Pinpoint Magazine:

A Student's Guide to Preparing for a Career in Design

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A Senior Thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for graduation
in the Honors Program
Liberty University
Fall 2017

Acceptance of Senior Honors Thesis

This Senior Honors Thesis is accepted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for graduation from the
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Abstract

Pinpoint magazine's purpose is to inspire and educate design students in their path toward a design career. *Pinpoint* is a magazine that features articles filled with insight and practical advice about entering the design industry. The information gathered is presented in a printed magazine format that will help college students pursuing degrees in art and design become informed about how to best pursue their career, how to navigate the world of design, and how to develop their design skills effectively. By reading a magazine filled with practical information on how to become a professional designer, design students will have a more informed and well-rounded view of their chosen career.

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Informing Design Students

For college students, graduating college and entering the professional world is a daunting and often terrifying prospect. Students who are pursuing degrees in design can be unsure of what to do once graduation occurs. Although students go through multiple classes that are crafted to prepare them for a career in design, they may still be left wondering what direction to turn once they graduate. The perceived instability of work for those in creative fields can scare students into thinking that they will struggle to obtain a well-paid job with the design skills that they love. However, design is a thriving career field that is filled with many job opportunities. Steven Heller solidified this concept when he emphasized that with the computer revolution, "…graphic designers became culturally significant as communicators, aestheticists, stylists, and even authors" (14).

Relevance of Graphic Design

Today's society is increasingly becoming more visually oriented and dependent. (Barnard 59). As a result, college students who graduate with a design related degree can pursue successful careers in design because designers are vital to the health of many businesses (Folkmann 14). Even though graphic design is a vital component of today's society, graphic design often goes unnoticed and unpraised by the average person. Malcolm Barnard pointed out that, "Graphic design is everywhere. Yet it is often taken for granted, passing unnoticed and unremarkable as it blends in with the visual culture of everyday life" (1). Every day people use and see objects, products, and examples of

graphic design. In today's visually dependent society, graphic designers are continually relied upon to produce the designs that saturate today's culture. Students have the opportunity to work hard on their skills and design knowledge while in college which will benefit them later when they are out of college.

Graphic Design Education

In the classroom, students are taught the basics of design, how to use design strategy, and how to effectively create and combine aesthetically pleasing designs with design strategy. Cheri D. Logan of the Cumbria Institute of the Arts said, "Degree level study has gained wide acceptance as the preferred route into the graphic design profession, providing one example of higher education's direct engagement in meeting the demands of the commercial world" (331). Learning foundational principles along with hands-on application is the most effective way for students to develop skills as graphic designers. Nicos Souleles emphasized this concept by saying that teachers "bring to the instructional process their conceptions and prior experiences that need to be considered for effective instruction to take place" (242).

However, professors can find it difficult to transfer their knowledge at an undergraduate level. Researchers O. A. Ojo and I. M. Ntshoe said, "Graphic design students, like many other students in the practical orientated disciplines such as engineering, medicine, architecture and others, need collaborative skills and experience in order to survive the labor market in the current global economy. However, for most design courses taught at a university of technology level, it is difficult always to provide a 'real world' professional practice experience at an undergraduate level" (172). Graphic design goes beyond putting together an eye-catching design or an aesthetically pleasing

layout. Every graphic design piece has a specific purpose and an audience. It will interact

with an environment and it will impact different people – whether it is a brochure or a

movie poster. Design students who graduate can often be inexperienced in how to mesh

the skills they have learned with the commercial world. Students can learn to become

better at combining their design skills with commercial strategy through research and

seeking hands-on experience.

The Business of Graphic Design

The classroom teaches design students how to use design basics and how to

become skilled graphic designers. Students may not realize that graphic design often

extends beyond aesthetics in the commercial world and that designers will be expected to

have other skills as well. To survive in the design industry, students need to have some

understanding of how graphic design works in businesses. Andrew Morris said, "…if

design is predominantly a service industry to business, then surely designers should have

a basic understanding of what makes business tick" (19). Research and experience are

often the ways that students can expand their knowledge base about the design industry.

Deborah Littlejohn emphasized that the design industry is an ever-changing industry:

"Societal changes, including the economic forces of globalization and the digital

revolution, along with a proliferation of information and communications technologies,

also contribute to changes seen in the field: the computer is much more than a production

tool – it is a social communications platform, one that will continue to transform design

practice" (34). As such, students would be prudent to research and seek knowledge about

the commercial design field and how they can expand their skills and knowledge of the

the industry outside of the classroom.

