**LAYING A SOLID FOUNDATION**

As an instructor, my primary objective is to lay a solid foundation for my students to become successful designers of the future. I believe a solid foundation of design is comprised of a developed understanding of the design process (and time management); principles and elements; concept development, communication and creativity; design discourse and terminology; visual culture and history; critical evaluation of work (self and peers); and technical skills. Together, these focal areas are the backbone of design and lay the foundation my students need to produce effective visual communication projects and be successful in the field of graphic design.

# CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT & PROCESS

I encourage my students to go beyond their initial solution and to investigate the “why” and “how” of their design solutions, not merely create a visually appealing design that looks good according to personal aesthetic or current trending styles. Students are asked to think about their design choices based on the project, its parameters, concept, audience and content. I ask them to create their own hierarchy of importance based on project objectives and communication goals. We begin with thumbnail sketches that are discussed both individually and collectively in the classroom.

By creating a discourse or brainstorming session, I encourage collaboration in the design process, encouraging my students to consider multiple perspectives and possibilities in their design solution, while also introducing the idea of working collaboratively with future clients or a design team. By incorporating an “in-progress” critique, I allow students to present their unfinished work to the class. This process allows the students to present their problems, address mistakes early on, learning together and presenting multiple solutions to problems. Mistakes are necessary in the learning process and teaching students to verbally communicate their struggles in an accepting and solution-oriented atmosphere fosters a growth mindset, teaching my students to push through initial mistakes and design problems.

# PROJECTS

I place much focus on the design process, creativity and concept development with technological skills evolving as a direct result. I encourage a user-centered approach whenever possible with classroom projects. However, because of my professional background as a graphic designer, I also see the computer and industry-standard software as indispensable tools that must be harnessed and mastered to successfully compete in today’s workforce.

As a design professional, I am constantly researching emerging technology, software upgrades and trends. Therefore, my projects use design as a vehicle for different learning experiences as well as provide constraints and parameters that require development of technical skills and exploration of design theory and methods. Some of my projects include research; posters; exploration of hierarchy and structure using a modular grid; self-reflective work; and the investigation of the emotional quality of type and its ability to communicate mood and rhythm.

# TEAM FOCUSED ENVIRONMENT

I want my students to consider their classmates as their teammates: cheering accomplishments; encouraging and assisting; sharing new skills, insights and strengths; practicing together to become the designers of the future. I stress the importance of critique participation to my students, reminding them that the work they create is designed for an audience and how their work is being read or communicated is just as important as the look and feel of their final design and that both must work together to successfully communicate. I ask my students to value classmates’ insights and be active members of the team.