

Beyond borders

*Participatory design research
and the
changing role of design*

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will be up to the students to decide how they pursue issues of migration or other concerns in their professional life, but with the Sticks+Stones experience under their belt, they will have a tangible, concrete experience to frame their future involvement with social justice causes. If the well-intended Sticks+Stones 2010 plans come to fruition, the students will have been immersed in a pedagogical experience that will create enduring knowledge and will permanently influence their design careers in a positive way.

conclusion

Technology has put us closer to a virtual reality of living side-by-side with global cultures and given us unprecedented speed and connection to the far corners of the globe. With instant connections to international destinations and peoples, the emphasis on knowledge and research is even more important, but time is a precious commodity. This is easy to say, harder to practice. Sticks+Stones is ultimately an experiment, a voyage into the unknown with the goal of returning with two prized possessions: residue from a rich immersion in cross-cultural conversations and fresh perspective on the “other.”

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engaging a wider audience

Graphic design is an inherently collaborative profession; the Sticks+Stones 2010 project calls upon students to put these skills to use in extreme ways. Students will span native languages, global time zones and cultural norms as well as learning and working methodologies to create a thoughtful and strong final project. Studies show that a curriculum of collaborative learning, where all students are simultaneously imparting and absorbing knowledge, is more effective than traditional lecture-driven models (Rohidi, 2009). Through a mix of presentations by students, facilitators, faculty members and design professionals, 2010 participants will have multiple points of entry for the curriculum, enhancing the potential for permanent knowledge. Further, by engaging students in a collaborative, high-profile group project, the results will most likely be more thoughtful.

The Sticks+Stones 2010 exhibit project will challenge students to address migration by assembling an informative design installation that will be easily accessible to the public; the collective group will determine the exact form, message and intended response of the installation. Sticks+Stones faculty will not assert a political position within the issue of immigration but will instead prod students to create an objective, well-informed project that allows the viewer to decide what is right and what is wrong regarding the subject. This final project will include a measurable response or outcome, so that its impact will be discernable; students will then address the influence, successes and potential failures of their project. By engaging within a healthy debate and rigorous design making, students of the Sticks+Stones 2010 project will come away with knowledge of the specific subject as well as a working knowledge of how to break down complex issues into understandable visuals to educate a diverse public.

One of the consistent aspirations collaborators voiced about the direction of the 2010 project is the effort to reach outside of graphic design curricula and even the graphic design profession. By posing an exhibit or installation as the capstone project, it will live outside the walls of the classroom; this added level of responsibility that students will experience all too quickly mirrors their future work as professionals. Often class projects are seen as a means to a grade and a possible portfolio addition. By raising the bar to create in the highly diverse, often-unpredictable public sphere, students bear an added sense of responsibility of not just “making” for themselves or their portfolio. By working within their “sphere of influence,” as Beverly Daniel Tatum refers to it, visual communication students can bring about social change and meaningful dialogue (2003, 2004). Ultimately, it

anticipating student issues

The students who participate in the Sticks+Stones 2010 will be carefully chosen for their potential diversity, design skills, willingness to engage in this emotionally challenging curriculum and their mental stability. The latter is especially important as students who act out in small ways on home campuses could potentially experience intensified outbursts when put through the paces of a provocative course in a foreign location. Design faculty are not trained psychologists or social workers, thus they might not catch the warning signs of a student's deteriorating mental stability. By quickly enlisting the help of outside experts and keeping school officials such as department chairs and deans apprised of potentially troublesome situations, negative experiences can be minimized. This issue revealed itself when one troubled student posted a skewed and distorted perspective of his 2006 experience online. His professor was singled out in the public forum, maligning both her and classmates. The student later rescinded his rant and apologized, but the warning remained: This curriculum is not for the faint of heart.

Another potential challenge for the group project is creating an inviting atmosphere for individuals to feel comfortable expressing personal thoughts and participating equally in group forums. Stereotypically, Asian students, particularly female students, tend to shy away from participating in class discussions. The level of discomfort associated with being in a strange location with a large group will most likely exacerbate this tendency and not just for the Chinese students. In anticipation of this, the Berlin symposium will include "think-pair-share" discussion opportunities, small group conversations and group presentations. A key assignment will be to have students create presentations about their homeland for the group. These presentations will tell the story of their native land from a peer perspective; students will gain not only a sense of pride by showing off where they come from, but they will also learn in engaging ways about the places the other Sticks+Stones 2010 students call home. Sticks+Stones will also employ personal narrative, a powerful tool for cross-cultural (and other) learning, through a variety of assignments including journal entries and online postings.

