Department of Design: Assessment and Improvement of BA, 2015

Department: Design

Assessment Coordinator: Dr. Elsi Vassdal Ellis

Departmental Mission: In support of the mission of Western Washington University and the College of Fine and Performing Arts, the Design Program utilizes a curriculum that emphasizes the process of problem solving to direct students to make connections between culture and design and their role as responsible visual communicators. Students learn to combine personal expression and critical thinking as they create solutions that connect industry, individuals, and institutions to specific audiences and themselves to the world. Students develop adaptive learning strategies to sustain successful communication careers in a constantly changing world.

Departmental Student Learning Outcomes: Upon graduation, Design, BA majors will be able to:
1. Demonstrate functional competence with principles of visual organization, visual language and theory as applied to visual communication problems.
2. Understand and apply creative and abstract thinking skills to visual communication problems.
3. Produce creative, professional-quality work within project guidelines.
4. Understand, embrace and use current tools, software and technology as a vehicle of effective communication (conceive, design, produce, and create visual forms to successfully communicate ideas, opinions, concepts).
5. Demonstrate facility in visual communication practice, including written and verbal communication skills.

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<th>Assessment Measures</th>
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<td>1 BFA 2015-2016 application portfolio review (conducted winter 2015)</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4</td>
<td>The primary emphasis for the 2014-2015 Design Assessment was on the BFA degree option. This year’s assessment therefore begins with a review of the quality of the first two-thirds of the BA upper division core that contributes the primary evidence for advancement to the BFA degree option. This review takes place annually at the end of winter quarter. The portfolios consist of work from Design 330 and 351 (fall classes) and work completed and in progress from Design 340 and 360 (winter quarter). The typographic projects demonstrated continued improvement in overall quality of finished projects. The physical portfolios were also more professional looking over the previous year. This can be attributed in part to the information meeting organized by the of BFA candidate cohort. The students shared with the BA students the experiences and observations regarding the BFA degree option as well as their portfolios in progress. It is in part a recruitment presentation.</td>
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### GPA Analysis

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#### 2 Professional interviews/portfolio reviews of seniors

Debriefs with Aquent and Filter interviewers were conducted on June 8 and June 9, 2015. Overall, student portfolios were reported to be stronger than the previous year with corresponding improvement in project presentation skills. Aquent saw increase in the level of contract work readiness. Our students have the highest percentage of readiness compared to our academic competition within the I-5 corridor. Aquent noted that more than 50% of our seniors do not require any additional preparation before sending them out for their first design contract. There has also been an increase in the requests from hiring managers of various firms for graduates of our program.

Aquent and Filter expressed a desire to come earlier in the quarter – before the seniors begin looking for work on their own since several of their top picks for their own firms had found employment prior to graduation. The challenge is to find an effective time to schedule such interviews. Also, the students have not completed their PDF and online portfolios until the end of the quarter. There will not be as much work in the portfolios to be reviewed.

#### 3 GPA Analysis

Design majors are expected to maintain a minimum cumulative GPA of 2.5; student GPAs are monitored each quarter by the chair using the Student Success Collaborative system. If a student’s GPA does not meet the baseline criteria, a review of course success by quarter is made.

Students with GPA concerns were invited to meet with the chair to determine the nature of the academic problems as well as develop plans to improve academic performance. Students making steady progress in improving their GPA were also invited to meet with the chair to celebrate their success.

There appears to be an increasing trend in students dropping out of Western creating enrollment...
management issues in a major with a maximum number of 54 new seats each year. Enrollment has not been 100% in the BA upper division core due to strict adherence to the seat limit during the admissions review. The review committee now identifies candidates for admission beyond the 54, placing them on a waitlist for accelerated admission into the major.

| 4  | External review of student work | 1, 2, 3, 4 | Lacy Kuhn's *The Grasshopper Café* identify package was selected for inclusion the *Creative Quarterly 100 Best Annual 2014* (published in 2015) in the “Special Edition Book Graphic Identity & Brand Extension). |
| 5  | External Advisory Board |  | The BFA degree option was the focus of the 2015 Advisory Board meeting. See the BFA Assessment section. |
| 6  | Senior portfolio exhibit & online portfolio | 1, 2, 3, 4, 5 | The BA and BFA students presented work in the annual spring show at Western. The lack of a project-based capstone course for the BA made preparing students for this annual exhibit a logistical challenge. To resolve this the professional practices course (Design 485) was shifted from winter to spring quarter. Participation in the exhibit became part of the course requirements. Student teams were formed to create the identity for the exhibit, handle publicity, nominate and select the speaker for the noon speaker series. The show went up more quickly, demonstrated a strong identity, was better organized, and the portfolios (both digital and analog) were stronger.

