11-17-2017

Design Door

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Recommended Citation

Kobielsky, Kate Noelle, "Design Door" (2017). *University Honors Theses*. Paper 492.
<https://doi.org/10.15760/honors.495>

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December, 2017

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INTRODUCTION

Graphic design is all around us — from our cereal boxes, to the knobs on our ovens, as well as the street signs we use to guide ourselves to work in the morning. Even though it affects all of us in one way or another, not many people realize the importance and magnitude of graphic design.

Because of this lack of understanding, many young creative students who may flourish in a design degree do not receive the support and information they need while still in high school.

Design Door is a campaign aimed towards high school students that encourages self discovery in the field of graphic design and its related professions. This campaign will eliminate the extra step of discovering design at the collegiate level and will better prepare and inspire the next generation of young graphic designers.

THESIS STATEMENT

**HOW CAN
CREATIVE HIGH
SCHOOL STUDENTS
BECOME AWARE OF
GRAPHIC DESIGN AS
A CAREER BEFORE
ENTERING COLLEGE?**

Based on the following research, it is clear that many current designers and creative professionals are frustrated with the lack of exposure they had to design before they went to college.

The Design Door campaign is a solution to this reoccurring problem.

RESEARCH & FINDINGS

PREPAREDNESS

In the 1987 American Educational Research Journal, Valerie E. Lee and Ruth B. Ekstrom present research substantiating the lack of guidance counseling services for many students in American public high schools. Their research leading up to the journal entry heavily focused on “the process of guidance counseling in public high schools” and spanned the years 1980 to 1982.

One of the significant discoveries in this study conducted by Lee and Ekstrom was that “counselors controlled students’ access to the college preparatory curriculum, and in so doing acted as critical barriers instead of facilitators.”

KEY FINDING 1

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS ARE ACTUALLY OBSTACLES IN COLLEGE PREPAREDNESS FOR MANY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

In addition, a Doctoral Dissertation from New York University in 1981 used as a sample in the Lee and Ekstrom study, stated that “public high school counselors spend more time on disciplinary problems and scheduling,” than they do on college preparedness. This exact claim was then reflected in the following primary research I conducted.

Because the Lee and Ekstrom findings were nearly forty years old, I wanted to follow up with current public high school counselors in the Portland Metro Area to see if these key points still held true. I conducted in-person interviews and online questionnaires to gain more insight. Along with the desire to learn more about the climate of guidance counseling within these schools, I also wanted to start dissecting the experience of the creative student. The following questions are examples of what guidance counselors were asked in order to gain more knowledge in both areas of interest:

- What are your daily responsibilities?
- Do students regularly come to you for career or college planning help?

- Do you ever help creatively inclined students with this process?
- Where can creative students within this high school find resources on colleges or careers?
- Do you use any programs or materials to help students plan?

The Lee and Ekstrom findings from the 1980s were strongly reflected, especially when I asked counselors to list their duties. Here is a verbatim ranking of what daily responsibilities one counselor listed:

1. Taking care of students’ mental health issues
2. Working on the master schedule
3. Coordinating student testing
4. College related counseling

This alignment between primary and secondary research became undeniable and led to a third means of investigation.

I wanted to know what my peers had to say on the matter. This project came about because of the past frustrations I went through personally with the guidance counseling system, so how did this gap in college preparedness effect other graphic design students and professionals such as myself?

A brief questionnaire was sent out to current graphic designers and students in the Portland Metro area. The following is a list of questions asked in this stage of the research:

- When deciding on a career/degree path what made you choose graphic design?
- Before entering college, where did you receive most information on degree/career path planning?
- What would you tell your past self about choosing graphic design?

The most substantial statistic derived from this research was that 66.7% of the participants asked actually got most of their information on degree/ career planning on their own (Fig 1).

FIG. 1

WHERE CURRENT DESIGN STUDENTS & PROFESSIONALS RECEIVED INFORMATION ON DEGREE/CAREER PATH PLANNING.

Since most creative students were conducting their own research on graphic design, it was clear that the first key finding was holding true: counselors were actually a hindrance to college preparedness and not a catalyst. If counselors had access to graphic design resources, then they could become more effective gate-keepers of the college preparatory system for creative high schoolers.

