

The Inclusion of Social Responsibility in the Visual Communications Curriculum

2008

Case Study

Submitted by:

Ambica Prakash
Assistant Professor Graphic Design
Art & Design Department
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, Wisconsin

*“It is important for students to experience
the various aspects of design—commercial,
social, cultural and political.”*

Ambica Prakash
Assistant Professor Graphic Design
Art & Design Department
University of Wisconsin-Stout

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Synopsis from official website <www.uwstout.edu/programs/bfaa/ps.html>

College of Arts & Sciences

Art and design are creative endeavors that communicate to the viewer in myriad ways. Both often mirror the culture that created them, and thus the forms of these expressions may be able to transcend the context of their making to describe or explain an entire world outside of our own experiences.

The artist and the designer often share the ability to visually articulate cultural values, ideals for social change, and individual conceptions of what it means to be human. The Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at UW-Stout prepares graduates for careers as professional artists and designers.

The curriculum is based on foundation courses in general education and the visual arts, including mathematics, social sciences, humanities (including art history), drawing and design. Students in the Bachelor of Fine Arts program may opt to pursue advanced studies in the studio arts emphases of ceramics, drawing, metals, painting, printmaking, and sculpture; or a concentration in graphic design, industrial design, interior design, or multimedia design. Regardless of emphasis or concentration, students in the program engage in a curriculum which is grounded in the fine arts, which values the critical and perceptual dynamics of art-making, the relevance of art history to contemporary art and design, and the analytical principles of aesthetics.

Personal Interview

November 19, 2007

Ambica Prakash
Assistant Professor Graphic Design
Art & Design Department
University of Wisconsin-Stout
Menomonie, WI
www.uwstout.edu

How are the NPO clients selected to work with your students?

First and foremost I try to find clients that require projects that match the curriculum, as well as the student's abilities. Projects must come from clients that have a genuine need they are trying to address—a problem they are trying to solve. We have somewhat of a local network that we use to help find our NPO clients, but mostly it's word of mouth.

Once an NPO is identified, I meet with each of them personally to ensure there is a solid understanding up front. I want to be sure that their projects have validity and importance for them and me. Both the nonprofit and the academic partner needs to have a stake in the process, and the relationship must be mutually beneficial.

Do you strictly work with local clients?

No, we have worked on both local and national projects. We would like to expand our scope to include an international project next, perhaps in my native India within the education and advocacy category.

What are the benefits for offering these types of projects?

These types of projects help the community realize the power of design for social change. They also give student's a multi-dimensional perspective on the design process and the power of design.

Students show more commitment, and responsibility towards these projects, and they are definitely engaging in their communities on a deeper level.

They are learning that they can do professional quality work if guided properly, and they care more about the work they are producing because it is a real-world project. There is a bit of a competitive spirit between them as well, because they are vying against each other for the client's approval.

How are these projects integrated and facilitated within your curriculum?

In Graphic Design One, client projects are the last piece of the class, and take between three and four weeks to complete. The goal is to incorporate what students have learned in the applications of typography, imagery, and concepting together with real-world problem solving.

The NPOs are involved in various capacities depending upon their own preferences. Some want to be involved at every stage, including presenting their problem to the class, in-progress critiques, and final presentations. Others just want to see the end result.

Most of the work presented to the clients gets produced. Sometimes it is frustrating to the students when clients choose not to use the work. In those situations we have an opportunity to discuss the process in context of the real world, and talk about how this type of situation could very well happen with paid client projects as well.

Do the students enjoy these types of projects?

Yes. Student feedback is really, really positive. Some students come to me after the class is over, wanting to know how they can do more of this kind of work in the future.



AN IDEA FOR CHANGE GRAPHIC DESIGN PROJECTS ENCOURAGE ART FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD

At first glance, the four panels could be advertising anything—allergy medicine, maybe. Or antidepressants. A closer look at the poster-sized pieces hanging in the SoFA Gallery reveals the more noble nature of Ambica Prakash's master's project, aptly titled "An IDEA for Change."

A recent graduate of IU's master's program in graphic design, Prakash devoted her project to promoting volunteerism by sharing the four-step process (IDEA=Inquire, Discover, Experience, Act) she herself went through in shifting from passive observer to active participant in the community.