The senior exhibit speaker, Aaron Draplin, not only shared his design experiences with the students and guests as part of the noon presentation. He also conducted a design workshop on logo design for all the seniors in the late afternoon. |

**Program Changes Based on Assessment Data**

1. There continues to be a concern on the part of the faculty about the lack of additional courses in the curriculum to address the hand skill issue. The binding experience in Design 351 continues to improve the hand skills of the students as needed in Design 330, 340 and 341 but there continues to be the need for more such experiences as it relates to Design 341 – 3D design. The physical portfolios prepared for the BFA application were significantly more professional in winter 2015 over winter 2014 in their overall presentation and construction due to the inclusion of the binding experience in Design 351.

The creation of a new rubric for the BFA portfolio review reduced the time required selecting the twelve candidates for advancement into the BFA degree option.
2. The faculty acknowledged that without a return to four sections each of the Foundation courses (Design 220 240, 250, 260), achieving 100% enrollment in each of the BA upper division core courses is next to impossible. Increasing class sizes is not an option given the pedagogical approach to all courses within the curriculum. The courses operate in a similar fashion as a WP 3 course does: presentation of the first draft, feedback on the first draft, presentation of the second draft, feedback on the second draft, presentation of the third draft that is then submitted for the final evaluation. The first project critique involves the entire class in one three hour session with students and faculty participating in the critique. The second critique involves a smaller set of students with the faculty member. The final critique involves all students. Class sizes of 18 are function well in this model if the critique is managed well. It is difficult to get through all students if enrollment exceeds 18. This resource issue will continue to be addressed within the college.

3. Assessment goal for 2015-2016: The goal was to compare project visualization skills as represented in project process books of students who took Design 220 in its new form from Kent Smith (spring 2016) with those who took the course as taught by the adjunct (fall 2015 x 2; spring 2014 x 1). This assessment goal was not met in 2014-2015. It will be undertaking in 2016.
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6. **Identify, analyze, interpret, translate and manage complex communication problems into effective visual communication solutions.**

7. **Demonstrate integration of print, web, interactive media in complex visual communication solutions.**

8. **Work collaboratively and manage design projects to effective completion.**

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<td>1  BFA Portfolio Exhibits</td>
<td>6, 7, 8</td>
<td>The BFA seniors presented their work in two exhibits: 1327 Events (June 6) and Western (June 12). Work presented was a combination of individual and collaborative design solutions. Overall the portfolios achieved the objectives of the BFA degree option in terms of professionalism and development of collaborative skills. The portfolios this year demonstrated a better balance of individual and team projects as well as the articulation by the students of their ownership of various parts of the team projects.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>BFA spring review</td>
<td>6, 7, 8</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Presentations as part of Design Days and classes</td>
<td>5</td>
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<td>4</td>
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Because of the strength of a BFA graduate working at Facebook, the West Coast recruiter for the firm met with the professional practices faculty to discuss the opportunity to interview our students prior to Aquent, Filter, etc.

Three BFA candidates were recognized spring quarter by Adobe in their Design Awards: Zach Becker placed first in the Digital Publication category for his project *Isolation*; Amelia Barlow was a semifinalist in the web & app design category for *Pantone Capture*; Sean Williams was a semifinalist in illustration with his *Asteroids* USB Album with Jukebox; and Zack Becker was a semifinalist in web and app design for *WWF Reality* and in photography with his light painting experiments.

| 4 | External review of student work | 1-8 |
| 5 | Professional interviews/portfolio reviews of seniors | 1-8 |

