

As a graphic design educator, my role is to cultivate the opportunity for each student to develop their personal agency and create work that reflects their sensibilities, experience, intellect and values. To guide each student through the development of a creative process that can transcend the classroom leading to personal fulfillment and professional success. To instigate the creation of powerful formal solutions that incite curiosity, raise questions and make pointed commentary of social or cultural systems.

The contemporary graphic designer is an extension of their individual humanity developed through vocational study and personal experience—a practitioner and not merely a service provider. The graphic designer creates messages that reflect the intentional combination of verbal and non-verbal elements in the pursuit of visual and intellectual agency. This agency allows the graphic designer to engage with the human condition by being curious; defining problems; thinking critically; collaborating with people; and shaping cultural dialogue.

To develop this agency, the graphic design student must have a rigorous understanding of historical ideology, industry terminology and formal principles related to the graphic design profession. They must understand that formal arrangement is the result of a meticulous design process that emphasizes intellectual empathy, investigative research, critical thinking, problem-solving, social awareness and aesthetic courage. They must understand that creating effective communication requires keen observation. And, to have reliable observation, means, they must maintain writing skills to document critical analysis; they must translate analysis into formal directives that measure objectivity; they must seek out feedback to understand the effectiveness of their solutions; and they must make contextual connections that present visually-interesting and intellectually-rich work.

To develop this agency, the graphic design student must learn by making. They must see the hand as their primary investigative tool—physically calling the content and form to the center of discussion—an extension of their conceptual and aesthetic interpretation. Students must be resourceful and use any means necessary—medium or material, both analog and digital—in connecting conceptual objectives with formal qualities. They must see each contextual and formal decision as an opportunity to appropriately and efficiently strengthen their communication—uniting typography and form through impeccable craft.

To develop this agency, the graphic design student must challenge their notion of what type, images and messages represent in a broad cultural context. They must expose the social or cultural systems that define collective understanding, investigate the human condition and present design solutions that reveal their personal experience. They must engage with their peers and see creative disciplines beyond graphic design as potential collaborators. They must see the audience as an active element in their work and create direct human connections. They must understand that they have a responsibility in shaping a cultural dialogue and being good stewards in their community. They must see every project as an opportunity to unite investigation, process, content and craft to discover how graphic design can contribute to humanity as a whole.