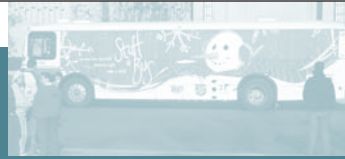
"After I'd left home [in New Delhi, India] and studied in different cultures, I started looking at disparity in different countries and cultures and how people use their resources," she said. "In undergrad, I made a lot of critical commentary on over-consumption and environmental issues. In graduate school, I started trying to see how I could be an active participant trying to initiate dialogue and discussion for positive change through graphic design." Growing up in India, certain things were ingrained in her early on: turn off the lights when you leave a room, try to finish what's on your plate. "It's a big country, rich with culture and heritage, but also a lot of parity and disparity. Part of me always wanted to do something but didn't know how."

Each panel of the exhibit is coupled with one of the four elements—earth, fire, water, and air—along with inspirational quotes and questions designed to inspire self-reflection and, ultimately, action. Accompanying the exhibit is a pocket-sized workbook filled with questions such as "What role do I play in my community?" and "Do I have a good BALANCE in my life?"

Prakash left Bloomington in summer 2005 for a teaching position in Wisconsin, but the service programs she initiated in her Introduction to Graphic Design classes continue. Prakash and IU professor James Reidhaar recently worked together to institutionalize service learning in the course. "The whole design program has a component of giving back to the community," said Reidhaar, who has brought service projects into his classroom for the past 25 years.

Reidhaar has been the driving force behind such community initiatives as Design for Human Need in 1985, a showcase of 300 pieces of student work that highlighted issues and promoted social service organizations. "Ambica and I discussed a way to standardize the graphic design program so service was at the gateway. Our idea was that before students even applied to go on to a higher level with a portfolio, they would know that service was part of being a designer," he said.

Prakash formed a partnership between her class and Bloomington Parks and Recreation three semesters ago, creating trail signs for the organization as a model assignment for her students. Her classes have since made posters promoting heart-healthy activities



LEFT: BLOOMINGTON PARKS AND RECREATION TRAIL SYMBOL PROJECT FOR FIRST-YEAR GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENTS. ABOVE: PROFESSOR REIDHAAR'S B.F.A. GRAPHIC DESIGN STUDENTS CHECK OUT THE BUS WRAP THEY DESIGNED FOR THE SALVATION ARMY'S STUFF-A-BUS DONATION DRIVE.

such as swimming and playing tennis, targeted at all age groups. "We've moved through a pilot project to institutionalizing the project, letting students know it's a service exercise," said Reidhaar. "We've let that client know we'll work for them as much as they want."

IU graphic design instructor Jenny El-Shamy said social service is one of the reasons she got into graphic design in the first place. "Graphic design for public good always intrigued me more than commercial graphic design," said El-Shamy. Her Bachelor of Fine Arts seminar always culminates with a project for a local client, usually a nonprofit. This spring, the class designed a logo for Amethyst House, a nonprofit rehabilitation center in Bloomington. "Those are the most rewarding projects—the Monroe County Humane Association, Amethyst House, the IU Office for Women's Affairs—even projects for the university, promoting diversity. It's more fulfilling and powerful than designing food packaging or selling something."

IU student Cassie Wright took two years of classes with El-Shamy, including Production for the Graphic Designer, Professional Practice, and the B.F.A. seminar in which students created the new Amethyst House logo. Her favorite assignment was a project for a Professional Practice class in which students were assigned a series of posters that argued a certain viewpoint on a political or social issue of their choice. Wright's project promoted breast cancer awareness. "I think it was the first time I really used my designs to help settle some emotions and feelings that I had inside," said Wright, whose mother, grandmothers, and aunts have all been diagnosed with the disease.

El-Shamy helped connect Wright with Bloomington's WonderLab Museum of Science, Health, and Technology, where she worked as an unpaid graphics intern before being hired as a part-time designer this fall. "My time at WonderLab has really helped shape me as a designer and as a person. Before my internship, I never would have guessed that I'd enjoy graphic design for children," said Wright. "After my time at WonderLab, I'd love to have a future in design for kids, maybe even in combination with publication design." Wright said the most gratifying part of working for a nonprofit is the sense of community. "We may not have a lot of money to put behind projects, but we have more heart behind them than anyone can buy."

