

ART & DESIGN DEPARTMENT  
GRAPHIC DESIGN AREA

**REPORT**

**PORTFOLIO ASSESSMENT:  
IMPLEMENTING DIRECT MEASURES OF STUDENT LEARNING  
IN THE GRAPHIC DESIGN AREA**

**Overview**

The assessment of student learning, student development, and program outcomes is essential to the health and vitality of academic programs at California State University, Fresno. The purpose of implementing student outcomes assessment is to advance student learning through improved curricula and instruction. In support of this purpose the Graphic Design Area within the Department of Art and Design proposed the implementation of an assessment instrument that is directed to measure student learning that can be used to improve our academic program and area.

The Graphic Design Area (GD) is considered an Option within the degree of B.A. in Art. This Option has seen an increase of GD majors from 90+ GD majors in 1998 to 235+ GD majors this year. The area has also submitted in 2002 a proposal to convert this Option into a B.F.A. in Graphic Design. The acceptance of the proposed BFA program will create significant and meaningful opportunities for the assessment and evaluation of our changing program and an ongoing laboratory for implementing change. It is for these reasons that the area chose to establish a strong assessment instrument through the use of portfolios. In the GD area a portfolio is considered a set or volume of the student's superior work. This may include graphic design, illustration, multimedia and written analysis of critical issues of graphic design.

**Methodology**

Portfolio assessment will be an on-going process of assessment and implementation of findings. For this assessment the GD area implemented two portfolios. GD students in the GD35 Visual Communications Fundamentals course submitted what we'll call the Sophomore Portfolio. GD35 is a foundational GD course that all students in our program are required to take. Most students in that class have had no other GD classes at that point. Students were asked to submit a CDROM of 10-12 images of their best visual art and design work. Sophomore Portfolio will be used as a pre-test or pre-GD area assessment instrument.

Students in GD148 Advanced Advertising Design and GD149 Professional Practices submitted what we'll call the Graduating Portfolio. These students are concluding their studies in GD and the dozen or so examples of their work on the CDROM were expected to serve as a final assessment of our direct measurement of student learning.

To implement this portfolio assessment the GD area used the goals, objectives and learning outcomes published in the SOAP within the Self Review Program for the Art and Design Department to create two rubrics- one rubric per portfolio. The two rubrics assess the same goals and objectives within the GD COMMON GOALS but at different times of student's

schooling. The initial rubric for the Sophomore Portfolio the COMMON BA GOALS were used and reviewed by the faculty.

The portfolios were evaluated by five internal reviewers: three full time faculty and two part time faculty, and three outside reviewers: professional graphic designers and /or creative directors that are well established in our field. We met in three sessions in a computer lab. Typically, we loaded the student files on all the available monitors in the lab and moved as a group from portfolio to portfolio, each member making comments and arriving at a consensus, which was recorded on an evaluation sheet for each student. A full-time GD faculty member served as a facilitator for the part-time faculty and for the outside reviewers. Each area of the rubric was rated on a scale from 1-5.

The only drawback in this process was inconsistency in the types of digital files submitted by the students; or in some cases students submitted far too many examples with no discrimination in the editing of their samples. Closer supervision of the portfolio creation process will address these minor problems. This includes giving the student a handout with specifics for the format of portfolio.

The three full-time GD faculty met again to analyze and interpret the findings as well as review the qualitative comments by the part-time faculty and external professionals. We looked at the outcomes connection to the SOAP, student learning, program and area pedagogy and curriculum including its implication to employment in the job market as well as to develop a strategy for implementation into the curriculum and syllabus. Our desire is to have successful graduates with strong portfolios in order to be able to compete in the competitive job market of the graphic design field.

### **Findings: Analysis and Interpretation**

The SOAP includes five goals and twelve objectives that are common to all the areas of study in the BA of Art. These goals and objectives are intended to introduce the student to the principles, theories and applications of art and design including aesthetic judgment, critical thinking, social and cultural issues. The GD area has five goals and within these goals there are seventeen objectives. These goals include the creative, theories and principles, application, societal, and technological aspects of graphic design. The objectives are based on these aspects and are designed to measure an outcome using Bloom's higher order thinking skills. Within the objectives, the students must be able to develop competencies specific to graphic design such as the ability to analyze, synthesize, evaluate and apply principles, theories, creative processes and critical thinking. The student must also be able to demonstrate knowledge and application of technology in graphic design.