Another obvious issue with the group gathering will be language. US faculty collaborators struggled with ways to be more inclusive to non-English speaking students and to minimize any appearance of the project being too US-centric. However, practical logistics ultimately dictated that all participating students be fluent in English. Although the English-only language requirement quickly narrowed potential international campuses, it was seen as an unavoidable parameter of the project.

and the gathering in Berlin is also expected to be an essential component to the project's success. Empirical research tells us that online exchanges are inferior to in-person discussions; further, online learning can serve to reinforce perceptions and stereotypes, since when presented with an unknown quantity the tendency is to fall back on making judgments from a personal perspective (Karakaya and Pektas, 2007). Thus, Sticks+Stones has evolved into a hybrid course: part online, part study abroad and part bricks-and-mortar. The Berlin travel experience will also help make real cross-cultural issues. Removing students from the comfort zone of their respective home campuses and placing them in unfamiliar surroundings generates the uneasiness of being in a foreign place and the tendency to stereotype to clarify one's surroundings (Hofstede and Pedersen, 2002, 19). The in-person exchanges, afforded by the Berlin symposium, are essential for students to rediscover the myths and stereotypes of the "other." By blending in-person and online group discussions with typical single-campus exchanges, students will have a variety of learning experiences that will further their skills as professional collaborators.

Faculty collaborators will push boundaries by asking students to weigh the limits of creative freedom against the necessary exposure of a message and to potentially build something that might not be possible in another's country due to politics, religion or other censorship issues. Students will look inward to their countries, communities, religions, families and other influential groupings and assess how they frame their beliefs regarding the construction of visual messages. Do the students agree with their culture's freedom or limitations of imagery? Are they aware of the boundaries, or lack thereof, that other designers face? How will students react to creating in a more or less inhibited culture? To what extent do these repressions influence the designs of the students? How will their visual solutions change once the freedom, and perhaps even curriculum mandate, of expression has shifted? To what extent will students push to report the issue of immigration and how will this manifest in visual form? Gathered in a single room, this collection of students from diverse customs, life experiences and closely held beliefs will be forced to consider multifaceted views to issues of stereotyping, racism, xenophobia and migration as they relate to visual message-making.

yield a richly diverse group. By interacting with and learning from students of other cultures, all of the 2010 Sticks+Stones participants can come away with a better understanding for others as they are exposed to differences they would not recognize if not juxtaposed to contrasting others (Trepagnier, 2006, 111). This self-reflection applies not just to students but to faculty as well for their personal experiences and beliefs also influence their curricula (Brunson, 2007, 131).

This difficult and often painful work of looking inward is important for graphic designers to create the appropriate awareness of how their personal biases and beliefs might seep into their visual messages. It's risk-taking for design students and it's risk-taking for design faculty. When design students in Vancouver, Canada learned of the 2006 Sticks+Stones project during a post-project presentation, they voiced their hesitation—even unwillingness on the part of some—to participate in such a course. Such blatant discussion of racism and prejudice—particularly in reference to immigration—is not commonplace in today's curricula as it is unsettling for both faculty and students.

These insecurities can be minimized, however, by enlisting the expert help of additional faculty, skilled facilitators and other knowledgeable professionals. In 2006, collaborating faculty quickly realized that the discussion of race and religion would be potentially more charged than any design critique forum, so they invited Dr. Robert Corley, an expert on race relations and conflict resolution and a University of Alabama at Birmingham faculty member, to help facilitate these difficult dialogues. Dr. Corley has extensive experience addressing civil rights and racism, facilitating discussions about religious differences and has served on the boards of numerous civic and social justice organizations including the Alabama Poverty Project and the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute. When the 2006 Sticks+Stones group met in Los Angeles for a three-day symposium, he not only helped construct the framework for the activities but also led the emotional Privilege Walk exercise and ensuing discussion. Dr. Corley also joined the group again at its concluding online video conference at the end of the semester and frequently participated in the Birmingham classroom's discussions. His participation contributed to the overall success of the project. For 2010, faculty collaborators have sought guidance and assistance from the campus study abroad office, the sociology department and immigration specialists. A professional facilitator will again help lead discussions of immigration, stereotypes and racism in Berlin.

