

PURPOSE

This briefing paper is intended to promote thoughtful assessments of faculty qualifications to teach graphic design, as well as issues that relate to faculty effectiveness. It is especially useful when institutions and individuals are making assessments for the purpose of:

- Planning for the improvement of current programs;
- Examining the viability of current programs;
- Assessing the need for, the projected viability of, and the ability to support new programs;
- Planning new programs.

This paper addresses two basic issues.

First, the educational and professional accomplishments of faculty able to lead students to competence. Due to burgeoning enrollments in graphic design courses and programs and a strong economy that favors professional practice over teaching, there has been a shortage of qualified faculty. As a result, the AIGA and NASAD are concerned about the following practices. When employed by institutions, each raises questions about the appropriateness of teaching assignments in graphic design programs.

Assigning faculty who have not studied graphic design to instruct in graphic design classes.

Hiring recent MFA graduates who have little or no professional practice or teaching experience and whose masters' may be their first degree with a major in graphic design.

Staffing programs with large numbers of part-time faculty from design practice who have limited knowledge of and commitment to the graphic design curriculum as a whole.

Offering undergraduate and graduate graphic design degrees without adequate teaching resources to cover minimum instruction in all fundamental aspects of the field.

This paper suggests alternatives consistent with the great teaching traditions of graphic design, but also recognizes new conditions and challenges for students, faculty members, and institutions.

Second, faculty evaluation and retention. Peer assessment of the teaching, research, and professional development of faculty determine who is retained and who is not. Graphic design faculty too often find their work misunderstood or skewed by faculty and administrators who do not understand the graphic design discipline, but who sit in judgment of their work in terms of promotion and tenure. While elements of fine arts, science, humanities, and social science models may be applicable, no one model is adequate or appropriate for design faculty. This paper elaborates on appropriate forms of research and professional development in design. It describes practices that shape the teaching workforce in strong schools. It calls for faculty evaluation based on the nature of design itself.

PREPARATION FOR FACULTY TEACHING GRAPHIC DESIGN

Generally speaking, faculty assigned to teach graphic design must hold degrees with majors in graphic or visual communication design. Although there are notable exceptions, most professionals in the field now are formally educated, trained, and credentialed. The terminal degree in the field is the *Master of Fine Arts* or a title representing an equivalent 60-semester-hour degree program in graphic design. Titles of the specialization include *graphic design*, *visual design*, *visual communications*, *communication design*, *communication arts*, or *commercial art*. The term *illustration* does not refer to the same set of competencies as the other titles and should not be viewed as interchangeable in defining qualifications. The term *graphic arts* may refer to technical support areas such as printing or electronic pre-press and not to comprehensive problem-solving competence as detailed in the NASAD standards for majors in graphic design.

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In many institutions, shifting enrollment patterns between the fine arts and design have led administrators to assign responsibility for design instruction to fine arts faculty. Some have become qualified in graphic design, but too many have tangential relationships to design through study, practice, and teaching such design elements as photography, illustration, lettering and calligraphy, or basic two-dimensional design at the foundation level. Such qualifications alone should not be viewed as sufficient preparation for teaching graphic design comprehensively and integratively. While fine artists may hold qualifications to teach isolated concepts associated with design, generally, they are not qualified to bring students to competence with the range of issues identified in the NASAD standards as minimum criteria for professional preparation. In most cases, the overall size of the graphic design faculty should determine the appropriateness of including faculty qualified only as fine artists. In all cases, assigned course responsibilities should be consistent with areas of expertise.

The growth of technology has produced a new cadre of uncredentialed faculty who have technical virtuosity, but who lack comprehensive design knowledge. Institutions should have clearly stated policies on levels of skills and knowledge they consider to be equivalent to a terminal degree and should apply these policies uniformly in full-time and part-time hires. Specific qualifications should be developed for each faculty function to ensure that individuals are fully prepared for the specific responsibilities they are given and that students develop technical skills within the context of an overall concern for design problem-solving.

