives become the concrete statements about what the design should communicate.



CONCEPT
 Mankind is vivid. It is a cacophony of emotions, and sounds, and colors, rising and falling, undulating, in a never-ending, never ceasing, human orchestra. It is a human drama filled with the characters and faces that color and tint the stage. It is a human zoo, a pandemonium of egos and animals, trapped in cells of their own invention. This human manifestation, this human expression, this human thing, it is a chorus built from the songs of individuals, built from the tales, and stories, and fables, of the people who tell them. This human thing, it is a bold, majestic, thrilling experience that is. It is a visual explosion, a sensual punishment, a stark and unforgiving wonderland of thrills and amazement. A world of bright optimism and harsh reality, life and death, love and hate, truth and lies, this human thing. This human thing; it breathes, it moves, it dances swaying under the stars. And when the world, this human thing, turns and sets its face upon itself, and views with its own two eyes, this human thing. It becomes us, it becomes this. This Human Thing.

Jeremy DeBor

The concept statement can take many revisions until students get something they can work with. Here is the concept statement and the design it inspired for a "production company".



Fear Humor Grief

HUMAN THING ENTERTAINMENT

IT'LL MELT YOUR FACE OFF!

Jeremy DeBor

Jeremy created a kinetic icon system that would change based on the current performance of the company



PRESENTS GULA LUXURIA

PRESENTS SUNSHINE DAN

JAN 2011 JUN

JAN 2011 JUN

Jeremy DeBor

This is a concept statement for a "green-living loft community"
Jessica found a quote that she felt best represented the essence of her initiative.

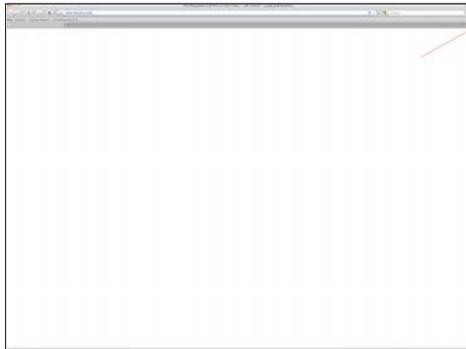
CONCEPT

"...our lives are supported and sustained in mostly invisible ways. The energy that runs our lights, our washing machines, and our air conditioners come from somewhere, we realize, though for most people, exactly where it comes from and how it is generated is unclear. Food arrives mysteriously at the grocery, and waste is whisked away from our curb... There is, it seems, a growing disconnect between our lifestyle choices and ethics and their physical and ecological implications... we must see the place of the natural world in cities and urban environments as just as legitimate and valuable as it is perceived to be in more pristine places, such as national parks. Such a perspective allows for a vision of cities, not as hopelessly gray concrete, or devoid of the beauty and complexity of nature, but rather as green canvases."
- Tim Beasley "Re: Rethinking Cities"

Jessica Halfyard



Jessica Halfyard



Jessica Halfyard

"If I had put that much thought about concept and design relationship into more of my projects early on, I think that the project would have been ten times more successful. Learning that skill earlier, developing a concept and translating it into a fully developed and comprehensive set of ideas and principles for every project, I think is equally as necessary, if not more necessary than building your competency in the Adobe products."

Jessica Halfyard, Software Graphic Designer
Altair Engineering, Troy, MI
Class of 2012

This particular student said, "If I had put that much thought about concept and design relationship into more of my projects early on, I think that the project would have been ten times more successful. Learning that skill earlier, developing a concept and translating it into a fully developed and comprehensive set of ideas and principles for every project, I think is equally as necessary, if not more necessary than building your competency in the Adobe products." (Jessica Halfyard)



Andrew.

Andrew recently turned 21 and is a junior at State University

Andrew works part-time to pay for tuition, and is careful with money. He typically tries to drink Blue Ribbon, but will often buy a bar's on sale at the liquor store.

Andrew sometimes pick a microbrew at random, especially on occasion or if his friends decide to do so. Awareness of the brand is a key player here.