Another successful yet complicated component of Sticks+Stones is the element of travel. In previous Sticks+Stones, the most impactful teaching opportunities came in face-to-face discussions, whether video conferences or in-person discussions,

immigration law that allows, if not encourages, racial profiling has helped escalate the immigration debate to a fevered pitch in the United States. Immigration's pervasive unpopularity adds another complication to an already complex subject that the Sticks+Stones 2010 design students will be assigned to parse.

Students will confront this complexity as the group gathers for two weeks in Berlin: What will be the German students' impressions of the Turkish students, given the pre-existing immigration strain between these two countries? What will be the US American students' reactions to the Chinese, who stereotypically represent a more-intelligent student body? How will the Turkish students, who hail from a Muslim country, respond to the Chinese students, who hail from a land that reportedly blamed the Uighur Muslims for the riots in 2009 (Cha, 2009)? How will each group transform the fragmented histories and knowledge of the others' regions into a more-informed view of their fellow designers? What will be the response of students when they are exposed to a multitude of perspectives of 'truth' about immigration? These global students will be called upon to respond personally and professionally to these juxtapositions.

Taking students through the task of representing such a complex issue as immigration instills the ethical principles of responsibility and message truth. The degree to which students from around the globe can form free and true expression of an issue will vary, perhaps significantly. For example, the extent to which Chinese students could express/protest a governmental issue varies greatly from that in the United States. The German students will potentially have the most expressive freedom, particularly when representing the human form, as Europeans are less inhibited about nudity. In contrast to this, Turkish students' Muslim culture, which in its strictest interpretation, forbids any representation of the human figure. Students will be challenged to consider which of these creative parameters (or lack there of) will be appropriate when constructing their group project.

The collapse of the current global economy has shown that we are all connected, despite the fiercely guarded borders and vast bodies of water that separate countries. Opportunities for awareness and learning about ethical considerations of the design profession are limited outside a university setting. If college students are not exposed to and taught the ethical parameters of the profession, then they will most likely conduct their professional career unaware of this essential knowledge. If students can learn to make a difference, the collective positive effect might also be felt globally.

Although the 2010 participants hail from the far reaches of the globe, a thoughtful pairing of students within the same geographical region could also

from Turkey. Turkish people compose Germany's second highest immigrant population, but are the least integrated of immigrants, facing difficulties earning an education and gaining employment (Deutsche Welle, 2009).

The United States is often touted as a welcoming "melting pot" for immigrants, but recent events keep it from living up to its characterization. According to the Southern Poverty Law Center's 2009 investigative report, the treatment of immigrants in the southern US region often mirrors the treatment of blacks during the post-slavery, segregationist era. Individuals who appear to have a Latino background or appearance, whether legal resident, US citizen or undocumented worker, are assumed to be illegal and thus are routinely subjected to racial profiling, bigotry and widespread hostility (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). In addition, the post 9/11 assumption that persons appearing to be of Middle Eastern descent must be terrorists of some kind and the eviction of a black school group from a predominantly affluent, white swimming pool community decidedly point to the United States' still prevalent stereotyping.

From the United States' Jim Crow era treatment of Latinos to the ethnic riots in Western China to Turkey's stereotypical association with headscarves, Islam, belly dancers, kebabs and subsequent false association with 9/11, to Germany's violent history of genocide and division—all of these locations' connection to ideas of stereotyping, immigration and prejudice will reinforce their relevance. All too often we judge others' cultures by our own, which creates skewed perspectives. The importance of learning from first-hand sources of diverse culture cannot be overstated. For Sticks+Stones these sources include not only the symposium location—Berlin and its historically rich venues—but also the students themselves.

