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Voices of Hope: Designing Social Change

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Abstract from my proposal

If awarded this fellowship, I will devote my time to employ graphic design toward creating positive social change for youth living in the underprivileged neighborhoods of Providence, Rhode Island. The change my project will embody addresses a paradigm shift taking place in the graphic design community as the focus moves from design as a practice that fuels a market to the awareness that graphic design is a social practice and that it can be vehicle for powerful and sustainable social change. This effort will inform my teaching, resulting in a model for art and design education addressing social change, establish BSU in the region as a change agent for defining civically engaged design. This project embraces a culture of heightened social awareness and practical application of visual means to address real world problems.

I will work within a regionally established network of after-school arts programs organized under a body called the Providence Youth Arts Collaborative (PYAC). This network of organizations is regarded as one of the top programs in the United States for their efforts in offering quality after-school arts education to urban youth. I have been active as a graphic designer in this network since 2003. My project would entail working with a team of youth from this network to investigate how graphic design can act as a tool of intervention directing youth away from negative life choices toward positive ones, such as the numerous after-school programs offered through the PYAC. I will investigate how graphic design can intervene at points in life where youth are confronted with important choices through mapping various social systems in the Providence community (education, social/peer groups, cultural, recreational, etc.) and identifying opportunities for intervention and persuasion. The results will yield a method and approach to graphic design as a civically engaged practice encapsulated in a process book or video and a visual outreach campaign that accomplishes the above mentioned interventions.

Overview

My primary interest to do this work was because I believe the discipline of graphic design has lot more to offer to the greater good. Graphic design is typically practiced as a service to corporate and market needs, however history has proven to us that the power to put words down on a page and disseminate them can have profound influence on social change. It is likely that the Protestant reformation could not have taken hold so rapidly in Europe if Marin Luther's theses were not printed and disseminated throughout Germany. Today we are so saturated with information that it takes a lot to get people to pay attention. My project was a visual and theoretical inquiry into the possibilities of graphic design to instigate change. This inquiry sent me into unfamiliar terrain that I traveled over the course of the year through making, reading, writing, discussing, observing, and presenting. I attended monthly meetings with PYAC, read

countless books and essays on this topic, attended conferences, and continually returned to my question with new eyes each time. As I worked through the year I kept my focus on what I had proposed for PYAC, but I always had in the back of my mind how what I was doing could be folded back into my teaching. The true measure of the success of this work will not only be in how it serves my inquiry question, but how I can influence students and other teachers and designers to take the ideas that emerged in my project and bring them into their work. In this way we enter into a paradigm shift where we can enrich the abilities of young designers and the potential of design and give to the practice new ideas to make the world a better place—by design. It is these small steps that make the difference.

The work I did in under the Presidential Fellowship has already begun to blossom and receive recognition outside of the parameters of the project. At the very end of this work I presented a paper that I wrote on this project at an education conference in Florence. After my presentation I was approached by another presenter and was asked if I work with her as the designer for a project focused on arts and social change. Our conversations since then have resulted in my becoming an Associate Partner to work with her on two projects supported by the European Commission. One is in service to the Yuhudi Menunin Foundation in Belgium on a project called MUS-E, which is concerned with using arts and music as medium to facilitate social inclusion of ROMA (Gypsy) children into Western culture. Another is in support of the Carlo Collodi National Foundation in Italy. This fall semester we will be defining our relationship and applying for support from the European Commission to sustain my service to these organizations. I vividly recall the joy on Cinzia's (my colleague for this project) face when she told me that she was so happy to find a designer that shares the same ideologies and questions. To be invited to do this work is one of the most rewarding parts of this project because it made me realize that my work is valued beyond the PYAC.

The remainder of this report is divided into a description of my process, some visual outcomes, and praise.

My process

May and summer

The first step was taken back in May when I attended a meeting by the Providence Youth Arts Collaborative (PYAC). They welcomed me with much enthusiasm and several expressed how important my project is to help strengthen their collective efforts in offering after-school arts education to Providence youth. I learned a lot about what the leadership of such non-profits think about and need. As a result of that meeting, I made many contacts in the PYAC and agreed to attend all of the monthly PYAC meetings for the upcoming season.

