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# 2009 Academic Summit

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## Educational Program Summary Outline

# San Diego State University

### Program Summary

Art 454 Environmental Graphic Design is an upper division elective in the Graphic Design major of the School of Art, Design, and Art History at San Diego State University. The course description reads: "Identification and communication systems applied to environmental solutions. Landmark and wayfinding signage systems in interior, exterior, and architectural environments in collaboration with interior design students." (This semester we did not collaborate with interior design students.)

The culminating assignment for Spring 2009: "Design a signage program that solves the problem of finding one's way around the Art Building. Install the solution and test it at the end-of-semester 2009 Spring Show and Open House."

### Faculty

Professor Susan Merritt with support from on-campus environmental graphic designer Jeremy Blake of the SDSU Sign Shop and Graduate Assistant Namita Sharma, an MA candidate in Graphic Design

### Course Goals

Learning outcomes included:

- Work within a designing process, including data collection and analysis (predesign); schematic design; design development; testing; and evaluation.
- Develop sign information content systems, including kinds of information, hierarchy of content, and navigation.
- Develop graphic-typographic systems for optimum communication, including specifying appropriate typefaces, type treatment, graphics, shape, form, color, and layout.
- Learn about basic sign materials and codes.
- Expand design thinking from the two-dimensional into the three-dimensional realm.
- Experiment with ideation techniques, such as thought mapping, word lists, sketching.
- Interview users and determine needs.
- Design and work with grids and proportional systems, such as the Fibonacci series and the golden section.
- Use dimensions and measurable scales to convey sizes.
- Construct models.
- Interact with other students in discussions and critiques.
- Improve writing and presentation skills

### Lesson Plan Outline

The assignments as stated in the syllabus included:

Required reading in "Signage and Wayfinding Design: A Complete Guide to Creating Environmental Graphic Design Systems" by Chris Calori published by John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 2007. ISBN: 978-0-471-74891-5

Various Exercises: For example, create a model of a project completed in Graphic Design 1, such as the star symbol assignment, or Graphic Design 2, such as the key or leaf translation; and complete a technical drawing in Adobe Illustrator of a stop sign and construct an accompanying model to scale.



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Field Trips: On-campus Sign Shop, a division of the San Diego State University Physical Plant, and Fabrication Arts, a full-service custom fabricator of environmental signs and graphics located at 2926 Main Street in San Diego, California

Project One: Signage and wayfinding system for the Art Building at SDSU, home of the School of Art, Design, and Art History

Project Two: Conceptual Graphic Communication System for a given site to include:

- Signage and wayfinding: create a unique identity and help visitors find their way through the environment
- Interpretation: tells the story about the meaning or concept or theme; the site; or event
- Placemaking: including gateways, portals, gathering points, or landmarks that establish a sense of place
- Accompanying Print Piece: for example, a printed map, a brochure, or guide.

Presentation/Process Book: three-ring, spiral or Wire-O binding

## Final Report

This semester the Environmental Graphic Design students participated in an implemented project in collaboration with Jeremy Blake, an environmental graphic designer who works at the Sign Shop on campus. Having Jeremy involved enhanced the learning opportunities for students because he brought real concerns to the classroom, especially with regard to materials and installation. Having Jeremy involved on a regular basis would definitely be an added benefit.

During the analysis and conceptual design stages, students in Art 454 conducted user surveys and familiarized themselves with the Art Building's traffic flow patterns, points of decision-making, and assessed the signage needs. The students created personas of users of the Art Building (Art majors, professors, staff, visitors/prospective students, and alumni) and imagined user scenarios. They surveyed users to acquire feedback on the sense of place and the building's wayfinding (or lack thereof). This was a very useful component that forced students to realize that they were designing for an intended audience and brought purpose to their efforts. The final stage presented here focuses on applying creative skills to solve the problem revealed by the initial studies.

Students initially had a difficult time dealing with the conceptual aspects and transferring skills learned in previous classes to the demands of a signage program. Project One, the intention of which was a fully developed signage program for the Art Building, was concluded early. Project Two, which was to be based on an entirely conceptual space, was abandoned and the remainder of the semester was spent conceptualizing, designing, and installing wayfinding signage and establishing a sense of place for the end-of-semester Spring Show and Open House. It proved to be a good assignment because it provided the students with an opportunity to develop a sense of place in an environment with which they were familiar and to theme the signage program for the event.

Students took their lead from responses to their survey about the building: "Needs to be more creative." "Make it less boring." "Signage definitely would help." "Drab. Boring. Uninspired." "We have elevators? There's a main entrance?" The project concept revolved around the main characteristic of the Art major persona: "Students are always broke." Students chose recycled cardboard boxes as the substrate for the wayfinding system and room identification signs. A team of three students photographed classmates holding cardboard signs. Some of the signs became directories and others supported sayings determined by each student, such as "Will code HTML for pizza." Other teams focused on developing icons for a room identification system and designing a system of directional arrows for wayfinding. The signage program provided continuity while allowing for individual creativity.

Everyone was pleased with the results and students achieved many of the learning outcomes. Because the Art Building has no signage, it lends itself to a project like this and I would do this



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assignment again. Next time I would require more models and implementation drawings prior to installation and encourage stronger three-dimensional interpretations to push graphic design students beyond two-dimensional thinking.

### Samples of Student Work