The Sticks+Stones 2010 project will use immigration as a primary topic to address these issues of prejudice, stereotyping and racism. This will not be an easy task for students. Misinformation abounds regarding immigration. Often assumptions are made that anyone speaking with a non-native accent must not only be an immigrant, but an illegal one; these conjectures support racial profiling, bigotry and repressive treatment (Southern Poverty Law Center, 2009). Moreover, the plight of immigration is generally not a popular, sympathy-inducing one. With the current devastated global economy in particular, immigrants are made scapegoats for this dire economic situation. Accusations of stealing jobs, overburdening the social systems and contributing to other economic drains are rife. Online dialogues in the United States regarding immigration are often vehement, hate-filled diatribes that blame immigrants for all that is wrong with the country, including its depleted economy. The recent passage of Arizona's controversial

looking forward

The 2010 iteration of Sticks+Stones will broaden the conversation and the curriculum to an international scope; collaborators have invited sixty design students from China, Turkey, Germany and the United States to participate. These students from more distant geographical locations represent differences in native languages, lifestyles, political climates and cultures, traditions and rituals, values and goals, religious majority, socio-economic status and affluence, yet the common thread will be the students' interest in and passion for design and visual communication. It is through design that students will come together as one group to create messages about their experiences and stereotyping.

Each of the locations is rich in historical as well as contemporary relevance. Germany's Berlin is a city whose history is in contradiction to its present. During World War II, the city was an epicenter for the Nazi party and its plans for the genocide of the Jews; Sachsenhausen, one of the most notorious Nazi death camps, is located just outside the city limits. In the heart of the city, Brandenburg Gate stands as symbol of Berlin's conflicting past, representing both the repression and division of the former Berlin Wall and the restored unity and openness now present today. The city that was once known for its exclusion is now a welcoming inclusive spot where artists thrive. Berlin will play a pivotal role as the location for a two-week symposium.

China, too, is a country of contradictions: The Beijing Olympic games enhanced the nation's image in 2008 yet the 2009 riots in Western China were a nadir, the country's deadliest ethnic unrest in decades. The Chinese students will be able to offer enriching first-hand accounts about life in a Communist country with its relatively more limited expressive freedom, experiences growing up in an officially atheist land that persecuted religious followers, as well as life in a nation that offers a burgeoning technology and is quickly becoming a key player in the global economy.

Turkey is a predominantly Muslim nation with large numbers of immigrants, often illegal, and the subsequent multicultural issues that result; its geographical location between Europe and Asia provides residents with a unique blend of Eastern and Western cultures. In addition, its proximity to the recent and ongoing violent clashes in the border countries of Georgia, Iran and Iraq, give its students a strong understanding of unrest and religious struggles. The Turkish students' abilities to speak first-hand about these experiences and their impressions will foster greater understanding and knowledge of others for the Sticks+Stones group. Furthermore, Turkey will provide a link to Germany as an estimated fifteen-million people in Germany are foreigners or of foreign origin, with twenty-percent of those coming

validated the revealing process: "I'd love to see more collaborative experiences in the future. They force interaction between foreign groups and create more necessary dialogue." And they learned about the responsibility of being a designer: "Design is a powerful tool because it can be reproduced cheaply and easily and it is accessible to everyone. Given this set of circumstances, design can easily promote change in the community, especially when the cause is taken up and pursued by members of the community who wish to cause change."

"I have always considered myself a fair and decent person, but since some of our exercises in Los Angeles, I have noticed 'harmless' words that I say that could really hurt someone that overheard me," said one student. "I also realized what kind of potential power, be it good or bad, that I as a graphic designer possess. I have to always keep in mind what an awesome responsibility designers have to encourage positive changes and movements."

Although both years had tremendous successes, there were many areas for improvement as well. It was a heavy administrative load to coordinate the different classes, develop and broadcast the curriculum, install an exhibit and produce its catalog, while attending to the many logistical details. Finding simultaneous windows of time for video conferencing and the Los Angeles symposium proved difficult, furthering the time commitment to these administrative details. Although all were given the same project assignment sheet, the four 2006 faculty members had slightly different interpretations of the expected outcomes and this led to some skewed results of overall projects. Faculty collaborators also wished for more involvement from students, yet the semester's clock was not gracious. The in-person conversations also seemed to have barely scratched the surface when it was time to close the discussion. The exhibit and catalog were produced post-semester, unwittingly removing the students from a significant portion of the overall project. Finally, the faculty also failed to conduct more pointed pre- and post-analysis surveys to more accurately gauge any shifts in thinking about tolerance, stereotyping and the design profession.