On two separate occasions over the summer I visited New Urban Arts (NUA) (<http://www.newurbanarts.org/>). My first meeting with NUA was with their executive director Jason Yoon. He and I worked on developing some ideas on how I can realize my project and he also set up another meeting for me to recruit some of his students.

Aside from my groundwork with PYAC I spent the summer reading and writing. I read numerous books that deal with design for change and sustainable design. I read and wrote. I wondered about the unknowns, seeking for some model to follow. None were found. This problem suddenly became an opportunity. I was not working within a norm. This work was indeed “innovation”.

I also recruited my two design assistants Amanda Alvarez from Classical High School in Providence and Andrew Linde, a BSU student, now alumnus.

Fall

Throughout the fall I attended monthly PYAC meetings where we had long discussions about the progress of my inquiry question and their design needs. I also met weekly with my design assistants. New Urban Arts was kind enough to offer us studio space for our meetings. During our meetings we discussed sketches we had been working on over the week, read articles, and developed an inquiry question. Between meetings we communicated and shared sketches via email. Our inquiry question was the most critical part of the whole project. The question we used to drive our process was; *How can graphic design improve the credibility and visibility of the Providence Youth Arts Collaborative so that they can increase their offerings to youth and encourage youth to enroll in an after-school arts program?*

This question kept us focused as we developed a design strategy and a body of visuals in search of answers. In our readings we found theoretical support in a body of research known as “Diffusion Research”. This research studies how changes take hold in social systems over time. We found this area of study to be one of the only areas that offered a time-based perspective on how to unfold an idea into a social system and what kind of realistic change expectations we should have (that is noted later in the work descriptions).

Over the fall semester my design team and I wrestled this design challenge down to the ground.

As this project was a totally new direction for me I found it necessary to find a community that was also dealing with similar questions. In October, I attended an “Imagining America” conference at NYU. It was two days filled with presentations on themes of social change and civically engaged scholarship. This event gave me a better contextual understanding on the area I was moving my work into. It also gave me a wealth of ideas for developing this work in a classroom when I return to teaching.

Another pivotal event that I participated in was a daylong workshop on presenting information with Edward Tufte. Edward Tufte is a renowned figure in the world of information design. Perhaps his most famous work is his critique on PowerPoint (<http://www.edwardtufte.com/tufte/powerpoint>). After his workshop I was inspired to design a city map for the youth, parents, and guidance offices that locates all of the PYAC free programs. The map’s information became a form of empowerment.

In November, I attended a website planning charrette with New Urban Arts who invited two experts on social media and education. I was interested to learn how social media can be a valuable component to the outreach campaign and visual identity that I was creating for the PYAC. This informed the web design.

Fall – extras

One of the PYAC member organizations (AS220) was given an award by the city of Providence and by Michelle Obama in November. I made a poster for the PYAC logo, which was presented at the Providence celebration for this honor. It was the logo's premiere debut and the mayor was in attendance.

Winter and spring

The winter and start of the spring was production time. I worked with the printer to oversee the printing of the map, I worked with Amanda to help her get materials to screen print tote bags, and I worked with a computer programmer to code and launch the website. Together with PYAC I compiled all of the content needed for the website, which involved me writing a lot of it. I also finished a video montage, which is hosted on the website here:

<http://pyac-ri.org/get-involved/become-student/>

To explain the body of work and the design strategy I am including an excerpt from the essay I wrote for the Future of Education conference.

The visual outputs

I surveyed the PYAC members at the beginning of the design process to learn what they thought was an appropriate visual tone for the work. The keywords derived from those surveys included; urban, loose, serious, playful, not centralized, and transparent. These words along with the Diffusion of Innovations model drove the mood and method of the design outputs described below.

The primary element of the visual identity is the visual language and logo. The logo I designed represents the six members of PYAC through the use of six dots, which are connected by gradient-filled lines forming a network that expands into space to create a metaphor for idea exchange. The star suggests that their unity is greater than their individuality.



