UNITED

GRAPHIC DESIGN

PRACTICE & EDUCATION

DESIGNS

UDA
THE GLOBAL DESIGN ORGANIZATION
United Designs Alliance FIRMITAS ▪ UTILITAS ▪ VENUSTAS

on towards integration

GREATES
LOVE SONG

Frank studios

Warburg
cancer
Deprive a hea

ialization

devices, only the best accesso
e, a special comn tment.

RESERVES
THE RIGHT
TO INSPECT
ALL
HANDBAGS,
BRIEFCASES,
BACKPACKS,
ETC.

CHAPTER 1

Articles
Writings on
Graphic Design Education

Issue Based Design Education: Dealing with Social Issue in a Graphic Design Curriculum

PAULA DiMARCO
California State University, Northridge
USA

INTRODUCTION:

In the 21st century, terrorism has clouded the human psyche, and war and hunger have threatened the balance of the human race. The graphic designer's role has shifted to a direction of social and global awareness. Recently published graphic design books like, Citizen Designer, Graphic Agitation 2, and The Design of Dissent, as well as design conferences have been part of the discourse on initiating socially responsible design. It is our responsibility, not only as designers but also as human beings on earth, to be more socially aware and to understand that we have the power to change the minds of people for the good of humankind and not solely for the wealth of already privileged countries.

As a graphic design educator I feel obligated to inspire and encourage intercultural understanding and social responsibilities to my students. I propose a way of teaching graphic design that would provide an environment of sharing while in the process of exploring social relationships and developing alternative models of human behavior in a quickly changing and, at this point in time, quickly worsening social environment. Freedom of speech has enabled us to communicate issues and through graphic communication we can break down prejudices, builds awareness, and promote change for the good of the global society. I propose a direction of design education to include, Issue Based Design Education (IBDE).

Within an undergraduate graphic design course, I initiated an Issue Based curriculum by having students work on advertising campaigns and/or pro bono projects that make a positive difference. The course continually focuses on conceptual problems and integration of theory and its practical applications to the visual communication field. Within my curriculum, I stress the importance of social commentary and encourage students to draw from research and conceptual development within design processes. Students not only refine and learn skills in design but also learn about building strong effective visuals and copywriting.

For an annual art exhibition called, Social Issues in Graphic Design, students developed public service campaigns on all aspects of AIDS, violence, intolerance and injustice (Figure 1 & 2). **The objective of the exhibition is to stress the importance of humanizing graphic design through social and community-based issues. The goal of this exhibition is for students to experience design that matters.** One student said it best when referring to the exhibition, "*If just one person walks out the door of this show and says "I never thought about it that way" then we have done what we set out to do – build awareness.*"

Fig 1. An annual art exhibition, Social Issues in Graphic Design

*Fig 2. An annual art exhibition, Social Issues in Graphic Design*

DESIGN DESCRIPTIONS:

The following examples are from the Social Issues in Graphic Design exhibition from 2002, 2003 and 2004. Students wrote all the text as well as created or photographed all the imagery. Students went through a process of researching a social issue or nonprofit organization and developing strong effective public service slogans, which were emotional and thought provoking.

Student Design Project
Title: Ladies
Organization: Act Up
**Issue: World AIDS Day; Woman affected by AIDS**

The body copy reads,
Women are the fastest growing group with the HIV virus, and many are heterosexual with no history of prostitution or drug use. World AIDS Day 2004.
"I decided to focus my issue on AIDS and its effect on woman. I chose to take my direction through illustration, instead of photography because I was fascinated by the many activist posters produced in the 60's that were illustrated. Artist like Wes Wilson and Milton Glaser were inspiration for the design style." – Ariel
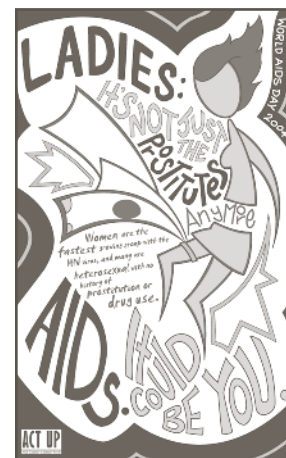
Student Design Project
Title: Death Sentence
Organization: Act Up
Issue: Lifting the band on Needle Exchange Programs