Multiple viewpoints were absolutely necessary for meaningful conversations that could result in enriched work. The group's diversity offered a wide range of political perspectives, life experiences and spiritual practices that informed discussions and created a larger knowledge base. The success of increasing the numbers and diversity of the participating schools propelled faculty collaborators to go a step further for the next iteration: to conduct the project with an international student base diverse in language, culture, politics as well as global location and apply the lessons learned as faculty collaborators.

for their work given the semiotics at play? If not, what aspects of their design were misleading to their audience? In their use of language, had they applied terms that were truly appropriate or misleading? How did this intimate lesson relate to their soon-to-be-profession? As image-makers for their community, and potentially the world, it is imperative that graphic designers use responsible language and imagery. Students learned first-hand how it feels to be stereotyped and to stereotype others and how misinformed language can shift perceptions.

Armed with this intimate lesson, students were then directed to create awareness-raising messages for their respective communities. Each school identified a seminal issue; some students worked as individuals, some as teams, to generate solutions to issues as diverse as abandoning degrading terms such as “slut” and “fag,” encouraging Hispanic students to consider college and ways to overcome Alabama’s “illiterate redneck” stereotype. Selected works were exhibited at the Birmingham Civil Rights Institute in Alabama, a venue that strives to consider the minority experience and offer artistic and visual works with human rights themes.

Students consistently echoed the validity and deeper learning experiences from the overall curriculum, especially those enrolled in the 2006 project, which included the Los Angeles symposium. The exchanges in Los Angeles were some of the most impactful and rich of the entire curriculum. “The dialogue created from everyone seeing each others’ [stereotype portraits and corresponding labels] was incredible,” said one student. “This was the most beneficial part to me, because people became defensive and started speaking without hesitation on subjects that needed to be spoken about openly.”

“The discussions that took place in L.A with the other universities revealed many differing opinions that helped open my eyes to the fact that we stereotype... everyday, most of the time unconsciously making those decisions,” another student said. “I found it interesting that something we do without thinking can really affect other people in a profound way.” Even a simple assignment, such as the stereotype postcard quickly obviated the seemingly automatic tendency to categorize a person. “Sadly, I found it very easy to immediately come up with a stereotype about someone based on superficial information,” said one student.

Students learned about themselves: “[One of the exercises at the LA symposium] was really uncomfortable for me at first but it made me deal with things that I felt. I had to acknowledge that my modest up-bringing was considered privileged and that didn’t make me evil.” And they learned about others: “I loved being able to meet all of the different people,” said one Birmingham student. “I found it really interesting that the students from Utah were so similar to us in a lot of ways.” Another also

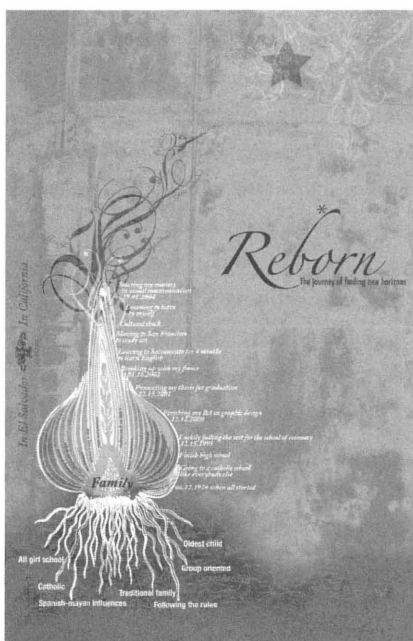


Figure 1: Self-portrait by Maria José Banos, San Francisco State University received the following labels: Life stinks, Hate of family, Confident, Stuck-up, Farmer, Flavorful, Strong, Creative, Driven, Rooted, Shrek-wants to break out of upbringing, Future focused, Towel head!, Loves family, Religious, Well self-esteem, Satisfied, Sure, Vegetarian, Obsessive-compulsive, Type A, Hard working, Hungry, Happy Californian, Focused, Grown up, Onion loving, Book worm, Know it all