PERSONAS

Touchpoints:

1. Business-to-business ads, encouraging bartenders to recommend and sell on special
2. Guerilla ad campaigns near local college campuses
3. Special events at bars, with tents, uniforms, themes, prizes, etc. (advertising to go with it)

Another process method that utilizes writing skills is working with personas. In both my corporate imagery and interaction design courses I have students write personas to represent real people in real situations. This step in the design process makes it easier for students to understand the nuances of an audience's needs, goals, and motivations. This last semester I think I uncovered a few students that would be really talented at writing soap operas as their personas took things to a different level.



JAZMIN

SOCIAL HISTORY: Her favorite color is Yellow Ochre. Most of her friends work at Headshops downtown She loves Bob Marley, Patchouli and K2 She has one secret: she owns a leather jacket. She regularly attends seven activist groups on campus and is a regular at certain stores. **GOALS:** world peace, a TRUE democracy, a wicked back tattoo, never buy what she can't make, see Phish four more times in concert, learn how to blow glass, stick it to the man. **MOTIVES:** vegan values, needs to be heard/seen, needs to feel at peace

Here is an example of a set of three personas a student wrote to create an identity for a "handmade community shop".



SOCIAL HISTORY: His favorite color is turquoise. He has a "crew" of really good friends. He loves Banksy, God, and skateboarding. He has a secret pseudonym "Brk" which he uses to graffiti different locations in Lansing and East Lansing at night. He is a regular at local shops **GOALS:** chill out design and sell his own brand of t-shirts, learn how to macrame, move to California, tag every building in East Lansing, world peace **MOTIVES:** good company, needs to feel at peace, feeling happy doing art, warm weather, being in the outdoors

ERIC

SOCIAL HISTORY: She is the first graduated generation. She received college education and is now retired. When she's at home, she always searches on the Internet and magazines for hand making clothing tutorials and recommendations. She has a lot of handmade experiences but is not one-hundred percent professionally trained. She is self-teaching and can become an advanced amateur. She tends to be conservative. **GOALS:** peaceful and substantial late years, health, nice living conditions, sufficient finances to support herself, enjoyment **MOTIVES:** keep away from loneliness, afraid of unstable situations and dramatics changing, keep away from hospital and medications, comfortable conditions, money, find a solution to boredom.



DOLORES



SOCIAL HISTORY: Has a sense of style. Enjoys learning about new, popular things. Follows the trends of things ranging from fashion, to music, food, causes, movements, gadgets. Environmentally aware but doesn't mean she participates in "green" activities. She is drawn to things visually at first and possesses enough curiosity to learn more about those things. **GOALS:** to be looked upon as a trendsetter, to be looked upon as someone who is stylish and visually appealing ranging from what clothes they wear to what things they own **MOTIVES:** keep up with trends

KELLY

1" logo should be no smaller than 1/4" when used on items.

The logo is meant to symbolize the enthusiasm our shop is all about. The banner represents being proud of what you believe in and the circle represents Earth. The logo can be in black and white or with a solid background color.

DESIGN IDENTITY: LOGO

Sofi Dutcher

From the personas Sofi developed an store front initiative that would give her audience an alternate shopping experience, offering handmade and reused products.

STICKERS

Sofi Dutcher

TATTOOS

Sofi Dutcher



This is an application that will allow people to scan products to find out the good and bad aspects of the company that is behind the product.



When asked about the persona writing process she said, "learning how to create and use personas was one of the most valuable things I learned. It gave me a personality to work with and to market to. Before that, I had a tendency to design for myself." (Sofija Dutcher)

This is a fun activity for them and in group projects it serves as an agreement between members of who their target audience is.



One last note about writing...I don't let my students use "lorem ipsum" in any project, in the senior classes I require them to write their own copy. The use of "lorem ipsum" was a bad habit I picked up from working in professional practice, it was quickly pointed out as such by a professor in grad school.

One student commented that "a lot of clients do not understand lorem ipsum. In terms of pitch communications, a design can go a lot farther with a snappy self-composed headline than "Lorem ipsum dolor siti amet consectetur adipiscing elit." (Jeremy DeBor)

"Being a good editor speeds the development process, being able to catch grammar and syntax errors as you are working on a project means one less round of revisions and one less thing for client's to start back-peddling on."

