ONLINE EDUCATION: TEACHING IN A TIME OF CHANGE

• Paper / Proposal Title:

In pursuit of materiality, immediacy, and community interaction in the virtual design studio classroom

• Author(s) Name:

Ellen Christensen, Saskia van Kampen

• University or Company Affiliation:

San Francisco State University School of Design

• Abstract:

Prior to the pandemic, design programs were implemented within “hands-on” (active learning) spaces. These on-campus spaces emphasized prototyping, revising, and building using a variety of tools and technology. The shift to remote learning has limited access to these carefully designed on-campus learning environments. Many assignments planned for in-person environs were quickly revised and implemented online in new formats, with revised methods and outcomes.

Benefits of the physical classroom learning environment such as immediacy of interactions with students as they work, impromptu feedback on student progress, assessment of student body language, and the ability to co-investigate project dimensionality, physicality, and materials have, in many cases, been imprecisely translated to the virtual classroom. An additional challenge of remote learning is that students can be neutral classroom observers rather than fully engaged participants. All of the challenges above impact student learning experiences and understanding of the design process.
Our research team at San Francisco State University has recently completed Phase 1 and Phase 2 of data collection from Visual Communication Design students at our university. We have surveyed our students about challenges, possibilities, and successful pedagogical adaptations within the new virtual design studio classroom. A set of challenges for student remote learners have been identified through questions about learning environment specifics including designated workspaces, synchronous / asynchronous lessons, shared space management, connectivity, lo-fi prototyping, access to tools such as printers, scanners, etc., and screen-based implementation of projects, critiques, and lectures. By directly surveying students, we gain clearer insight into what teaching innovations work best to encourage learning from the student perspective. Through our investigation, we hope to clarify best practices for the co-creation of effective virtual classroom communities of learning.

• Author(s) Biography:

Ellen Christensen (MFA, AIGA) is an Assistant Professor of Visual Communication Design in the School of Design at San Francisco State University. She completed an MFA in Graphic Design at the Rhode Island School of Design in 2018. Her graduate thesis at RISD, Placefulness, researched design strategies of care and community placemaking. She received a high honors BA in American Studies at the University of California, Berkeley in 2007, where she formed her own concentration within the American Studies major, “Ethnicity and Visual Representation.” Her undergraduate honors thesis at Berkeley examined primary and secondary sources to research the under-told history of women-run portrait photography studios in San Francisco from the Gold Rush to 1906. She received a RISD Graduate Studies Grant in 2018 to document vernacular typography in the everyday signage of historic small businesses in Lisbon, Portugal. Prior to joining the faculty at SF State, she taught at Boston University, Tufts University, and Clark University.

Saskia van Kampen (MDes, RGD, AIGA) has taught graphic Design at OCAD University in Toronto, Ontario, Canada as an Assistant Professor since 2014 and is now Assistant Professor of Visual Communication at San Francisco State University. She is focused on developing research projects that involve students, believing that by doing so she is supporting the next generation of designers to be socially driven in terms of accessible and inclusive design outcomes. Her research includes critical pedagogy in studio design courses, writing in the disciplines, and creative practice as protest. Before moving to the States she was the Vice President of Education and board member of RGD (Registered Graphic Designers). Her role in RGD was to create programs that support both students and academic professionals in design. As such she created a Canada-wide
Designathon, set up yearly academic awards of excellence and began an academic peer-reviewed journal.