HOW CAN WE SERVE OUR COMMUNITY? CASE STUDY OF ZAYED UNIVERSITY GRAPHIC DESIGN

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"We must not just ask what can we do about what we can make or do. It is time to ask how we can make a difference in the world through research we carry out. And what is the difference that we often carry out research."

Marian Wright Edelman

Students – Recycling Awareness Campaign

Graphic Design senior students developed a multimedia campaign for the Recycling Awareness Campaign at Zayed University's campus. Students worked together in teams to gather primary and secondary research related to environmental issues specific to sustainability and recycling. Their research entailed current global, national and regional environmental statistics.

This multiple weeks of intensive research included readings, discussions, and guest speakers. Students shared their different points of view, knowledge and skills with each other as they worked together to create unique and innovative solutions for recycling awareness at the University campus.

Deliverables

Logo: A visually appealing mark that will enhance both the message of recycling and attract interest.

Tagline: A statement that will provide audience a quick understanding of their responsibility.

Brochure: Educational material that includes relevant information about recycling.

Poster: A visual aid that successfully synthesizes the recycling message.

Mascot: A character that will visually communicate the message of the campaign.

Why Should I Care?

Abu Dhabi, and the city of Al Ain, are the only cities in the world with skyscrapers popping up every ten seconds. Dubai, the capital of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) is actually the one making the news. The emirate which makes one-tenth of the city it is, however, is the place that not only seeks some of the answers in Oman, but it aims to become the richest capital of the world with both the construction of the Louvre and the European Disneyland. The UAE is a small wealthy but developing country. It is considered that Emirati citizens are the

$17 million each, and the wealth can be seen at every corner: luxury cars, beautiful jewelry, designer clothes, and magnificent villas.

With the influx of foreign labor and the UAE's rapid growth come stories of success and stories of failures, feelings of admiration and scrutiny, well-wishers and those that express resentment. One thing is certain, the country's development and increase in population has introduced another corner of the world that consumes and thus discards.

As an academic who began her career as an educator in the United States, I ask: With a portfolio worth a few million, why would Emirati graphic design students care about sustainable design or making a difference? For that matter why bother attaining a college education? A degree is just a ticket to securing that high paying job, and a job in this case is not needed.

The rulers of the UAE are well aware that their oil reserves are finite; consequently for the last few decades it has been investing in creating an infrastructure with its earnings: Dubai as a tourist destination, and Abu Dhabi as supporter and hub for the arts. Attracting professionals from all fields to help in this endeavor (myself as an educator), we will be replaced, and the positions filled by Emiratis as they acquire the necessary knowledge and skills to manage their country.

Using examples from my experience teaching the final capstone project, I will discuss how as educators we can work toward creating a learning environment that encourages students to consider their responsibility as designers their community. Also, as educators, how do we instill the capacity for our students to become thinking, ethical designers, and how do we put these theories into practice? Finally, I

will share one of the most significant differences that I have identified in teaching in the USA in comparison to the UAE.

Global And Local Efforts Toward Sustainable Evironmental Practices

Global Efforts

The UAE's efforts to diversify its economy away from the reliance of fossil fuels are evident. Abu Dhabi is now the host of the International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA) headquarters, the global base for renewable energy knowledge and efforts. The capital is also developing the first sustainable and carbon-zero waste city, and this month, Abu Dhabi hosted the third World Future Energy Summit, which according to its website "brought more than 29,000 attendees from 130 countries".



Other initiatives taking place are the use of electric buses at Sir Bani Yas island, and soon the capital will have recycling bins that will hold solar advertising displays. The Heroes of the UAE campaign, is another initi-

ative, a joint effort with the World Wild Life and the Environment Agency of Abu Dhabi, which targets young citizens to become more environmentally aware and responsible right in their homes.



Local Efforts

Currently, Abu Dhabi's waste management does not offer recycling pick up services; however, we have approximately 7 recycling centers situated at various schools,

and businesses to drop off paper, aluminum, and glass materials.

Service Bureaus

In Abu Dhabi, there are a number of service bureaus that offer printing and publishing services

from a one-person operation to large scale print shops. There are at least three service bureaus that offer and extensive selection of recycled papers as well as soy inks. The cost is higher for the use of these materials thus the issues, and challenges of additional costs that graphic designers and customers face are similar to those experienced in other countries. I encourage students to visit the various printers, begin to develop relationships, and gather prices for future projects.

Capstone Process

During the spring '09 semester Graphic Design Capstone students worked to create a campaign for the 1st recycling initiative proposal for this University's campus. It would be the students' way of practicing responsible design and bringing an important issue to the forefront.



Students worked as a team to gather primary and secondary data related to environmental issues specific to sustainability and recycling. Their research entailed current global, national and regional environmental conditions. Students used library data, internet information and conducting a campus survey. Through six

weeks of intensive research, in-depth class discussions, and guest speakers, students used the collected data to develop six independent and individual recycling awareness campaigns.



Deliverables

Logo: A visually appealing queue that will encompass the message of recycling, and attract interest.

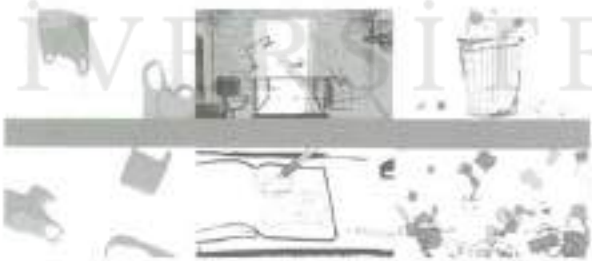
Tagline: A statement that will provide readers a quick understanding of their campaigns.

Brochure: Detailed information that provides helpful information about recycling.



Poster: A visual aid that successfully synthesizes the recycling message.

Message in Motion: A motion-graphics piece that visually narrates the message of the campaign.



How Do Educators Bring Actual Issues To The Classroom?

Students are individuals and as educators we provide them with the knowledge, and resources that they

can use to continue to develop intellectually, and apply in their careers. I may be able to influence students' actions in the class setting; however, I will not be able to obligate them to continue responsible design practices after graduating. It has to be part of them as individuals to desire to continue learning and feel responsibility to their world.

As educators we provide a safe class environment. A place in which fear of retribution does not occupy space. We provide information that offers diverse angles, and allow students to develop individual ideas and opinions.

What Differences Have I Noticed From Teaching In The USA Versus The UAE?

I believe that graphic design graduates in the UAE have a better chance of applying responsible design theories, whether environmental or socially conscious, more so than graphic design graduates in the United States but similar to graduates from other countries that offer free education, free healthcare, and or other allowances.

It is my belief that an environment such as this allows a professional designer to be more critical, and have control over the projects selected. To consider one's work a valuable contribution to the wellness of society, a legacy of sorts versus the need to accept projects that may clash one's beliefs in order to meet financial responsibilities -- the current situation that most graduates face in the US.

The challenge is not the injection of responsible design theories into the classroom, this entails cooperation from academics (which even if slow paced still tends to occur), and adjustment of the curriculum, the challenge is faced after the classroom experience. It is when students have to face the real world, and decide how they will make a living and make a difference, which in some unfortunate cases may be impossible.

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