Fig. 2, visual outputs, visit the website at: www.pyac-ri.org

Together with my design team we created an icon family to represent the PYAC's offerings. The icons communicate on a purely visual level and are core elements to the visual identity. The website was an intensive editing process to choose images that appeal to all stakeholders (youth, members, nonprofits, and funding agencies). It provides information about PYAC offerings and research for potential students. To utilize peer-to-peer influence and guide people to the website, we decided tote bags would be effective as they can be a reusable and wearable object by innovators and early adopters. To pull people in, the tote bags carry

a question: "What Can You Do?" which is surrounded by the words; music and theatre, film, visual arts, and dance.

Informal interviews with about thirty youth at New Urban Arts, led my design team to conclude that social media is a prevalent means through which youth receive information. Considering this, I made a video montage that tells a diverse visual story of all of the PYAC offerings and others successfully engaging in an artistic activity. This resides on the website and on a social media outlet for peer-to-peer sharing and viral influence.

We designed a map that charts the PYAC member locations in the city and describes their offerings. It doubles as a poster and a hand-out. It was sent to guidance councilors and PYAC members with the intention to utilize both peer-to-peer and opinion leader influence. It was printed on paper made of 100% post consumer content and with low toxicity inks. This map of opportunities is a form of empowerment as it has informed youth of opportunities. It has received much praise from PYAC and the Providence public school system. At the time of this publication, surveys have been sent out to those who received the map to learn if it increased enrollment. This requires more time to be measured. Based on meta-analyses of similar campaigns the intended affect of this project on the Providence public school youth community is expected to be 5% or less [6].

[6] Snyder, Leslie B. "Health Communication Campaigns and Their Impact on Behavior". *Journal of Nutrition Education and Behavior* 39.2 (2007): s32-S40

Over the spring semester I continued to attend PYAC meetings. I also attended one their best practices half-day conferences. All of the members are concerned with the same question, which is how to use arts as a tool for youth empowerment. The ideas they shared were informative to both the project and my future teaching.

I called all the guidance offices of all of the Providence high schools and middle schools and asked if they would be interested to receive my maps. I then sent out about 1000 maps to the willing schools.

I attended a conference at Yale University titled "Unite For Sight", which is the world's largest global health and social entrepreneurship conference. My intention to go to this conference was to again be a part of a community of people striving for innovation and social change. Here I was able to attend a workshop run by the pioneering design firm IDEO and several other presentations by designers with a long record in designing for change. It was helpful to see how others presented their work and the value of what they do. I walked away with a much better sense on how to present this kind of work and how to take it to another level.

Sharing the ideas in this project is important. Through dissemination my mission is extended beyond the limits of this project. To that end I spent a portion of the spring semester articulating what I had done and what this work was intended to do. I designed a process book that records this project. I thought it was important to share this work with the design community and to have a permanent record of it. I have sent the book out to forty design professionals and gave two copies to the BSU library. I also wrote an essay titled *Designing Social Change: Inquiry-Based Teaching in Graphic Design*. This essay was published by *Libreriauniversitaria.it*, was presented at the Future of Education Conference in Florence and at the May CARS celebration at BSU.

Conclusion

The practice of design is rapidly changing and this work adds an important voice to the conversation on its future. I have transformed the way I work as a designer. I have renewed the way I view design education and unearthed tangible ways to teach what I have learned. One Providence high school student and one former BSU student have shared this experience with me and have portfolio work that demonstrates it. After this experience, I feel I have the experience and credibility to continue working toward the greater good and I intend to make this the focus of my practice and a more integral part of my teaching. Below is the conclusion from my essay, which explains the pedagogic value of this work.

This project adds to the ongoing conversation on the social value of art and design with hopes that sharing my process will further enhance this project's mission. It offers an alternative thread to weave into the fabric of art and design education.