1. **Two BFA Senior Exhibits:** The 1327 Events exhibit provided a capstone production experience for the students in the preparation of print materials for the exhibit (signage, postcards, posters, resumes, business cards). Two-color letterpress invitations were printed in the Print and Finishing Lab for distribution to design firms in Bellingham, Everett, the greater Seattle/Bellevue area, and Portland. The exhibit was well attended by Seattle design professionals, including many alumni. Because of the costs of leasing the space and certain expectations, the next BFA cohort will be expected to find a different venue for their Seattle show. The 2015 on-campus senior exhibit was held again in the first and second floor lobbies of AIW. The BA students were charged with developing the identity for the show that would again take advantage of the architectural features of the space to exhibit work as well as create two exhibition spaces to reflect the differences between the BA and BFA degrees. The show was very well attended by parents, students and professionals.

2. **Review of 2014-2015:** In the BFA planning meeting for 2015-2016, faculty identified what worked and didn’t work well in the seminars (Design 480) and workshops (Design 481). Overall, the balance between collaborative and individual work for their final portfolios had improved. Students better articulated their specific responsibilities on the team projects (take credit where credit is due). Cynthia Hall, then president of the Seattle SEGD chapter, served as a critic/consultant in the fall quarter seminar, and worked with the instructor and students on the PAVE project in environmental/experiential design. The reduction of the service learning component in the winter quarter seminar led to stronger portfolio projects for all the students. Working with real clients provides the opportunity to develop conversational and negotiation skills. Some projects, however, do not have the conceptual challenge to meet competitive portfolio requirements. The faculty also identified the need for more research experience related to the development of design solutions and so 50% of the winter quarter seminar focused on developing design research skills related to user experience design as well as the writing of clear design briefs. The remainder of the quarter required students to identify design problems, develop a design brief related to the problem, and then exchange with their peers their briefs to solve someone else’s problem. These were quick turnaround projects. The Advisory Board members strongly encouraged continuation of this approach to developing multiple skill sets. The goal to link the fall and winter quarter Design 480 sections did not transpire for a range of reasons, some dealing with faculty assignments and professional leaves as well as opportunities that came up that required changes to quarterly approaches.
3. **Plans for 2015-2016 BFA schedule:** The goal continues to link fall and winter Design 480 sections with the fall section beginning with hypothetical clients that would be tied to the winter workshop with a client and/or incubator type of project. Environmental graphic design will again be the primary emphasis of the fall seminar with possible collaboration with ID students. The winter quarter Design 480 seminar will repeat the design research/design brief exchange approach; the spring quarter will continue to focus on portfolio clean-up, expansion, and preparation for graduation.

The BFA workshops were moved to winter and spring quarters to reduce the workload of the BFA candidates during fall quarter as well as balance out credit loads, making it easier to register for 12 credits to meet financial aid requirements.

4. **Changes to curriculum (both BA and BFA):**

**Professional practices:**

Two curriculum changes relating to the capstone experiences of the BFA and BA were submitted to the college and university curricular bodies for implementation in 2015-2016. Design 485: Professional Practices, has been a repeatable course taken once by BA students and twice by BFA students. The fall section is reserved for the BFA students to wrap up the internship experiences. The winter offering of Design 485 is for all BA seniors prior to admission to the BFA degree option. It is a capstone experience leading to the production of resumes, business cards, physical and online portfolios, informational interviews, and mock interviews.

In keeping with the reassignment of all BFA courses to the 400-level, Design 485 will be designated as the BFA professional course only and not a repeatable. The primary objectives of this capstone course are to share and critique the internship experiences that will then form the content of the annual publication *Intern Stories*. The publication is printed off campus as a perfect bound edition for distribution to the interns, internship sponsors, Design faculty, prospective intern sponsors, deans, etc.

The BA professional practices course will be listed as Design 385 in the 2015-2016 academic schedule.

In the 2014-2015 academic schedule, the BA version of Design 485 was shifted from winter to spring quarter 2015. It was also offered for the first time as a WP3 course. The shift to spring quarter facilitated the planning and preparation for the Senior Show and reduced student stress in trying to squeeze in a WP3 graduation requirement, usually fulfilled through English 302. No course changes were necessary since the original writing assignments met the requirements for WP3 status.

The faculty reviewed the BA senior portfolios during the show. The spring 2015 portfolios were stronger than those in 2014.