Recent graduates of MFA programs in design are attractive to schools, in part because they have the most current computer-related skills and know the latest in design theory. Economics and policies for filling vacated positions regularly favor hiring new graduates. However, many arrive for interviews without experience either in teaching or in the professional practice for which they must prepare students. Some may have completed the master's as their first design degree and, therefore, have less than two years experience with basic skills and concepts in the discipline. The stiff competition among schools for graphic design faculty guarantees that many of these recent graduates will be employed to teach. As a general practice, junior faculty who have no significant experience should be hired only when the program can provide adequate instruction in advanced professional practice issues through more experienced individuals. Such faculty should be encouraged to undertake professional projects as part of their career development plans.

In some highly developed graphic design programs, especially at the graduate level, it is possible to find non-designers employed as full- or part-time faculty. Experts in other fields such as psychology, writing, anthropology, history, business, critical theory, sociology, and computer science may be appropriate teaching resources in programs where advanced research is undertaken. In the case of doctoral study, these faculty may serve on dissertation committees and contribute to seminars. These hires generally are additions to a fully qualified design faculty that delivers instruction in visual and design problem-solving issues.

PART-TIME FACULTY

It is tempting and appropriate, especially in large metropolitan design centers, to employ practicing designers to teach on a part-time basis. These individuals bring professional experience, contact with the design community, and the pragmatics of real work to an academic program without the

costs of full-time salaries and benefits. However, some programs build their entire instructional staff with part-time faculty. Care must be taken to ensure that the graphic design program has a sufficient number of faculty with a consistent or long-term commitment to the institution, an understanding of the total curricular context for the courses they teach, and a willingness to contribute to the service and research activity of the department or college. As faculty policies and issues are reviewed, internal and external evaluations should determine whether: 1) part-time faculty have been chosen to fulfill specific curricular objectives; 2) the individuals hired represent outstanding examples of practice in the areas in which they teach; 3) the proportion of part-time to full-time faculty supports or jeopardizes the integrity of the total curriculum; 4) part-time faculty maintain sufficient contact with core full-time faculty on curricular and student development issues.

MINIMUM TEACHING RESOURCES

Because graphic design enrollments are high and show no signs of abating, there is an economic/credit hour incentive for colleges or departments of art and design to offer or expand graphic design among their programs of study. Without question, financial incentives can promote program excellence, and without question, students have every right to pursue studies that attract them. However, the number of courses, minors, concentrations, and majors in graphic design is growing, despite concern about the availability of resources to prepare students comprehensively for practice. This expansion constantly reduces the pool of qualified faculty. The expansion of master's degree offerings is another sign of evolution and represents yet another pressure.

Given this expansion, it is not uncommon in the United States to find undergraduate graphic design programs with one or two faculty claiming to provide the full range of competencies necessary for entry to professional practice. For programs advertising a four-year professional degree, this level of staffing should be questioned on grounds far beyond the student/faculty ratio. Can one or two full-time, tenure-track or continuing contract faculty provide what NASAD standards for graphic design majors and the profession require: full teaching support for typography, computer-assisted layout, communication and design theory, design history, design methods, multimedia and motion graphics, website design, production, and design management in addition to fundamentals such as drawing (and graphic translations), basic design, and color theory? Clearly, the breadth of teaching competencies necessary for a comprehensive, professionally oriented graphic design education are unlikely to be embodied in one or two faculty, regardless of their teaching loads.

At the graduate level, the stakes go up. Graduate faculty must demonstrate a clear vision about design and a well-developed teaching philosophy related to graduate education; an advanced level of expertise in the area of specialization; and significant stature in their field. Graduate faculty also must be able to supervise theses and final projects. Frequently, graphic design faculty must demonstrate additional competencies in cultural and cognitive theory as they relate to design, and research skills as differentiated from professional practice skills. Despite any hiring trends to the contrary, it is likely that more senior faculty will demonstrate these competencies and capabilities.

Normally, two full-time faculty devoted to graduate instruction are a minimum for a department offering the terminal degree in graphic design with an enrollment of five or more students. One common practice is piggybacking graduate instruction on top of undergraduate instruction, usually by dual enrollment in undergraduate courses. There is the danger that instruction will be directed to the dominant undergraduate population, leaving graduate students insufficiently challenged. Careful evaluation should determine if the number of full-time faculty is reasonable to assume graduate responsibility on top of a full-time undergraduate load, and if graduate students are held to significantly higher standards and course content than their undergraduate counterparts. NASAD standards for all graduate programs require that at least one-half of the credit requirements be taken in courses intended for graduate students only.