Figure 2: Self-portrait by Brandon Dawson, University of Alabama at Birmingham received the following labels: Family-oriented, Traditional, Complex, Soulful, Christian, Goal-oriented, Warm, Healthy, Ladies man, Wealthy, Rebellious, Inspirational, Balanced, Outgoing, Artistic, Normal, Motivated, Thinks outside the box, Concerned about image

and old family photos, the designer was called: preppie, religious, dependent, conformist, typical and all-American, among others. Terms once carelessly thrown out, such as “sluts,” “hippies,” “junkies” “possibly retarded,” “suicidal,” “bipolar,” “towel head,” “liberal bastard,” “witch” and “stupid,” took on new resonance when the labelers met the labeled; misreading images that lead to incorrect and even harmful labels also caused students to reexamine their reactions.

Students' lessons in this project were twofold: ownership of language and ownership of visual graphic solutions. Did the students receive appropriate terms

Along with five distinct projects, the curriculum included the following readings: on social psychology (*Stereotyping: The Politics of Representation and Images that Injure*), giving detailed accounts of the roots of, damage done by and perpetuations of stereotypes; on human geography (Lucy Lippard's *Lure of the Local*), offering perspectives of how an artist's sense of place or home influences the resulting work; on graphic design activism (*Conscientious Objectives*, *Graphic Agitation 1*, *Graphic Agitation 2* and *Citizen Designer*), explaining the specific ways designers create powerful and responsible imagery; on information graphics (Richard Saul Wurman's *Information Architects* and Edward Tufte's visual imagery series), revealing organized ways of depicting complicated information. The latter articles might find their way into typical design curricula, but the former articles were decidedly outside the usual design reading assignments. The 2006 students also participated in a video conference discussion with Mark Randall of World Studio Foundation in New York, a socially minded, non-profit organization that was formed to use graphic design to create change in communities. The self-portrait project, conducted in 2005 and 2006, called upon students to create tabloid-size self-portraits that visually and graphically described who they were and how place—their homes, their travels, their communities—had helped shaped them. Students incorporated maps, landmarks, song lyrics, computer gaming imagery, science diagrams and even cigarette butts to give others a visual sense of who they were. Once completed, the self-portraits were shuffled and exchanged with the other schools.

Students were then directed to study the self-portrait they each received of an unknown student from another participating school and deliberately label and stereotype the person reflected in this design. Students were encouraged not to self-censor or feel the need to be politically correct in their assessment of the anonymous maker; if faculty were to conduct an honest discussion about image and stereotypes, these labels and stereotypes had to be honest as well. Once the labels were assigned to the self-portraits, all of the students gathered together—via video conference in 2005 and in person in Los Angeles in 2006—for the unveiling of the twenty to thirty labels each design had elicited.

For one designer's self-portrait, which used images of an onion and text detailing important transitional moments the maker's life, the range of labels assigned included: stuck-up, creative, driven, towel head, obsessive-compulsive and focused. (The "towel head" labeler from another school had initially mistaken the onion image for a turban and assigned a term for someone of Middle-Eastern descent who wears a kaffiyeh. This then led to discussions of 9/11, Al Qaeda and the visualization of terror.) In another portrait, which included images of crosses

at Birmingham; Weber State University in Ogden, Utah; Northeastern University in Boston; and San Francisco State University—represented diverse religious, ethnic, sexually orientated and socioeconomic demographics of the United States. Participating students embodied twenty-two ethnic backgrounds, thirteen religious affiliations and eight countries including Iran, El Salvador, Spain, the Philippines, Japan and Columbia.