For Prakash, her master's project was more of a beginning than a culmination of her graduate studies. "One of the reasons I chose to do this was that it took me a couple of years to find my links to the community and start volunteering some of my design services [to the Center for Sustainable Living, Shalom Community Center, and Bloomington Parks and Recreation]. I was trying to bring a fresh perspective to this idea of civic engagement, and hopefully inspire others to become more active in their community," she said. "I've been fortunate. A lot of people have one profession and then they volunteer on the side. For me, I'll be able to make a difference and do it for a living."

— Jennifer Piurek

HIGH FLIERS IU ARTISTS FINALISTS IN INDIANAPOLIS AIRPORT PROJECT

When IU Fine Arts alumnus Dale Enochs, '81, found out he'd been named a finalist in the Indianapolis Airport's public art project, he was pleased—and humbled. "The fact that other artists were included whose work I really admire and am familiar with made it that much more interesting and exciting," said the limestone sculptor, listing fellow finalists Tom Otterness, Albert Paley, and Barbara Grygtus as some of the contemporary artists he most respects.

More than 500 artists from six countries and 39 U.S. states submitted their work for consideration in the competition. Fifty-two were named finalists. And of the 52, four are from Bloomington, the most of any city in Indiana. In addition to Enochs, finalists include IU Fine Arts alumna Amy Brier, also a limestone sculptor; and Fine Arts faculty members Betsy Stirratt, a painter; and Jeff Wolin, a photographer.

"My work is shown in museums all over the world, but not in public spaces like airports or shopping malls," said Wolin, known for his moving photographs of Holocaust survivors and Vietnam War veterans. "But I like the idea of being able to do something in a more public domain that allows people who don't usually seek out art to experience it."

Julia Muney Moore, public art administrator for the Indianapolis Airport (which is currently undergoing an extensive renovation), said the project is part of an overall

airport arts and culture program. "The impression visitors take away of any location includes some influence from their experiences with its arts community," said Moore. The project's master plan includes visual art, a series of temporary exhibitions and displays, performances by local and regional artists, and information about the area's cultural resources.

Stirratt feels her work is consistent with Indiana's current surge of activity surrounding the life sciences. Over time, Stirratt's paintings have evolved from human body parts and images of food to biology-related pieces that embody growth, movement, and change. "I thought this would be a great opportunity not only to do something I want to do, but to do something that's relevant to the state," she said.

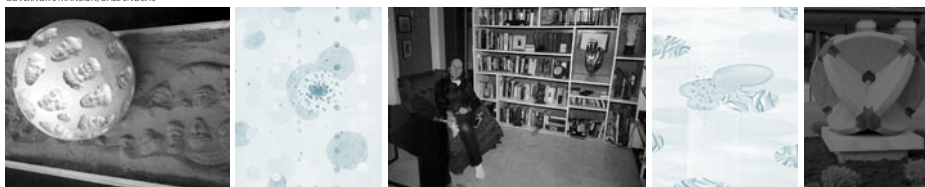
To Brier, the airport project is a way to set in stone the idea that culture matters as much as sports in Indiana. Her proposal tells the story of limestone and the "people in an industry that is unique to Indiana."

Moore said the selection panel looked for a variety of artwork, aesthetics, and media that the airport could continually draw from over the next several years. Forty of the 52 finalists were asked to submit schematic designs, which were on public view and on the airport's Web site from April 25 through May 8. The finished works will be unveiled at the newly designed airport's opening in 2008.

Wolin, for one, hopes that by making art more accessible, people who wouldn't normally go to a museum will be inspired to do so—or at least be less fearful of contemporary art. "I would venture to guess that more than half the population never go to art museums past the time their school makes them go," Wolin said. "If people experienced it, they wouldn't be so afraid of it." Looking at art, Wolin points out, is a pretty good way to pass the time at the airport. "It beats the stupid television!" he says.

— Jennifer Piurek

FROM LEFT: GODS AND GODDESSES, DETAIL FROM BEES AND BALLS, AMY BRIER; MECHANISM, BETSY STIRRATT; FROM INCONVENIENT CONVERSATIONS (SEE BACK PAGE), JEFFREY WOLIN; STRUCTURE, STIRRATT; SCULPTURE OUTSIDE INDIANA GOVERNOR'S MANSION, DALE ENOCHS



HENRY RADFORD HOPE SCHOOL OF FINE ARTS 5

Indiana University
Henry Radford
Hope School of
Fine Arts
Newsletter,
Winter 2005,
page 5.