After creating the rubrics for the two portfolios, all three GD area faculty met to analyze and interpret the portfolios according to the goals and objectives established in the Art and Design SOAP. At this level the Sophomore Portfolios were evaluated using the BA COMMON GOALS for the department as well as the GRAPHIC DESIGN GOALS. The reason for this is that most students have had mostly foundation Art courses up to this point, and very little opportunity to develop any GD skills. For the Sophomore Portfolio, the GD area faculty concluded that most (eighty-five percent) of the GD students have a good sense of art skills-

drawing, painting, etc. and have a good sense of beginning principles of art- balance, rhythm, etc. The scores on the rubric range from 2 to 3. Where 2 indicates that the student is able to demonstrate MINIMAL application of the BA COMMON goals and objectives and 3 indicates that the student demonstrates SOME application of the goals and objectives. Here, “SOME” is indicated when a student is able to depict in their work at least three of the goals and/or half of the objectives indicated above. Another strong conclusion is that most of these beginning GD students lack any formal education in theories, application and production of graphic design. In this area, GRAPHIC DESIGN GOALS, ninety-eight percent of the students scored a 1. This indicates that their portfolio DOES NOT DEMONSTRATE any part of the goals and objectives.

The GD area faculty also met to analyze the Graduating Portfolio. At this level the GD faculty reviewed only the GRAPHIC DESIGN GOALS portion of the rubric. The reason is to better analyze and understand the level of learning being displayed within our GD area. The primary conclusion is that overall our GD students have improved their quality of production, interpretation and understanding of graphic design within their sophomore year and senior year portfolio. Ninety-five percent of the students were able to demonstrate SOME of the goals and objectives from the GRAPHIC DESIGN GOALS. Eighty percent were able to demonstrate ALL and MOST of the goals and objectives.

The GD professionals from our community also met to analyze and interpret the portfolios according to the GRAPHIC DESIGN GOALS rubric including employment potential based on the portfolio review. Their conclusion is that our GD students are “excellent” graphic designers with plenty of potential. Their scores indicated that eighty-five percent of our GD students demonstrated SOME of the goals and objectives and that seventy-five percent were able to demonstrate ALL and MOST of the goals and objectives.

### **Conclusion: Application and Improvements**

This assessment has been a great indicator of the goals and objectives that the GD area is fulfilling and others that need to be addressed. As indicated, the GD students are growing in their ability to meet the GD area’s learning goals and objectives through their last years of schooling. It is fantastic to observe the improvement between the rubric score of the student in the introductory portfolio and their graduating portfolio. The creative, theories and principles, application and technological aspects of the rubric have increased substantially. But, students have average scores on the cultural and social aspect of graphic design. Even though the scores from the GD professionals were not as high as the faculty’s scores, they still indicated an overall improvement. The GD professionals indicated that progress needs to be made with students who are less skilled by giving more feedback to individual student’s portfolio assessment. In regards to employment, the professional believe that most of our students are well equipped to handle a beginning starting position as graphic designer in a design firm, but they also pointed that our students lack pre press and multimedia knowledge.

After reviewing the professional and the faculty assessments, the GD full-time faculty met to analyze and develop a strategy for implementation of our findings into the current curriculum and syllabus as well as adding changes to the proposed BFA in Graphic Design. As faculty,

we have made improvements to the current syllabi for particular courses. For instance, in the GD 148: Advanced Advertising Design course, we are addressing the GD critical issues associated with social, cultural phenomena. In GD 150: Advanced Internet Design, we are addressing the issues of multimedia and in the GD42: Graphic Design, we are addressing the problems with pre press. In the BFA proposal, we are adding an extra class for pre press and layout and including a new area of emphasis- Interactive Multimedia Design to the proposed degree. We are also implementing a mandatory portfolio for beginning students as well as a new course for graduating seniors that focuses on portfolio development.

Another implementation of the findings led to an area meeting with all of our part-time faculty where the goals of the area were emphasized. Emphasis was made with part-time faculty to update their syllabi and meaningful outcomes for their students that are in line with GD area goals.

In conclusion, this assessment has proven to be a valuable resource. It has become an essential tool to the health and vitality of our academic program. The GD area will continue to implement this type of assessment in order to continue the progress of the student's performance. As stated before, one of the main considerations for the assessment was the advancement of the student's learning through improved curricula and instruction. The GD area is committed to make changes in this area for the improvement of the quality of the department, area and graduating student. The GD area is also committed to the quality of the graduating student who is ready for employment. We are considering and continue to consider the implications of our curriculum, program and technology advancements to employment in the graphic design field. Finally, we are working to develop a strategy for implementation of the technological changes needed to maintain a current and viable program and produce a student with the tools necessary to succeed in society.

Thank you for your logistics and financial support. Our department, area and students will appreciate the outcomes in the near future.

Sincerely,

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