

**AIGA Design Educators Conference**

**SCHOOLS OF THOUGHTS 2**

**POISED TOWARD THE FUTURE OF GRAPHIC DESIGN EDUCATION**

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PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE=PRACTICE BEING PROFESSIONAL

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## PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE = PRACTICE BEING PROFESSIONAL

What do student designers need to learn in a *Professional Practices* class? Contracts? Professional ethics? Estimating/bidding a job? Business etiquette? Marketing?

Yes. Yes. Yes. And yes.

How can we best teach these important skills? Lecture? Research? Writing?

Sure. But students don't take these typical activities as seriously as we teachers might like. Since I teach at a large community college, I'm very aware of another reality faced by our students: they often compete for jobs with candidates who've had two more years of time and training to hone their skills. I'm always looking for anything that might give our students a competitive edge.

In teaching *Professional Practices* I thought it better to try to create a situation in which students would have to work together as professionals rather than reading about how to do it. I wanted to use the class to encourage force them to begin creating the professional network that is critical to success in any field. So I structured the class around a series of bi-weekly studio visits alternating with more traditional lecture-based classes.

Since professionals typically work as part of a team. I divided the class into three teams. Each team was responsible for arranging one or more studio visits. As an alternative, they could invite a designer to class to do a presentation. Either way their responsibilities included:

RESEARCHING design firms in the area; early in the semester we listed all the possibilities and the class voted for the firms/topics they were most interested in. After these choices were made, each group had to:

CONTACT the firm; sometimes they had to try more than one to get a "yes." Since this class meets from 6-10 pm, studio visits had to take place after normal work hours.

ARRANGE date and time; if a guest was visiting us, the group had to provide light refreshments for the group;

DESIGN, print and distribute an invitation/map for their classmates;

CHOOSE a place to gather after the tour to discuss the experience;

DESIGN, print and mail a thank you note to the firm.

The goal was to involve students in the entire process, beginning to end. Not incidentally this ~~gave them the opportunity~~ forced them to meet and talk with professionals in the Cleveland area. The process was difficult for many students, especially those who lacked self-confidence. But the results were good. It gave them a taste of the world they were about to enter. It brought a reality into the classroom that I as an instructor could never do. And the process benefited the college by creating an awareness of our program that has strengthened our ties to the professional community.