KEY FINDING 2

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS NEED MORE RESOURCES TO HELP PROMOTE GRAPHIC DESIGN IN HIGH SCHOOL.

KNOWLEDGE

In a study conducted by Kenneth Gray, Web-Jyh Wang, and Sharon Malizia at Pennsylvania State University, they found a dwindling of vocational training within most high schools in America (where technical training for design historically fell). This is because there has been a steady rise in college preparatory programs and most students are now making plans to go to college in one way or another. The National Center for Educational Statistics (NCES) reported that in 1972, 63% of high school seniors intended to go to college, while in 1992 that same demographic reached 95%.

These statistics are evidence that many students are trying to think proactively about their futures, but with the issues found surrounding high school counseling methods and the lack of resources for creative high schoolers, students may be missing out on choosing an appropriate degree/career path. Coupled with the lack of vocational training in schools, the inadequacies of specific and consistent college prep/counseling may be leading to a basic lack of knowledge about design in young students entering into higher education.

Because this was something I had seen while going through college, I again turned to my peers for insight on the issue. In a questionnaire sent out to design students and professionals in the Portland Metro Area, when I posed the question:

WHAT WOULD YOU TELL YOUR PAST SELF ABOUT CHOOSING GRAPHIC DESIGN?

Design students and professionals responded with:

"CONSIDER IT SOONER AND KNOW THAT IT'S A VIABLE CAREER OPTION. DON'T KILL YOURSELF DOING SOMETHING YOU HATE."

"IT IS A GREAT CHOICE SO DON'T FEEL SO NERVOUS OR UNSURE ABOUT IT."

"DO IT FIRST, DON'T BOTHER WITH THE ENGLISH DEGREE. IT'S WAY MORE PRODUCTIVE, AND YOU'RE GOING TO LIKE IT BETTER."

"CHOOSE IT SOONER!"

Since words like “sooner” or “first” came up in the responses quite often, it became clear that there was some sort of fundamental gap in knowledge about design before entering college. If these creative individuals, who now seem to love their degree paths and jobs, are wishing they wouldn’t have waited to start a degree in graphic design, then it must mean they just didn’t know what design truly entailed.

KEY FINDING 3

MANY CURRENT GRAPHIC DESIGNERS AND COLLEGE STUDENTS DID NOT START OFF IN A DEGREE FOCUSED ON GRAPHIC DESIGN.

If young students could learn about design before entering college, then they might be able to save time and money by not wasting it on other studies or jobs that leave them feeling unhappy or unfulfilled.

EXISTING MATERIALS

When asking educators and counselors from the Portland Metro Area what they advise creative students to do about college, most of the responses were based around sponsored information. This means that they were using current art schools and colleges as the main resource for helping students in high school learn about their options for four year schools and degree paths.

KEY FINDING 4

THE MAIN RESOURCE CREATIVE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE BEING EXPOSED TO IS SPONSORED INFORMATION FROM ART SCHOOLS.

A multitude of schools were contacted and six institutions were narrowed down as the marketplace examples:

- Academy of Art University
- Art Center
- The Art Institute of Portland
- Laguna College of Art and Design
- The New School
- Oregon College of Art and Craft

The reason these schools were chosen as examples for this research was because of the ease and simplicity of receiving their entrance packages. The materials were not only beautiful and engaging, the institutions that sent them also rigorously followed up with phone calls and emails to ensure the application process for incoming freshman was as simple as possible.

In addition to these materials serving as marketplace examples, I also sought visual trends in the discourse community. If these schools and institutions are speaking to the audience I would be targeting, then these could serve as examples for the look and feel of the campaign I would eventually be creating. Based on the materials collected, I identified six visual trend categories within the discourse community:

- Sans serif type choice
- Minimal copy writing
- Asymmetrical alignment
- Bold color choice
- Blunt framing devices
- Abstract illustration style

These are all key components to the look and feel of a campaign suited for creative high schoolers and are consistent among all existing materials.