Expanding the definition of the design process to include upstream and community engagement is a needed alternative in the practice and could be an integral component of high school and undergraduate visual education. This alternative method coupled with grant writing skills would provide students with tools to start self-initiated projects and lead to new models of community-based design practices.

Design is a social art. We use it to shape how we live and understand the world around us, and we are shaped by it in return. By teaching art and design in ways that deal curiously and critically with our world, we can empower students to change it.

This work's measurable (in terms of new students enrolled in PYAC) influence in the Providence community is too early to calculate but the website, map, visual identity, and the video montage will continue to serve PYAC's collective mission and to increase the general public's awareness of what they offer. If this effort changed the direction of the life of one high school student who may have been on the wrong track, or influenced one student or teacher to do a similar project, then I will feel this work has made "change". I know that I have forever changed the way I will view my work and my teaching and I am certain what has happened to me will resonate in my students and peers. For that I am deeply thankful to BSU for the chance to carry out this work. Thank you.

Praise

"His questions, design work, engagement with the organizations and young people moved us to a much more publicly visible position."

-Sebastian Ruth, Community MusicWorks, 2010 MacArthur fellow

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"PYAC's visual identity will allow each of our organizations to become more visible and known in the community, allowing us opportunities to impact more people with our programs and attract more funders, which will certainly have a huge impact on the kids we serve."

-Meg Sullivan, Executive Artistic Director, The Manton Avenue Project

Dear Prof. Tarallo:

Thank you very much for sending the poster-size map to our department. It will be displayed and thank you creating this innovative project for the benefit of our children.

Sincerely,

Kai Cameron

-Kai Cameron, Facilitator for Community Partnerships at
Providence Public Schools

•

many thanks for your booklet on visual inquiry—it was a joy to go through and see you make the connections so dear to my heart :)

i hope you get to pass this around—it's a valuable statement designers and student aspirants need to read.

big hug, and thanks again,
tom

-Tom Ockerse, Professor of Graphic Design,
former Graphic Design Department Head, former Graduate Design
Program Chair, former Dean of Architecture and Design, Rhode Island School of Design

Links

http://communitymusicworks.typepad.com/online_journal/2012/06/voices-of-hope-designing-social-change.html

http://youth.as220.org/?page_id=3471

Visuals outcomes and photos of process

PYAC website: <http://www.pyac-ri.org>



Core visual identity



Preparing maps for shipment to schools



Amanda Alvarez showing of the bags she screen printed. Icons by Andrew Linde.

Dissemination of work to date (9/2013)

- 1000 maps to Providence High Schools and Middle Schools
- 500 maps to PYAC for recruitment
- PYAC website (28 visitors in the last month) and Facebook page (27 likes since spring)
- Video montage on PYAC website, but hosted through YouTube (39 hits views spring)
- 150 tote bags to PYAC mentors and students
- 40 Process books and essays to fellow design colleagues and BSU archives
- 6 process books and essays to PYAC member directors
- Delivered paper at BSU CARS May Celebration to about 30 in audience
- Delivered paper at Future of Education, Florence, Italy to about 30 in audience
- Paper from Future of Education published in conference proceedings, 228 presenters from around the world received the proceedings and it is on archive with Pixel, Florence

Future scheduled dissemination


- 10/7/2013, lecture at Framingham State for their graphic design students

Social media and analytics data

facebook


Admin Panel Edit Page Build Audience Help Hide

Notifications 1 See All **Messages** See All


 **Ana Khan likes Providence Youth Arts Collaborative**
about an hour ago



Get More Likes See Likes **Insights** **Page Tips**


Create an ad to get more people to like your Page.


 **Providence Youth Arts...**
27 like this.
Non-Profit Organization
Sponsored

Promote Page

 You need 3 more likes on your Page to get access to insights about your activity.
27 likes

 **Build Your Audience**
Try these different ways to get more people to like your Page:
 [Invite Email Contacts](#)

 Change Cover

 **Providence Youth Arts Collaborative**
27 likes · 1 talking about this

Update Page Info 1 ⋮

Facebook page that I created for PYAC has 27 likes since the spring semester.