Jeremy DeBor, Senior Designer
Juice Interactive, Chicago
Class of 2011

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"Particularly in quick turnarounds, a copywriter won't be pulled in on the job. As a visual communicator, higher-ups often expect me to generate both a design and messaging in a relatively short amount of time."

William Boor, Associate Digital Designer
Tribune Company (Digital Ad Ops Department), Chicago
Class of 2011

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DESIGNER as PERFORMER

Let's face it designers must also be good performers. As much as we want to hide behind our computers all day it isn't the most effective way to sell our ideas. Sometimes looks alone sell an idea but most of the time clients and team members want a show. They want to be pumped up about the decision they are about to make.

"Putting on a show and being able to present something in a coherent and straight-forward manner has definitely been one of the aspects my employers have been pleased with my abilities in. At MSU we gave presentations all the time, if we weren't talking about our own work we were talking about someone else's, and apparently, that's reasonably uncommon in design schools."

Jeremy DeBor, Senior Designer
Juice Interactive, Chicago
Class of 2011

A very smart, talented, and dynamic former student of mine expressed it this way:

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"Jazz hands helps."

Jeremy DeBor, Senior Designer
Juice Interactive, Chicago
Class of 2011

He goes on to add...Being graded on the quality of your presentation, and being shown how to give an impactful insightful presentation is one of the things I am most thankful to my undergrad for. Impressing clients is really the name of the game, and no matter how clever and witty, or beautiful and conceptual your design work is, sometimes it just doesn't speak for itself, or at least it doesn't speak loud enough for the client's to throw 10000 dollars at it. Jazz hands helps." (Jeremy DeBor)

In every course I give a grade on "professionalism" this includes their professional demeanor, showing up on time, class participation, meeting deadlines, etc. this also includes their oral and written presentation skills. In some cases I make the presentation a deliverable of the project. Over the years I have learned that like any other deliverable of a project I have to be specific about what I expect from them. I give them an outline of what to talk about and share examples of how I want them to talk about it. I don't want them to just show me a visual but tell me a story. In a recent final project for my interaction design course I required the students to dress up. I also moved the presentation to a different location other than our typical meeting spot, and to top it all off I invited some professionals to sit in on the experience. For us this doesn't seem like a big deal as it is a part of our daily jobs, but for them they were nervous. I liked that they were nervous because it showed they cared.



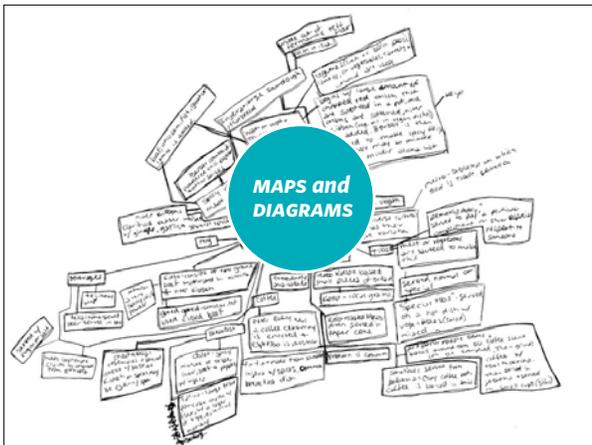


In some instances, I have even had the students present a peers project after an initial question and answer session with that person. This way they get to practice being on the other side and are forced to get information about the peers' project.

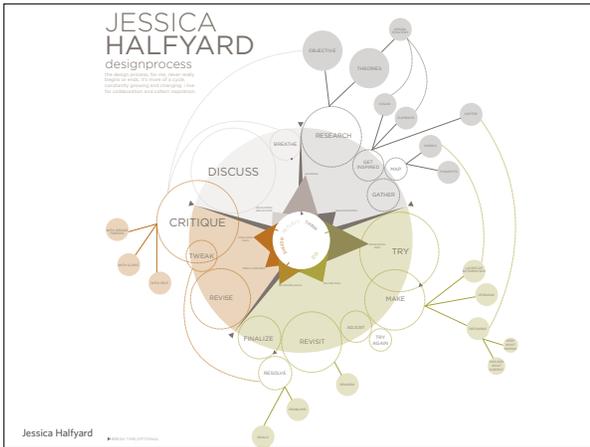
I think having students present in various ways keeps it entertaining for the students. I recently heard from a friend that teaches at the University of Kansas that he has his students present their process work in the form of Pecha Kucha, I will be testing this way out in the future!