"My issue is to help lift the US federal ban on funding for needle exchange programs. Many people are shocked by my message. Why would you want to help someone who is a drug addict by giving them needles to continue drug use? I feel all human being need help. We don't know who these people are. We just make assumptions about them and prejudge them because they are addicts. Well addiction is a disease and we need to help cure it. But addiction is affecting the human race as well. As HIV and AIDS is spread, people will suffer" — Tara
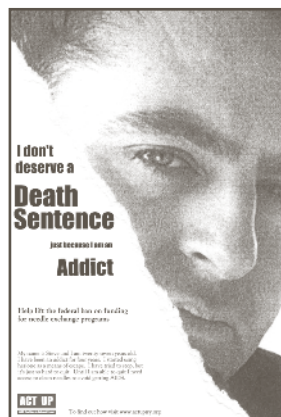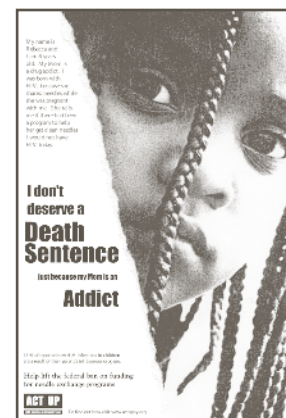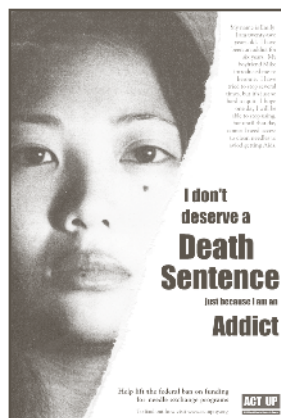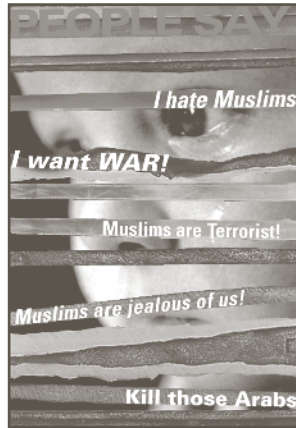
Student Design Project
Title: People Say…
Organization: Unicef
Issue: The effects of war on children

"I took the issue of war and dug deep down in my spirit. I chose the issue of War and its effects on Children. People do not really think about the children who become orphaned or disfigure or even die when war is happening. The children do not have the hate that adults bring to war and they are the victims. Graca Machel wrote a book called, The Impact of War on Children. I used one of Machel's quotes in my campaign because I felt the words needed to be heard." "The impact of armed conflict on children is devastating, wounding their bodies and destroying their spirit. This horrific toll demans an urgent response to protect children everywhere." (Graca Machel) – Tye

Student Design Project
Title: Future/No Future
Organization: U.N. Development Fund for Woman
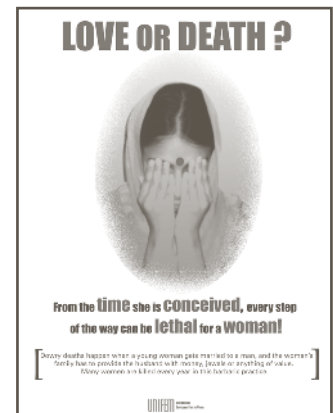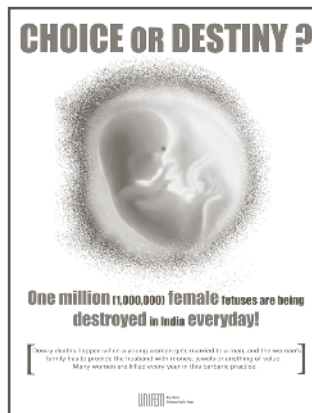**Issue: Dowry Deaths in India**
Dowry: the money, or estate that a woman brings to
       her husband in marriage.

Being raised in an eastern culture, I was introduced to this issue though various media. Dowry is a common practice amongst the lower class of poor nations, where a female child is considered a burden to the family. What motivated me to choose this topic was to create awareness amongst my fellow collogues who have been born and raised in Western society and are not aware of such issues. During my research I gathered some facts that were very shocking, some of them are listed below:

• Dowry deaths are also referred to "Accidental Kitchen deaths" and Stove burnings," which when a husband and mother in law set fire to a young bride because they are not content with the Dowry.
• 10,000 girl children are murdered by female infant-icide every year because family's fear not being able to pay the Dowry in the future.
• About 25,000 woman are killed in Dowry disputes each year.

Sad, but this is the truth about people living in this age and time.
— Alida
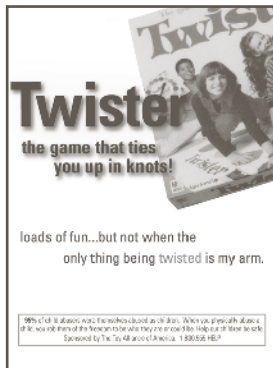

Student Design Project
Title: Vows
Organization: U.N. Development Fund for Women
Issue: Dowery deaths in India

"In Eastern culture, Dowry Deaths happen when a young bride is murdered by her husband because he isn't satisfied with the dowry he has received from his wife's family. This still happens today and very few men are convicted of this crime against women. Law enforcement overlooks these crimes because they appear to be "accidental." I first heard about Dowry Deaths in a religious studies class. Not many people know about this issue and how it affects women today. Awareness is the first step in creating change in society. This project provided the opportunity to create this awareness. It is hard to believe that even today, people are living in societies where women are still considered a burden." — Erin

The object: for my mommy to act like she doesn't **hit** or **strangle** me.