In the spring of 2005, US design educators, Pamela Beverly at Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, and Audra Buck-Coleman at the University of Alabama at Birmingham, took their graphic design students through the first Sticks+Stones curriculum. Inherent in the Alabama–Utah pairing was the common intensity of each region’s religious devotion and their dissimilar ethnic environments. These educators were curious to expose their students to the disparities place brings to design work: How does the design work produced differ from a designer in another region, beyond the “fashion trends” of visual styles? Included with this pedagogical question was the intent to broaden perspectives and increase awareness of the unacknowledged limited view students had of their fellow US Americans. Sticks+Stones also purports to ingrain social responsibility as well as responsible image making into students. Design students have been drawn to a creative communicative field; channeling their talent to further meaningful causes can be rewarding. Countless professional designers, writers and educators including James Victore, Bruce Mau, Marlene McCarty, Mark Randall, Seymour Chwast, Chaz Maviyane-Davies and Luba Lukova weave the threads of tolerance, anti-racism and ethical awareness into the fabric of their professional work, and over the course of time, we have witnessed what good graphic design can do, from Project M to peace propaganda posters to the work of Tibor Kalman and Gran Fury. We have also witnessed the ill effects of powerful graphic design through the Nazi propaganda posters, fear-inducing propaganda from post 9/11 and the false rhetoric of anti-immigration groups. Design educators need to instill these ethical values in their students to help create knowledgeable, responsible professionals.

The 2006 curriculum, an expanded version of the previous year’s offering, was composed of five projects: a stereotype postcard, that asked students to create stereotype imagery from limited information; a self-portrait that would be stereotyped; a workshop at the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles; a community-based reaction piece; and an interactive exhibit with corresponding summary catalog. The exhibit and catalog were a compilation of the previous four phases, intended to confront social intolerance and challenge a wider audience to reconsider closely guarded stereotypes and the ramifications of their beliefs.

gain a broader perspective and appreciation for other cultures, but they also develop a higher level of critical thinking skills (Gurin, 2002).

College campuses tout their diversity for good reason: it is a necessary environment from which students can excel and it is typically not an environment that has been available to them before, particularly in the United States. Students often arrive on college campuses with false information about “other” groups that has come not from their own first-hand experiences, but instead rumors and exaggerated secondhand information. The media, parents and social circles have contributed to these stereotypes and misperceptions that often impede students’ genuine understanding of their heterogeneous peers (Tatum, 2003).

As distance between home expands, so too, does the occurrence of stereotyping and profiling. Stereotypes are further reinforced by accepted social customs and education systems. Stereotypes and prejudice are not easily overcome as they have been ingrained in us from an early age and from a place of security and comfort: home. With this, the challenge to recognize and dispel our prejudices begins with the individual (Trepagnier, 2006). Engaging in difficult dialogues about race, racism, prejudices, religion, xenophobia and other controversial topics is unsettling but necessary.

Faculty collaborators believe design students must fully understand this potential reach and thus the responsibility they have to create tolerant, informed messages. Sticks+Stones faculty collaborators aim to propagate knowledgeable, culture-savvy future designers who have learned first-hand from an extraordinarily diverse group of peers about the insulting and potentially harmful effects of image misuse. Their innovative curriculum requires ethnic profiling and stereotyping as well as reflection, conversation and collaborative design as a means to multicultural understanding. They provide not only concrete examples of conscientious social action, but also craft assignments that require complex thinking and action on the part of students, to move them closer to regular participation in their professional design career.

the pilot study

From 2005 to 2006, Sticks+Stones brought together more than seventy-five students from distant locations within the continental United States. Faculty focused curriculum on the different stereotypes the students held of one another. Graphic design students at the participating universities—University of Alabama

contends, prefer to ignore race and racism rather than address these issues through open, honest dialogue (US Department of Justice, 2009).

The need to understand how personal beliefs of race, religion, socio-economic class and other differences impact visual messages is an ethical component of the graphic designer's and graphic design educator's professional duties. According to the Association of American Colleges and Universities, all curricula should address the diversity of "truths" students hold of themselves and others so as to form a holistic vision of their communities (1995, 4). The need for graphic designers is more urgent: for if these differences and the potentially skewed perspectives are not recognized, then slippage between accurate and faulty messages will occur within graphic compositions that can potentially influence the greater population. Sticks+Stones, a collaborative visual communication project, finds its inception at this critical point.

