

CONFERENCE REVIEW

AIGA New Ventures: intersections in design education

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The current landscape of design education is filled with new ventures for both students and educators. These new ventures are sparked by design's intersections with technology, collaboration, and communities. The AIGA Design Educator's Conference, *New Ventures*, immersed attendees into presentations and discussions related to these intersections, 'propelling design educators and students to re-think how, where, and what types of experiences best serve a design education in the 21st century'. (1)

New Ventures took place in Portland, Oregon at the Sentinel Hotel on September 11–13 and drew in participants from inside and outside of the US. Several themes were presented across 20 different panel discussions related to collaboration, critical thinking, and social design. The thread that tied all the discussions together is the need to prepare students for a lifetime career as an empathetic designer – one that is able to engage and work with people at various levels of the design process. The presentations and discussion offered multiple ways to prepare students for such a career – through educational collaborations, social design experiences, and 'real world' activities.

Educational collaborations

Several of the panel sessions focused on sharing examples and ways to implement 'educational collaborations' – from interdisciplinary to cross-disciplinary, within programs, coursework, or projects. Presentations covered rationale for collaboration as well as ways to go about creating these types of experiences for graphic design students. Two distinctly different ways of collaboration were revealed throughout the various panel sessions. One approach is to facilitate collaborative projects where graphic design students work with peers, those in other disciplines, or campus organizations. Another is to provide an educational collaborative experience for design students.

Barbara Martinson, of University of Minnesota, shared her project outcomes from a collaborative project between her graphic design students and nursing students from within the same university. Additionally, she shared a project in which graphic design students worked with computer science students in a color course as a means to test out how their varying approaches work together.

For a different example, Kelly Murdoch-Kitt of RIT and Denielle Emans of Virginia Commonwealth University of Qatar, have been testing out the numerous ways in which their design students can work collaboratively across cultures. In a poster remix project students from RIT and VCU worked together on a unifying topic, the learning outcomes from students offer the global collaboration. In this experience students learn to build trust and a sense of community that isn't reliant on proximity and location to each other.

Some panel sessions highlighted other ways to provide an educational collaborative experience for design students. These ways involve situating students from various disciplines into common courses by creating a new curriculum offering. In the panel session mentioned previously, 'Intersections in Interdisciplinary', Jessica Jacobs of Columbia College of Chicago is working to create a Business of Design degree that would provide a curriculum of business courses and design courses for undergraduates, creating a graduate that is a 'designer with business skills'.

Social design experiences

No AIGA Design Educators Conference would be complete without the topic of Social Design. Facets of social design were sprinkled throughout most of the presentations. 'Design for the greater good' is a common theme amongst most graphic design programs. These experiences are often highly collaborative but all vary in location and level of immersion into the community or place in which they intervene. If there was a spectrum for 'design for social good' that is structured on the level of engagement, one end of the spectrum would have 'designing *for* the community' and the other would have 'designing *with* the community'.

In the 'Intersections in Communities' panel, Brian Wiley and Eric Benson shared their student work from the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. Graphic design students participated collaboratively with each other in the planning and production for a campaign focused on creating awareness for a local garden community.

Natacha Poggio, from the University of Hartford, presented work from the creative think-tank, 'Design Global Change' – an experience where students do design work with global communities. Ryan Clifford formerly from MICA's Design Center for Practice, presented 'Thinking Wrong' through the popular program for students, Project M. In this program, a group of students frequent Greensboro, AL every summer to create community-immersive experiences.

'Real world' activities

Design education's connection to professional practice, the industry, aka the 'real world' was another common topic at the conference. The phrase 'real world projects' was used as a reference for opportunities that offered students a chance to build their skills as a practicing designer. The nature of these projects relied heavily on client-like interactions that have a small monetary value for the design services of the students. The use of this phrase by academics is highly problematic as it implies that the 'real' design projects can only take place in a monetary, client-based scenario. Natalie Davis, educator and founder of Canoe Goods in Austin, TX, offered a different perspective of what should be considered a 'real world project'. In her classes and workshops, Natalie empowers her students to extend their craft and design skills in ways that open up possibilities for them to create their own brand

and businesses. Amy Fidler and Jenn Stucker, of Bowling Green State University, shared a truly thoughtful and authentic experience they have created for themselves, their families, and their students. Since 2007, Jenn and Amy have opened up their homes (and schedules) every summer to students, engaging them in a different learning experience outside of the academic structure. They work together to identify ways in which design can change established patterns and empower the students to be active in defining the areas of this research. Both of these examples offer up a different model for practicing design other than through client-driven or money-driven projects – these are the 'real world projects'.

Conclusion

In conclusion, *The New Ventures* conference provided several presentations related to familiar topics that continue to be discussed at design education conferences. What this conference brought forward was the notion that the topics are at various intersecting points as proven throughout the disparate but related presentations. Design education is moving forward in multiple directions and when those directions converge, the possibilities are endless. Conversations in the near the future will perhaps discuss the impact of these intersections and new ventures on the education and practice of graphic design.

Notes

1. <http://newventures.aiga.org/> (accessed: 11th May 2014).
2. <http://educators.aiga.org/about-2/> (accessed: 11th May 2014).

Notes on contributor

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