Another approach is to offer graduate programs composed entirely of independent study. However, significant faculty time and attention are required if such programs are to be effective. Independent study cannot be expected to reduce faculty loads or address the issue of faculty expertise over the range of necessary subject matters.

CRITERIA FOR EVALUATION FACULTY RESEARCH, PROFESSIONAL, AND CREATIVE ACTIVITY

In evaluating the quality of faculty responsible for graphic design instruction, reviewers consider vitae containing descriptions of ongoing research, professional accomplishments, and creative activity. Until recently, the expectations for full-time, tenure-track graphic design faculty have been limited to teaching, service, and sustained professional practice based on client commission. Evaluation on these terms remains valid. However, other possibilities are evident.

DISCLAIMER

This text is analytical and consultative only. It was prepared by working groups of the AIGA and NASAD on the basis of observations and experience. Although intended as a resource describing common expectations and practices at the time of writing, it does not represent or constitute an evaluation of specific individual faculty members or institutional practices by the AIGA or NASAD. Faculty decisions and policies and means of determining them are ultimately the sole prerogative and responsibility of each institution.

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On occasion, faculty engage in the creation and production of design work that might more appropriately be classified as fine art, thus leaving the usual parameters of their primary discipline when the quantity or quality of client-initiated projects is not creatively satisfying. Under these conditions, graphic design faculty's creative studio accomplishments are judged against standards that include professional competitions, the number and stature of commissioned works for clients, and exhibition of work. Because design is rarely created for or shown in gallery settings, the traditional rubrics of invitational and one-person shows cannot be applied generally to all design faculty. Further, entry and hanging fees for design competitions and exhibitions can be hundreds of dollars for each piece, raising questions about the efficacy of broad-based submission to garner a few résumé entries.

With the development of graduate programs in graphic design, scholarship continues to grow and improve. What does this mean for faculty evaluation? In the past, the academic scholarship of design faculty was generally confined to technical and historical investigations within the limits of traditional design practice. The first comprehensive survey of graphic design history was not published until the 1980s and design periodicals usually restricted their content to captioned pictures of recent professional work, not scholarly discourse. While this is changing, there are still only two refereed design journals in the United States and their content addresses an array of design disciplines, reducing the odds of publication of graphic design writing and challenging graphic design faculty with the difficult task of securing publication opportunities outside their discipline.

Within the last decade, however, many design faculty have entered theoretical and polemic discourse that has its roots in disciplines outside design and the fine arts. This work results from ambitious reading and research that positions design ideas in contexts other than practice and personal expression. It seeks to discover and articulate the theoretical underpinnings of design as contributions to the body of knowledge about the discipline as well as the practice. Many efforts are self-published or confined to a small but growing number of publications devoted to such interests. Because the individuals engaged in this research are few and represent a new model for design faculty, internal and external reviewers may have limited experience evaluating the content and quality of their scholarship. The hybrid nature of their work (often a combination of academic scholarship, criticism, and making) falls outside the more well-defined research models of art historian or studio artist. The number of national and international opportunities for peer review are few.

The growth of graphic design scholarship and its inclusion as a goal of graduate programs in graphic design will create new priorities that affect faculty evaluation, particularly as specific institutions and graphic design programs adjust their missions and goals.

Each institution determines criteria for faculty evaluation. In the field of graphic design these criteria should reflect: 1) the roles of various faculty positions in fulfilling the published goals and objectives of the graphic design program; 2) the nature, meaning, patterns, and systems of evaluating professional work, scholarly and creative output, and research in graphic design; and 3) the specific responsibilities of individual faculty members and their accomplishments since leaving graduate school. (See also the *Twenty-Point Assessment* that follows in the Appendix.)

CONCLUSION

The AIGA and NASAD encourage careful consideration of faculty issues as institutions develop their approaches to graphic design. Our major concern is students. Are they prepared for the rigors of the profession, especially if the institution has so promised? No other resource can provide what faculty bring to students. Hiring and supporting excellent faculty is the obvious centerpiece of excellent graphic design education.

APPENDIX

The following outline has been an advisory text of NASAD since 1994. It applies to local assessments concerning faculty at the institution, school, or program level.

A Twenty-Point Assessment

The following twenty points provide one format for basic assessment of faculty evaluation and reward systems in an institution or its administrative units.