MEASURING UP — STOUT DESIGN STUDENTS TEAM UP WITH UNITED WAY TO REPLACE FUNDRAISING THERMOMETER SIGNS

The Dunn County News

By Tom McDonald, Special to The News

<http://www.dunnconnect.com/articles/2007/02/12/news/news06.txt>

The “thermometer” signs that once showed the progress of United Way’s annual fundraising campaigns needed to go. Not only were they getting a little faded and worn from years of use, they used an old United Way logo.

The easiest choice for United Way would have been to buy new signs that merely changed to the new logo. However, many United Ways across the country were questioning the whole idea of using a thermometer. The image got the point across about the money collected, but it did not say anything about what United Way was all about.

Project partnership

Enter Ambica Prakash, professor of graphic design at the University of Wisconsin-Stout. An accomplished graphic artist in her own right, she is also a published exponent of service learning — the idea that what students learn in the classroom should be combined with real-world experience in the community that benefits everyone involved.

“Service learning in graphic design involves the students in engaging a client, in this case the United Way, in a professional manner, as well as focusing on what they need to learn in the class in order to carry out the assignment,” said Prakash. “This way what the students learn is not learned in a vacuum, but rather as a real experience in solving real problems for actual clients by means of properly understood and executed graphic design.

“I contacted Diane Simon, executive director of the United Way of Dunn County early in the fall,” she continued. “I asked her if she knew of anyone who could benefit from this sort of service learning project. She said, ‘Yes, we could.’”

Ms. Simon added, “We began working on a project to replace the old thermometers with signs that better reflected what United Way really is and does. I am very excited by the idea of bringing the community and the university together in ways from which both benefit.”

Prakash assigned the project to her 300-level Design One course: to create a product that United Way needed, but could not afford without cutting into the funding of its partner agencies. It would also have to fit the learning requirements of the course, and involve the active participation of United Way in the creative process.

It was settled that the students would each design a new sign to replace the thermometer signs. With that, about 20 students in each of Prakash’s two Design One sections went to work for their new client, the United Way.

Learning more than design principles

“It took a lot of time,” said Bridgette Crozier, a junior from Fountain City majoring in industrial design. “Ambica asked us what we knew about United Way, and most of us knew very little. So part of the assignment was to find out what United Way does in the community.”

Andrew Beckman, a sophomore from Minnesota majoring in multimedia design, said, “I knew United Way was a nonprofit agency that helped people. But I associated it with its NFL partnership, and thought of it like a children’s hospital or some such. It was cool learning what United Way really does.”

The classes brainstormed ideas, and each student chose a concept they wanted to work on.

“I first thought about doing a race-car theme,” Beckman said. “But then I thought about the Dunn County area, and what United Way does to help people help themselves. So I came up with the ice fishing idea, and worked on that. I think it gets the idea across that United Way helps people help themselves, and the string of fish that replaces the thermometer gives quick and understandable information about how close they are to their goal.”

“For me, the idea to use a little girl reaching up didn’t change from my first concept,” said Crozier. “What took work was refining the image and the text to say the right thing quickly. The United Way does so many things that it was challenging to come up with the image and text that conveyed such a broad range of activities. Using the outline of a little girl reaching up to tell people about where they are in reaching the goal seemed like a strong and appropriate concept.”

Design decision

Students worked on the project for over month, coming together with United Way representatives regularly to refine the concepts, images and texts. The final decision as to which two signs would actually be used was a two-step process.

“First, I had three students from each section review all of the signs developed by the other section,” said Prakash. “This eliminated bias. Then the 17 signs chosen by the reviewers were displayed at the Furlong Gallery. A reception was held for the students and United Way staff and board members. The students voted on their top choices, and the United Way board members made the actual final selection.

“The students got a much better, more realistic learning experience than they would have if there had not been a real client involved,” she continued. “They found out how to learn about their client’s business, which used and improved their listening skills. They learned that professionals can enjoy being civic-minded, and not always commercial. And they learned about the community they live in.”