TYPE CHOICE:

Large San Serif type is used in many of the headers and focal pages in the print and web components of the campaigns sampled. This means that the general look and feel of the discourse community is modern, fresh, simple and bold.

COPY WRITING:

The benefits of a New School education are life-changing. Our graduates discover innovative ways to realize their potential. See why this one-of-a-kind university is so valuable to life after graduation.

The value of an ArtCenter education encompasses a support system that includes the College's social, professional and academic resources.

Great work starts here. How do we do it?

THE INSTITUTE THE WORK ACADEMICS **ADMISSIONS** STUDENT LIFE ALUMNI NEWS EVENTS GIVING Q

Students now have the option of granting a parent or other guardian the right to access academic records, financial records, or both. This can be done through the Academic Tools student menu (under My Personal Information). If the person is not already in your records, students must first "Request add of Parent."

The copy for most of the programs is very minimal. Keeping information short and to the point is key when communicating with a young and untrained audience.

ALIGNMENT:

In almost all campaigns, no image, paragraph, header or visual of any kind was centered on the page or with other components of the layout. All type was aligned to the left or right and all visuals had an asymmetrical balance. This is also another means to reaching a modern, and fluid look and feel.

COLOR CHOICE:

Many of the schools and programs tend to use a very similar palette including vibrant blues and purples, paired with bright reds, pinks and yellows. In fact, most if not all, schools sampled used at least one if not all of these colors as a base branding palette. The discourse community is continuing to push the feeling of freshness with these colors.

FRAMING DEVICES:

Color blocks are a reoccurring theme in many of the campaigns as well. Most sites especially used rectangles to confine and highlight titles, headers or important text on the page. The use of framing devices such as these, is very modular and modern approach and also adds to the boldness of the layout.

ILLUSTRATION STYLE:

In any instances where illustration is used, it is abstract and unidentifiable as a specific object, symbol or icon of any kind. This aids in keeping the message clear and the copy the main focus.

The trends that were found within the existing materials are key in creating a visual language that effectively speaks to the target audience.

These attributes, however, are a part of a system that has a very specific agenda: gaining freshman attendance. Because the goal of my project is to help students get more information on graphic design from un-sponsored sources, I will be creating my own visual system that will serve a more educational and approachable service.

KEY FINDING 5

**MODERN
FRESH
BOLD
MINIMALISTIC
CLEAR
&
VIBRANT**

RESEARCH SUMMARY

In summary, the research shows 5 key findings:

KEY FINDING 1

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS ARE ACTUALLY OBSTACLES IN COLLEGE PREPAREDNESS FOR MANY PUBLIC HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS.

KEY FINDING 2

GUIDANCE COUNSELORS NEED MORE RESOURCES TO HELP PROMOTE GRAPHIC DESIGN IN HIGH SCHOOL.

KEY FINDING 3

MANY CURRENT GRAPHIC DESIGNERS AND COLLEGE STUDENTS DID NOT START OFF IN A DEGREE FOCUSED ON GRAPHIC DESIGN.

KEY FINDING 4

THE MAIN RESOURCE CREATIVE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS ARE BEING EXPOSED TO IS SPONSORED INFORMATION FROM ART SCHOOLS.

KEY FINDING 5

THE AESTHETIC WITHIN THE DISCOURSE COMMUNITY IS MODERN, FRESH, BOLD, MINIMALISTIC, CLEAR & VIBRANT

MODEL ANALYSIS

THE DESIGN KIDS

The Design Kids (TDK) is a project headed up by Frankie Ratford, a entrepreneur and designer working to connect college students and recent graduates to the field of design.

TDK is:

"AN ONLINE RESOURCE... TO HELP YOU GET A KICK ASS JOB IN THE DESIGN INDUSTRY."

I looked to TDK as a model because it is a resource that empowers and connects young designers to the industry of design. When used as a model, TDK can provide insight into reaching creative high schoolers and help them transition from high school into college. (Fig 3).

FIG. 3

**GRAPHIC DESIGN RESOURCES FOR
TRANSITION PERIODS**

THE BIG IDEA

Based on the key findings from the primary and secondary research as well as the model analysis from The Design Kids, it is clear there is a gap in the guidance counseling system when it comes to helping prepare creative high school students for college.