Mission, Goals, and Objectives of Institutions and Art/Design Units

- i. **What are the mission, goals, and objectives of the entity being considered, and to what extent are they expressed in written statements and demonstrated in practice? What is the correlation of written and operational expressions of mission, goals, and objectives with faculty evaluation and reward systems?**
 - ii. **What internal or external factors and considerations are critical in establishing or changing the entity's mission, goals, and objectives, or in defining its sense of identity? How does this identity and the process of defining it affect faculty assessment?**
 - iii. **How will issues of stability or change affect formulation, operation, and adjustments to the faculty evaluation and reward system?**
 - iv. **What comparisons between units within an institution, or between a unit and the institution as a whole, may be made by asking the foregoing questions with regard to other units or to the institution as a whole? How do these comparisons relate to the respective missions and content being addressed?**
- Content and Characteristics Profile
- v. **What approaches and perspectives for work in and about art/design are present in the entity to be considered? What are the relative weightings or priorities among them? (This presence may be in terms of written literature, past and present practice, aspirations, plans, etc.)**
 - vi. **What values, philosophies, or criteria are present with regard to concepts and issues such as originality, experimentation, simplicity and complexity, interdisciplinary work, faculty development, and collaboration?**
 - vii. **What do comparisons among findings thus far (i-vi) reveal about the logic, values, and futures issues associated with faculty evaluation and reward systems? (The answers provide a context for the next questions.)**

Faculty Evaluation

- viii. **What are the stated or operational priorities with regard to various aspects of faculty work (i.e., teaching, creative work and research, and service)? To what extent does the faculty evaluation system consider the relationship between priorities and the resources needed to address them?**
- ix. **How are faculty responsibilities and workloads defined and established? To what extent are there logical relationships among workloads, definitions of productivity, and expectations regarding teaching, creative work and research, and service? To what extent is consistency from faculty member to faculty member, or from unit to unit, a goal?**
- x. **Are the evaluation mechanisms able to deal adequately with the complexity of work in art/design? For example, the complex and subjective nature of new work, the distinctions and interrelationships between work in art/design and work about art/design, the need to work with art/design both in their own terms and in terms common to other disciplines.**
- xi. **How is merit defined, determined, and indicated? To what extent is merit within the unit dependent upon and/or correlated to the mission, goals, and objectives of the institution as a whole, other units, or specific individuals?**
- xii. **What opportunities are available to faculty in terms of support, time, and peer review?**
- xiii. **What criteria are used to judge faculty work? Are these criteria safe against the influence of image-making techniques that may mask issues of merit? To what extent is public or professional image deemed important to the fulfillment of mission, goals, and objectives?**
- xiv. **Is the evaluation mechanism able to deal adequately with the values, priorities, and complexities that surround "innovation"?**
- xv. **What priorities do evaluation mechanisms express regarding equivalency, consistency, and diversity among various kinds of work and among disciplines and faculty members? What do the processes of forming, evolving, and operating evaluation and reward systems reveal about institutional values concerning standardization, evaluation techniques, and expertise?**
- xvi. **To what extent do the purposes, values, philosophies, and approaches discovered thus far reveal effective synergies within the institution as a whole, various units of the institution, search committees, and promotion and tenure committees?**

xvii. **What are the issues to be considered in developing documentation policy? (For example: values, protocols, nature of the work to be documented, standards of measure, types of documentation.)**

Policy Questions and Issues

- xviii. **What issues of context and capability should be addressed by institutions and units reviewing or contemplating change in faculty evaluation and reward systems? What philosophical, financial, and positioning issues and risks must be considered?**
 - xix. **What procedural, political, and communication issues need to be addressed to ensure understanding and support, fairness and feasibility for faculty and administrators in and beyond the unit? What personnel, work load, and security issues and risks must be considered?**
- Summary: Comprehensive Correlations, Synergies, and Issues
- xx. **How can all policies, perspectives, priorities, characteristics, influences, conditions, mechanisms, and aspirations (discovered in i-xix) best be integrated to support a positive and productive evaluation and reward system?**

For a more complete explanation of this text, see *Local Assessment of Evaluation and Reward Systems for Arts Faculties in Higher Education, October 1994*, available from NASAD.