Beckman, one of the winners, said, “It is way cool to win. It’s especially good to know that everyone in the two classes was just as qualified as I was to win. In another way, I think it speaks well for the classes that we worked so hard, learned, and cared so much for the project, beyond just what it could do for our careers.”

Crozier added, “I’m a junior, and don’t have as extensive a portfolio of work to show when I apply for internships and jobs. Having been chosen for this honor will really help.”

Beckman’s sign, “Reel in the benefits of giving,” is located on the west side of North Broadway in Sanna Park.

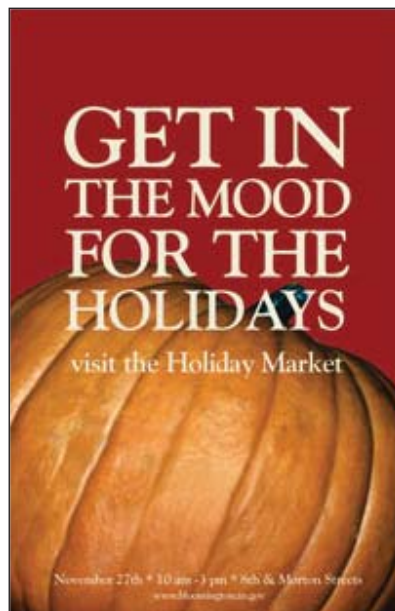
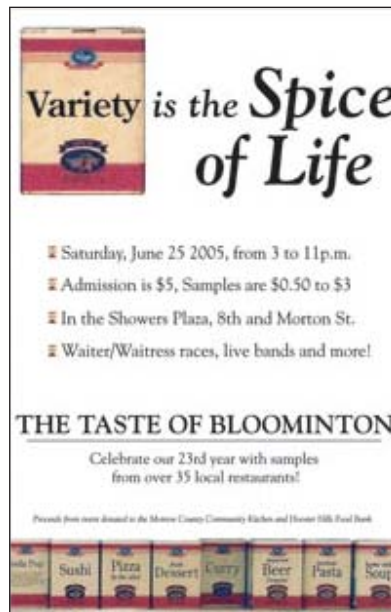
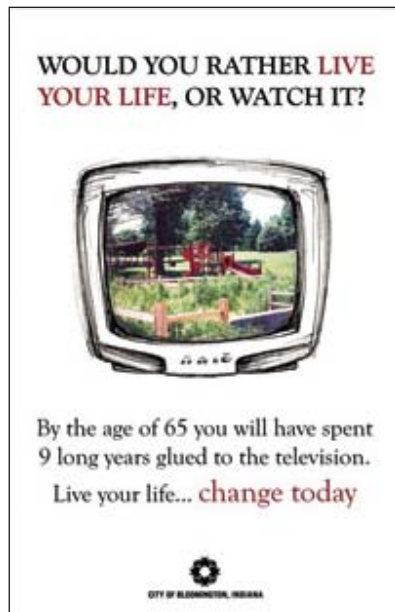
Crozier’s sign, “Reach out, improve our community” is on the south side of Crescent Street just as it joins Stout Road.

Project: Sophomore Service Learning

BLOOMINGTON POSTERS

http://ambicaprakash.com/teaching_08.shtml

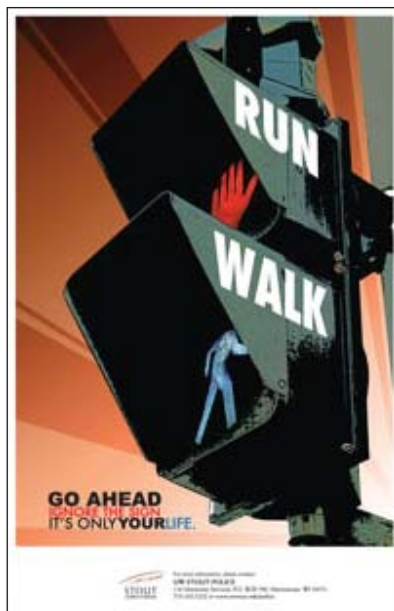
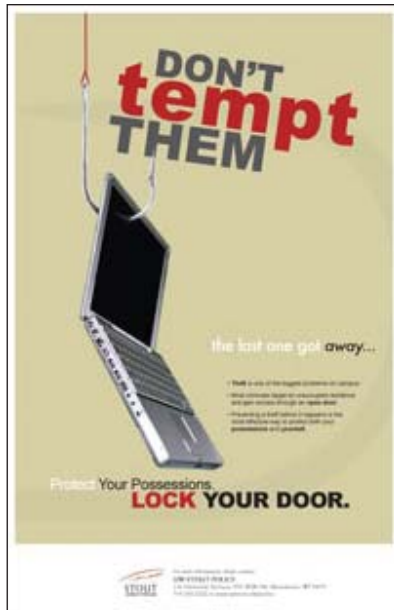
Students are asked to design educational and informational posters that promote a healthy and conscious lifestyle. They are expected to create a balance between concept and form, typography and imagery, as well as learn to identify the principle message. In this exercise, there is to be a call-to-action that is specific and not generic.