Extended Learning Techniques

There are many ways that design students can expand their skills and their knowledge base of the design industry and the business side of graphic design. Combining classroom education and projects with intentional reflection was found to help students learn design skills even more. A study found that "…reflection, introduced as a structured and critical practice, can support graphic design students to connect thinking from the project with thinking about their approach to practice" (Ellmers 79). Students can be intentional in reflecting on and seeking outside information about design, which will prompt them to become better designers. Graphic design is one of the disciplines that often has to be learned through doing. L.D. Myers said, "…many of the problems that arise in marketing demand creative solutions" (40). Students can extend their design knowledge by researching and gaining knowledge and experience while in college so that they will be more prepared for producing creative solutions.

Method

Creative Project

The more knowledge that a student has about design and the world of design, the more he or she will be able to make informed decisions about which area of design they want to build a career in. Design is a field that continually changes because of the continual advances in technology and platforms: "The future for graphic design offers more alternatives than ever possible before" (Thornton 33). Surprisingly, there are few resources solely dedicated to equipping students in college with knowledge of the industry outside of what they will learn in the classroom. Students can find many resources in the form of video tutorials, articles, and books dedicated to individual

subjects but there is a need for a resource that provides an overview of the design

industry and how students can prepare themselves for it. Michael Janda, a well-respected

design director, emphasized the importance of learning skills outside of the classroom in

his book, *Burn Your Portfolio*. He recognized the void in the market for a resource

dedicated to helping design students pursue a successful design career through learning

and applying skills that are learned outside the classroom (2). For printed magazines,

there are even less resources that target design students and seek to prepare them for life

after college. While there are digital and printed resources dedicated to design, there are

none solely dedicated to educating students on the information they need to know about

preparing for and beginning a design career.

When talking about what she wished she knew in design school, art director Dolly

Sanborn, said, "I wish that I placed more importance on drawing. I saw the illustration

majors with sketchbooks, but not many designers carried them around. I've taken up

drawing in my spare time now (after 15 years of working in the industry) so I can

continue to grow" (qtd. in Flavin). Graphic designer, Dennis Michael wished that he had

known that, "You are designing for clients, not yourself. As such, your designs might not

be the coolest looking designs out there. That doesn't matter. It's all about the problem

you are solving" (qtd. in Flavin). Practical advice like this will be included in *Pinpoint*

Magazine and will help students to be more prepared for life as a graphic designer.

A magazine resource dedicated to providing design students relevant information

pertaining to future career preparation will be helpful in developing student's design

skills and knowledge of the professional design world. By flipping through the pages of

Pinpoint Magazine, design students will become more informed about how to gain a

marketable position in the field they love. The magazine is designed in a cohesive and aesthetically pleasing way and displays design elements that designers use every day.

Materials

The content of *Pinpoint Magazine* contains articles and information on the following:

1. How students can start their design career

2. How students can utilize online tools to market and self-promote.

3. How students can pursue a career as a freelance designer.

4. Top ten tips for students to cultivate a successful design career.

5. How students can stay relevant as a designer.

The magazine articles explore how students can build their design repertoire which can help students to market their skills to future employers once they graduate from college. Articles cover and expound on personal branding, self-promotion, self-employment, and strategies for developing design skills.

Participation

Information has been drawn from sources that professional designers often use, such as design books and professional design websites.

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Results

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Even if students have an idea of what they want to do after college, many times they do not know what steps to take to pursue that career or what that career actually entails. Getting a well-rounded view of how to prepare for the design field will help students make informed decisions about their future career. Design students need to start taking steps to make themselves marketable to future employers. Gaining information about the vocation of professional design will help students to start expanding their

design repertoire by forming their own unique skill set in a direction that is marketable in today's current design field.

The articles and information within *Pinpoint Magazine* can prepare college students to get a relevant job after college in their chosen design field. Reading relevant design information will give students a holistic view of being a professional designer. *Pinpoint Magazine's* purpose is to direct students in their career preparation and to inspire them to seek and explore different design areas, giving them the best chance at succeeding in the design area of their choice.

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PINPO!NT

A magazine to lead the designer on the journey from student to pro

SPRING 2017

Build a killer online presence

3 strategies to promote
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Set yourself up for success

10 ways to succeed
as a designer