...except for those times daddy beat the **shit** out of me.

I didn't ask to get the abuse card.

loads of fun...but not when the only thing being **twisted** is my arm.
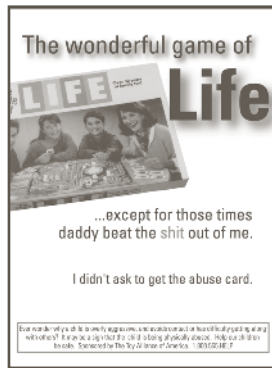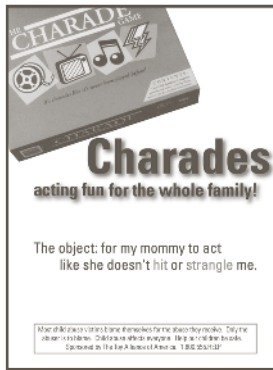
Student Design Project
Title: Games
Organization: N/A
Issue: Child Abuse

"I chose the issue, Child Abuse, because it was something I had never experienced but had friends and family that had gone through it. I chose to use the board games, Twister, Life and Charades as the main concept of the campaign. These games are all American fun games that children play with their family members. Child abuse is often a cycle and is perpetrated in most cases by family members (mostly parents). Therefore, playing on the words of the games, I was able to make statements that are strong and affective. I wanted to portray child abuse as more than physical harm, but also emotional harm. At the bottom, I placed my message in a red box with the intention of making it look like a warning, like those on cigarette packages." – Christian

Student Design Project
Title: My Story
Organization: Children with AIDS Project of America
Issue: AIDS

"I did not know what to expect from a project like this. I know that I like to help people and make a change in the world, but I did not know how graphic design would do that. I chose the issue of AIDS, because of my group was working on the same issue. However, I wanted to make a statement that touched the hearts of people as they read a real life story. This piece is a flyer that folds out into a poster. The purpose for telling a story about a young girl who did of AIDS, is to show that all victims of this disease have a story and a history. I wanted the viewer to moved." – Jamie
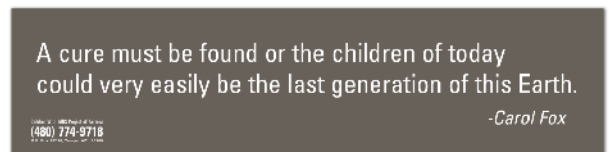
DESIGN PROCESS:

Students went through a process of research, brainstorm & build concepts, critiques within the class, self-reflection & refinement before completing the final product. The first phase of the design problem was to research their social issue through books, the Internet, and/or printed materials. They continued their process by sketching and working in support groups using collaborative techniques. Collaboration with other members of the class help to enabled students to develop strong effective public service slogans that are emotional and thought provoking. Self-reflection is an important part of an Issue Based Design Education Curriculum. Becoming a responsible designer is having awareness of the impact the process of the design has on your learning and your autonomy as well as society. Throughout class exercise, worksheets, and group critiques, each student kept a project journal to document all their notes and ideas. Their journals were records of all the information that they researched as well as their brainstorming of ideas and slogans.

Students are provided with tools and techniques for developing strong effective graphic design products. Through critiques and discussions, students refine their written copy and begin to photograph their own imagery. In the production phase of this project students learn about photography concepts and design principles. Through small teacher demonstrations and hands-on exercises, students become aware of typographic issues as well as concept building.

In an Issue Based Design curriculum sharing experiences is necessary for constructing meaning and fostering awareness. In most cases, the designers brought a person biography to the social issue at hand. This personal connection or interest was a way to address the diversity; an important aspect of the classroom community. Their willingness to share in the critiques and provide valuable feedback became apparent as the process continued. As some students began to learn from each other about the issues, their level of participation increased. The issues allowed the students to open the forum for dialogue and discussion, which helped make the messages more moving and thought provoking.

The direction the designers chose is usually based on the strength of the message being presented. That direction can be a personal (emotional) approach, a symbolic approach, or a statistical approach. Not all student designers were able to deal with the seriousness of these issues. Therefore, some students did not develop shocking messages because of their discomfort with activism individually. There are several graphic designers who might want to play it safe and be subtler with their approach. This is not a character flaw, but rather natural human behavior. And graphic designers are human beings with feelings, ideas, and morals.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, graphic designers have great power in the creation of visual culture. They need to recognize what it means to be a responsible designer in our global society. My objective as a design educator is to incorporate an educational experience that helps students foster a sense of caring for others while they learn to use the graphic design concepts and skills responsibly. My mission is to encourage meaning making and social awareness through an Issue Based Design Education (IBDE). I find that with strong content and affective concepts, our future graphic designers can see the impact their designs have on people's lives. It is my belief that graphic designers should use their power and voice to make the world a better place.