I have created a project called Design Door that helps to fill this gap.

The goals of Design Door include:

1. SPEAKING TO STUDENTS DIRECTLY.

Even though the role of guidance counselors is very important in this process of informing students about graphic design, the students themselves were, and continue to be, the driving force behind the research and implementation of Design Door.

2. SUPPORTING GUIDANCE COUNSELORS.

In most high schools visited, counselors used print materials to initiate learning opportunities for students. Brochures, fliers and posters seemed to be the most effective way for counselors to facilitate early stages of interest in students. Creating something similar is necessary for introducing Design Door into high schools.

3. SUSTAINABILITY.

Because many creative students tend to take on research themselves, Design Door needs to function on a social media platform as well. This will allow the students to take learning into their own hands and also serve as a consistent source of new information for them to digest.

4. APPROACHABILITY

The campaign's name also needs to be something that is clear, concise and intriguing. Because the whole point of the campaign is to help ensure students and counselors in public high schools learn about design, it is very important to keep the word "design" in the title.

The concept of a threshold being opened and stepped through resonates perfectly with what the target audience is going through. This is why a door is also a great symbol for the logo. These students will be taking a big step into the next chapter of their lives, and if it is framed by design, they will have a more poignant trajectory.

IMPLEMENTATION

PERSONAE

Design Door is aimed towards creative high school students, therefore the campaign needs to be custom designed just for them. Through questionnaires, two types of student personae became clear models to focus on.

Meet:

ACADEMIC ADDY & CAREFREE CARTER

Both are high school seniors and very creative students.

EMPOWERED

EXPOSED

CONNECTED

* ALL QUOTES FROM STUDENT/PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

ACADEMIC ADDY

Addy is involved in senior-level art and literature classes and is actively looking for a great art school to attend. She isn't sure what she wants to do yet, but she knows she wants to have a creative career. She is on the mailing list of a few different art schools and she often talks to her counselor about options for college. She has considered graphic design as a career, but still feel a bit confused on what that entails.

She needs:

- A way to research on her own
- To learn more about graphic design
- To connect with her counselor on finding more resources to guide her into the correct degree path

ENGAGED

INFORMED

INSPIRED

* ALL QUOTES FROM STUDENT/PROFESSIONAL QUESTIONNAIRE

CAREFREE CARTER

Carter isn't a fan of high school. He spends most of his time practicing guitar and playing with his fellow band-mates after school. He does enough work to stay afloat in school but doesn't participate in many school sanctioned events or programs. He loves art and really enjoys creating all the posters and album covers for his band. He has thought about college but has no idea what he wants to pursue — and the only time he has been to the counselor's office was when he skipped school to go to a local concert and got in trouble.

He needs:

- An eye catching campaign to peak his interest
- To learn about graphic design on his own
- To feel excited about a creative career path

LOOK & FEEL

The campaign visuals for Design Door are based on the needs of the target audience, my own personal aesthetic as a designer and the reference materials gathered from existing programs and institutions. The main components of the look and feel comprise of the following four attributes:

- Clear logo aspects
- Sans serif type choice
- Bold color palette
- Light-hearted illustration

LOGO DEVELOPMENT:

The logo needs to clearly communicate what the Design Door campaign is all about. Because the name has already been determined, it is a simple decision that the main visual for the logo should be a door:

It is also important that the name “Design Door” is a part of the main logo. The letter forms have been sized to mimic the shape and proportion of the door to give the design a good balance:

Another way the logo has been designed to optimize balance and consistency is by sizing the line weights of the type to match the door symbol:

Finally, the symbol and type has been paired together to create a cohesive logo:

Adding a splash of color is the finishing touch. By projecting a slanted color block from the door's opening, it gives the logo movement and a deeper meaning.

The semiotics of the pink color block show that there is a bright future for students who use Design Door. The light is shining out of the threshold in a forward direction. It implies that the world of graphic design is right on the other side, and all students have to do is take the first step.

TYPE CHOICE:

Because the type used in the logo is tall and thin, a similar typeface needs to be chosen for the headings within all printed and web materials.