I feel that this role goes hand in hand with the writing role and then parallel to a designer as problem-solver-seeker. I'm not sure where I first heard the phrase of designers shouldn't strive to only solve problems but we should move to being problem-seekers. A key to being successful at problem-seeking is to be a good researcher. Personally I don't think I picked up on this until I was in graduate school, well at least I didn't have any tools or methods in place to help with research until that point. Meredith Davis at NCSU was the person responsible for introducing concept mapping to me. From day one I was hooked and I still am. Now I bombard my students with the method and they find it very useful not only in their design projects but also in other areas of their education.

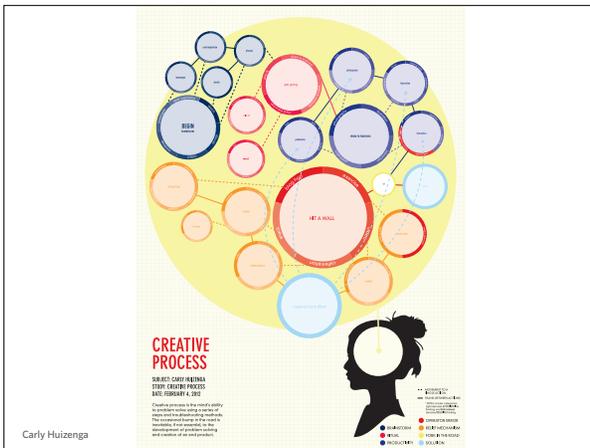


I have students use the method formally and informally. They could be simple mind maps in sketch form or sometimes I will require them to be a project deliverable, making them a formal artifact. Mapping and diagramming functions as a means to connect concepts, see relationships, identify patterns, and to find gaps in content.



These are examples of student's design process maps created in my interactive design class. Students used their completed maps as a way to identify possible moments an interactive design intervention could help in their design process.

JESSICA MAP
CARLY MAP



"It's good to be able to explain the way you think or work through a design problem to a prospective employer. I'm not sure if this is true of their thinking or not, but I feel like it shows character, problem solving, whether or not you might be a good fit for the way they work on projects, and often a bit of humor. Maybe this is a stretch, but I think it's kind of humanizing and sets you apart from just being another name in a long list of applicants." (Carly Huizenga)

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Carly Huizenga, Junior Graphic Designer
Distillery Marketing + Design, Madison, WI
Class of 2012



This is the reality in the profession, even if someone is a lone freelancer, they still work with others on a very regular basis. In academics I have found it hard to simulate a real professional collaborative experience complete with an appropriate mix of various disciplines. We have been developing a new degree in Experience Architecture that will be a blend of disciplines to accommodate a capstone course that will give students an experience similar to that of an industry collaboration. In the meantime I do have the design students work on group projects so they at least gain the experience of working with other designers.



"I appreciate working with others in class because it helped give me a better understanding of what it is like to deal/cooperate with others in general, and now I'm in a position in which I'm constantly doing so."

Kristen Miller, Graphic Designer
Plum Market, Farmington Hills, MI
Class of 2011

"Working with others in class because it helped give me a better understanding of what it is like to deal/cooperate with others in general, and now I'm in a position in which I'm constantly doing so." (Kristen Miller)



In this piece team members worked together to communicate a change related message to university decision-makers about the use of coal on MSU's campus.

BEYOND COAL

Jeremy DeBor, William Boor, Brittany Meadows, Thad Wojdyła, and Alissa Lane



J.J. Jenkins, Kate Murray, and Kelsey Tupper

This project was just completed a few weeks ago in my interactive course. Students worked together to plan for an interactive experience that would allow people to practice and track their salsa dancing lessons and events.

INTERACTIVE PROJECT

I know I am preaching to the choir when it comes to creating design projects that exercise other skill sets, I hope some of the ideas I shared here continues the discussion or inspires other ways of broadening the design process.

THANK YOU!

Rebecca Tegtmeier
tegtmey2@msu.edu