So what are you going to do with that?
Demistifying a Major in Visual Communication

An Honors Thesis (HONRS 499)
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Abstract

Although graphic designers play a major role in shaping the world around us, many people are not even aware of this profession. Identifying one’s college major as visual communication or graphic design often leads to even more questions, and it is difficult to provide a concise yet inclusive answer. Graphic designers combine visual elements to communicate a message. They could work for design agencies or major corporations, or they could be self-employed. Some of the disciplines of graphic design include corporate identity, magazines, advertisements, websites, and brochures. A major in visual communication is a foundation for a career in these areas as well as many others.

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Artist's Statement

As my senior honors creative project, I wanted to assemble a book of design projects that I have produced as a student at Ball State. However, I wanted my project to serve a purpose other than simply showing off my work. I decided to present my projects in a way that would help explain the major of visual communication and the career possibilities for someone with that major. Since I was working with only work that I had done, I was somewhat limited on the areas of graphic design that I could show and discuss. The five categories I selected were identity design, packaging design, editorial design, advertising design, web design, and brochure design. I chose these five because I had enough projects in each category to adequately explain them.

Once I had selected the projects to include in the book, the next step was to decide on the format. I chose to make the pages square instead of rectangles so that I could easily use long photos with captions under them or tall photos with captions next to them, as well as square photos that fill the entire page. I chose to make the pages eight inches wide because I wanted the book to be small enough to hold and easily flip through, yet large enough to fit in all of the text that I wanted on each page and to show the details of my projects.
The backgrounds of the pages that do not have full-page photos all have solid color backgrounds. Each section has a different color to signal the change in gears to the reader. All of the colors are somewhat subdued since I use bright colors in much of my work and did not want to distract from them. For the spreads introducing each section, I also used sketches in the backgrounds. These are scans of pages from my sketchbooks that I made slightly transparent. I wanted to provide more insight into my creative process and show that, although graphic designers often produce their final product with the aid of a computer, they still may use a pencil and paper for the initial planning stages. I also used two screen prints as illustrations. I have had two serigraphy classes while at Ball State, and I wanted to show some of the fine art that I have done.

I used Adobe Photoshop and Adobe InDesign to assemble the book. I cropped and resized the images of my work and my sketches using Photoshop. I produced the type, background colors, and cover image using InDesign. Although I have been using Photoshop since my first semester of college, I am not quite as familiar with InDesign. My skills with the program have improved by producing my senior project, which was one of my initial goals.

I designed the layout of the book in its entirety before writing any of the copy. This is of course somewhat backwards from the normal process, but I found it easier for me since I was doing both jobs. I wanted the book
to be a design piece in itself, so the layout was the most important aspect. This somewhat limited how much I was able to write, but I did not have any problems fitting the text into the space that I had left for it. Much of the copy came from my personal knowledge and reflections, but in order to paint as accurate of a picture of the world of design as possible, I also consulted other sources that were written by experts in the field.

Printing and binding the book proved to be a good learning experience in dealing with printers. My original plan was to cut and saddle stitch it myself, but I decided it would look better with coil binding. The first place I took the file to be printed had a problem with the printer that caused it to streak magenta ink on every page. The second place had no trouble printing it, but they were not able to cut or bind it at the time. Finally, after going to a third location, I was able to have my project completely finished.

When I look through my senior project, I realize how far my skills have come and how much more they still need to improve. When others look at it, I want them to see what is involved in receiving a degree in visual communication, as well as what someone with a degree can do with it.