POLARIS CONDENSED

has been chosen as the header typeface and

Quadraat Sans

has been chosen for the body copy.

Both are very modern sans serif typefaces that not only pair well together, but also with the logo. The proportions and consistent line widths are all within a similar ratio, therefore leading to a cohesive set of visuals. It is also important to choose these typefaces because most existing materials that were collected during the research phases were strictly designed using this style.

COLOR PALETTE:

Design Door needs to fit within the discourse community. Based on the materials gathered, there are four main colors currently being used to speak to creative high schoolers:

- Blue
- Magenta/Purple
- Red
- Yellow

Deep pink was chosen for Design Door because it is vibrant and warm like a red tone, but more fun and youthful. It is also very easy to see and read, while still standing out against black or white (the color of the type and paper.)

ILLUSTRATION:

Though many other materials gathered did not use much illustration, Design Door is more light-hearted and much more of an explanatory campaign than other materials researched.

The visual language needs to engage high schoolers and get them excited to learn more about graphic design. By hand lettering key points about design and also illustrating a fluid pattern, Design Door is very fun while still being informative. I want to make something that students will go home and hang on their wall.

ILLUSTRATION
PRINT
COLL-
ABORATE

ROLL OUT

Design Door now has a clear visual direction so the next consideration is medium. Because both students and counselors need easy access to this campaign, it has taken the form of a brochure...

...with a twist.

Brochures are consistently used by counselors within most public high schools so it makes sense that Design Door should also exist in this form. The challenge, however, is making something that is interesting enough for students to keep.

The printed brochures will also double as a poster when fully opened. This way, students are motivated to keep or even hang the poster and therefore also retain all important information on the brochure for future reference (Fig. 4)

FIG. 4

BROCHURE CONTENT

FULLY OPENED POSTER

The posters/brochures are only a first step towards Design Door. After reading about graphic design, students are then prompted to follow Design Door on Instagram for updates about the design industry (Fig. 5). This will be an account curated and run by myself in the beginning stages of Design Door and posts will include things such as:

- Bios on current graphic designers
- Events students can attend
- Facts about the design industry
- History of graphic design
- Local design studios or agencies

Eventually, Design Door will expand into a website that houses all the information that is posted on the social media channels as well as a print publication that is distributed to participating high schools. Future expansions of Design Door will also include school visits and events for creative high schoolers that support learning about graphic design before entering college.

FIG. 5

TENSIONS

Design Door, in the early stages, will rely on the use of social media. This is because social media is a self-sustaining method of information dissemination. However, relying on social media poses a complication. Because Instagram is a mobile app and not meant for desktop use, this may exclude students who do not have access to a smart phone. Eventually, Design Door will also include a website and a monthly print publication that can be accessed while students are at school. This will help reach those students that do not have the ease and connectivity of using technology at home or on their own.

Other tensions include the monetary obstacles of printing hundreds of brochures, publications and fees associated with maintaining a website. This will be funded by grants and therefore more research will have to be conducted to successfully budget and plan this next step.

BENEFITS

The benefits of Design Door greatly outweigh the tensions because it will be sustained by the graphic design industry itself. The power of social media and student participation will perpetuate Design Door even as the climate of design, or public high schools for that matter, change over time. This is the key to helping creative students and guidance counselors in public high schools learn more about graphic design.

Design Door is also something that has been absent in public high schools without there being an awareness of the need for a campaign like this. This means that it is truly filling a void in the counseling system itself. Design Door is a program that will begin a new avenue of connectivity and learning for creative students still in high school.

CONCLUSION

Design Door will be an entirely new resource for creative high schoolers and guidance counselors. It will open a whole world of learning and encouragement for future graphic designers.

This campaign is tremendously sustainable because of the endless opportunities for expansion and growth within the marketplace. With Design Door as a resource for students and counselors, there may finally be a way to help effectively prepare creative students for a degree or career path that they will truly love well before their first class in college.

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Special thanks to Meredith James. Your guidance has helped in the creation of Design Door – a piece of work that I am very proud of. I am honored that you have taken the time to advise me through this project.