UNIVERSITY POLICE POSTERS

http://ambicaprakash.com/teaching_09.shtml

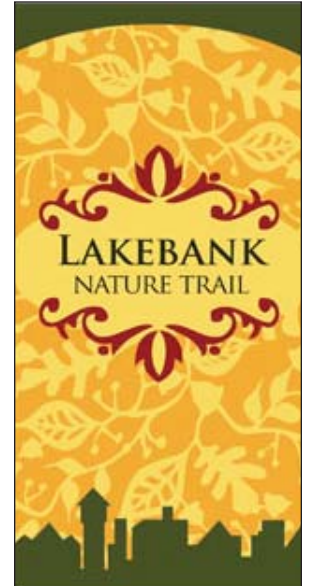
In this service-learning project, students designed educational posters for campus issues (apartment theft, drinking and driving, identity theft, sexual harassment, etc.). The University Police representatives selected 9 posters to be printed and displayed on campus.



LAKEBANK NATURE TRAIL

http://ambicaprakash.com/teaching_10.shtml

Another service-learning project, students designed interpretive signage and banners for a city trail. The biology department wrote the copy and provided the images of the flora and fauna in the area, while the students worked on developing a grid to house the information. For the banner, the students worked on developing bold, attractive, yet simple imagery to mark the beginning of the trail.



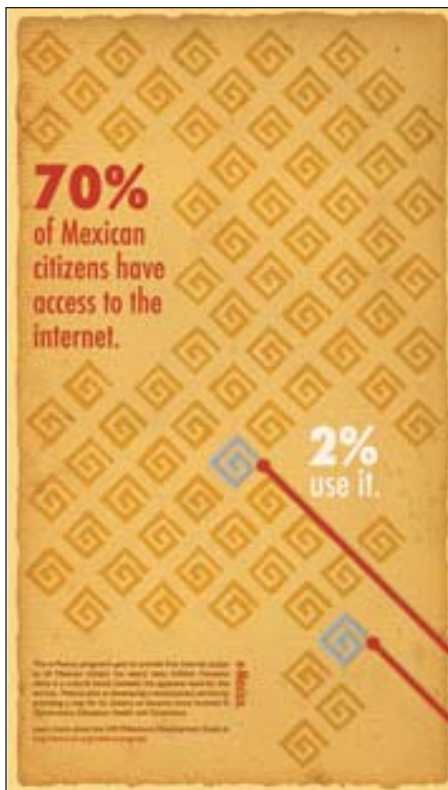
Project: Junior Level Project

UN MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

http://ambicaprakash.com/teaching_08.shtml

During this intensive project, the class is assigned one of the eight UN Millennium Development Goals and a continent. The students research their topic and find a data set to visualize a poster, postcard and billboard design via information graphics. They create relationships between the written words and visual images, while exploring the richness and diversity of graphic language, indigenous art & iconography in the world.

This project was designed to introduce students to issues in the world while exposing them to different cultures. As a part of this project we also printed and produced a poster book. We are continuing this project this semester [winter 2007] and are producing a postcard and bumper sticker book.