Audience Overview

Aug 2, 2013 - Sep 1, 2013

Advanced Segments | Email | Export | Add to Dashboard | Shortcut

% of visits: 100.00%

Overview

Visits vs. Select a metric

Hourly | Day | Week | Month



16 people visited this site

Visits 28	Unique Visitors 16	Pageviews 59	Pages / Visit 2.11
Avg. Visit Duration 00:01:52	Bounce Rate 64.29%	% New Visits 50.00%	Visitor Type

Demographics

- Language
- Country / Territory
- City

Country / Territory

Country / Territory	Visits	% Visits
1. United States	26	92.86%
2. Australia	1	3.57%
3. Netherlands	1	3.57%

[view full report](#)

Location

Aug 2, 2013 - Sep 1, 2013

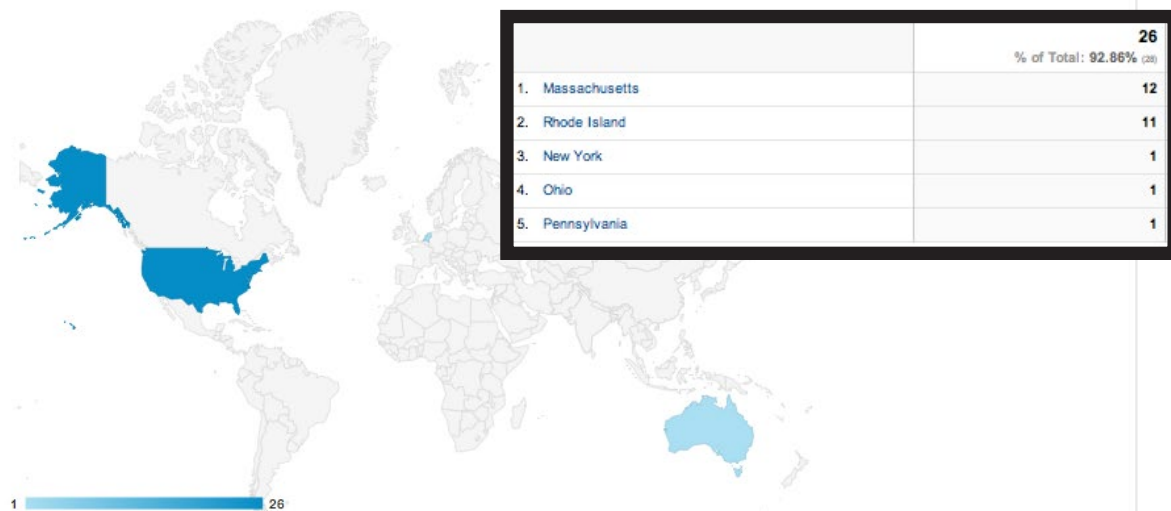
Advanced Segments | Customize | Email | Export | Add to Dashboard | Shortcut

% of visits: 100.00%

Map Overlay | Explorer

Site Usage | Ecommerce

Visits



Primary Dimension: Country / Territory | City | Continent | Sub Continent Region

Secondary dimension

Country / Territory	Visits	Pages / Visit	Avg. Visit Duration	% New Visits	Bounce Rate
	28 % of Total: 100.00% (28)	2.11 Site Avg: 2.11 (0.00%)	00:01:52 Site Avg: 00:01:52 (0.00%)	50.00% Site Avg: 50.00% (0.00%)	64.29% Site Avg: 64.29% (0.00%)
1. United States	26	2.19	00:02:01	46.15%	61.54%
2. Australia	1	1.00	00:00:00	100.00%	100.00%
3. Netherlands	1	1.00	00:00:00	100.00%	100.00%

Show rows: 10 | Go to: 1 | 1 - 3 of 3

This report was generated on 9/2/13 at 11:54:41 AM - Refresh Report

Google Analytics data shows 28 PYAC website visits from three countries (US, Australia and the Netherlands) between 8/2 and 9/1. US visits from MA, RI, NY, OH, and PE. Number for each state listed in box with bold frame.