gathering disparate voices

As a pedagogical experiment, Sticks+Stones aims to engage student participants each term in conversations about race as well as religion, culture, class, sexual orientation and categorizations that otherwise stand to separate and bifurcate us. The curriculum deliberately challenges students to evaluate their beliefs, recognize the limitations of their knowledge and the need to research and understand how preconceptions manifest in their design work. Sticks+Stones gathers these student participants from diverse geographical regions to explore their similarities and differences, to reveal their perceptions and misconceptions of the "other," and to create a greater understanding of their responsibilities as creators of visual messages. Sticks+Stones' learning outcome is aligned with the teaching philosophy of the Association of American Colleges and Universities in that it allows students to grapple with "...conflictual, uncongenial forms of human dissent" (1995, 23) in order to understand their ethical responsibility to bettering society. Sticks+Stones' primary goal is to get to the heart of miscommunication and unintended use of stereotypes and instill ethical values in these future design professionals. Graphic design's messages can reach across streets and across the globe; they can bring together countries, communities and strangers for a common cause; they can also serve to divide otherwise amenable neighbors. Sticks+Stones deliberately composes a highly diverse classroom of students in an effort for students to learn from each other as well as the curriculum. Students who learn in a diverse curriculum not only


introduction

As the Museum of Tolerance in Los Angeles makes visitors pointedly aware, we are all prejudiced, no matter how much we might deny it. Using stereotypes and categorizing others is our natural tendency, although not always to a negative effect. For example, we use stereotyping to help in understanding the known and unknown. Stereotypes also help connect us to others and foster a sense of instant community with strangers. However, a problem lies in situations when we are not aware of our prejudices or when we allow those prejudices to prevent us from seeing characterizations of a person or group that do not fit into our preconceived notions of who they are. Moreover, when the cultural norms of one community are used to compare that of another, the gap between accurate and inaccurate interpretations of the other widens (Hofstede and Pedersen, 2002, 20).

Perhaps it is easy to dismiss the need to educate students about racism, diversity and stereotypes as redundant or unnecessary. After all, we entered a new millennium with a climate of ultra political correctness; the United States elected a black President, and today's Internet has given us the ability to communicate with our world neighbors in real time. Many whites believed Barack Obama's successful election signaled a post-racism era. Unfortunately, Blacks, Asians, Hispanics and other US minorities report that although Barack Obama's current job title is a step in the right direction, racism is far from over in the United States and around the world. Further, expectations of mended—if not healed—racial wounds and renewed tolerant outlooks are dashed yet again with activities in 2009: the U.S. Holocaust Museum shooting in Washington, DC by a White Supremacist; China's riots and nearly two-hundred deaths as a result of the Han Chinese and Uighur ethnic conflict; the increased abuse, racial profiling and mistreatment of Latino workers in the US South; and according to the Southern Poverty Law Center's report, the increase in US domestic terrorism and hate groups since the Obama election. Unfortunately, the conversation about stereotypes and racism is not over. We have begun to breakdown the prominent racial and prejudicial forces, but there is still much work to be done.

One solution to reduce the violence and hatred associated with prejudice is to begin an open dialogue and confront the issue directly. In February last year, US Attorney General Eric Holder incited much debate and criticism about his effort to raise awareness about the lack of discussion regarding race when he said that the United States, despite its claim to being a welcoming, inclusive melting pot, is instead a "nation of cowards" (US Department of Justice, 2009). Most Americans, he

harmful effects of image misuse. The innovative curriculum requires ethnic profiling and stereotyping as well as reflection, conversation and collaborative design on the way to multicultural understanding.



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abstract

Graphic design's messages can reach across streets and across the globe; they can bring together countries, communities and strangers for a common cause; they can also serve to divide otherwise amenable neighbors. Design students must fully understand this potential reach and thus the responsibility they have to create tolerant, informed messages. The need to understand how personal beliefs of race, religion, socio-economic class and other differences influence visual messages is an ethical component of the graphic designer's professional duties. For if these differences and the potentially skewed perspectives are not recognized, then slippage between accurate and faulty messages will seep into graphic compositions. Sticks+Stones deliberately composes a highly diverse "classroom" of students in an effort for students to learn from each other as well as the curriculum. Studies show that students who learn in a diverse curriculum not only gain a broader perspective and appreciation for other cultures, but they also develop better thinking skills. Sticks+Stones collaborators aim to propagate knowledgeable, culture-savvy future designers who have learned first-hand from an extraordinarily diverse group of peers about the insulting and potentially