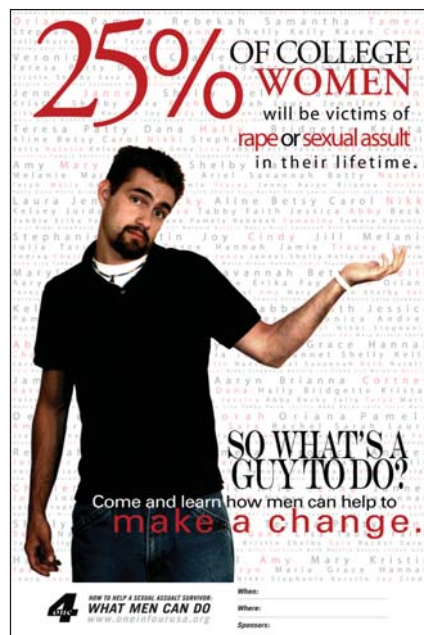
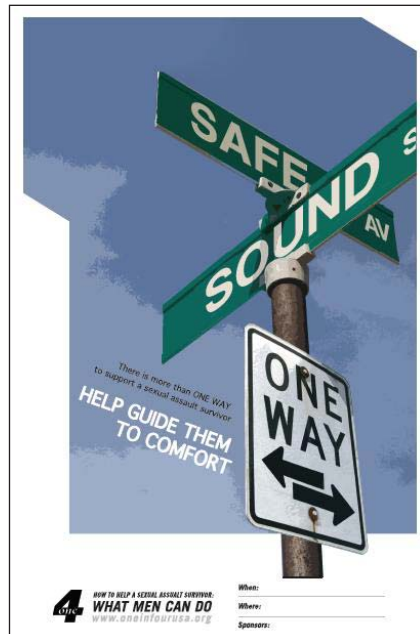
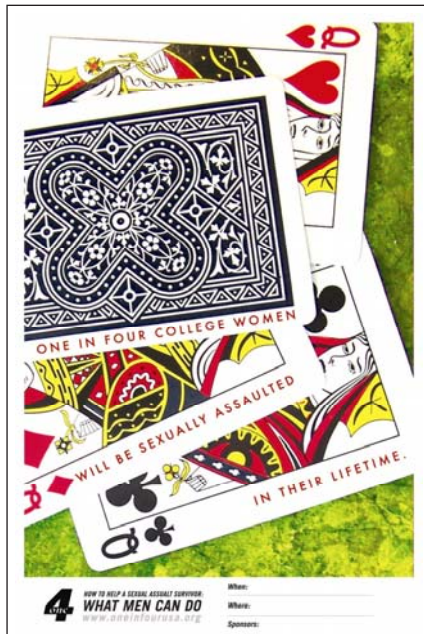




Project: One in Four

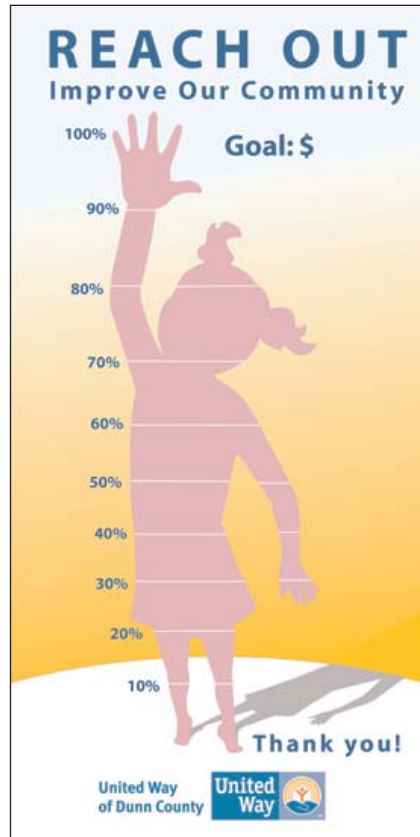
<http://www.oneinfourusa.org/posters.php>

One in Four, Inc. previously NO MORE is a 501 (c) 3 non-profit organization dedicated to preventing rape by the thoughtful application of theory and research to rape prevention programming. One in Four provides presentations, training, and technical assistance to men and women, with a focus on all-male programming targeted toward colleges, high schools, the military, and local community organizations.



Project: United Way

United Way Goal Signage: United Way of Dunn County in the City of Menomonie runs a yearly fundraising campaign. The signage design raised visibility for the local community on the specific goal amount of the year's campaign and tracked the accomplishments over time. Students ideated strong concepts for the signage and avoided clichés. All imagery was original and illustrative.



In addition, this semester my Graphic Design One class is working on a service-learning project with a non-profit in India.