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What was your college major?

I have a B.F.A. in Graphic Design from the Kansas City Art Institute and an M.F.A. in Design Theory from the University of Kansas.

Did this major lead you to your current career?

Indirectly, yes. I worked briefly in Chicago for an actuarial/benefits company and was responsible for designing their printed materials detailing employee benefits plan programs. After completing my undergraduate degree, I worked for five years in the design field here in Kansas City. At Russell Stover I did both graphic and package design; it was fun seeing work I'd done on display in their shops. I worked for the National Office Machine Dealer's Association (NOMDA) immediately after Stover's. I was responsible for their monthly, sixty-four page, color magazine. Following that job I started teaching at JCCC as an adjunct instructor. After one semester as an adjunct, I was offered a full-time position. It was during my tenure at JCCC that I completed my M.F.A.

What are the characteristics that your most successful students possess?

- An intense passion for the creative process.
- An 'over-the-top' inquisitive nature.
- Being able to 'get a read' on current trends and cultural influences.

- A willingness to devote time into exploring those influences. This can include following film, listening to many styles of music, being aware of the retail market and trends, reading – especially design magazines. Staying attuned to the web and movements and changes there is critical, too.

Name three things a student should know when exploring this career.

- This program is extremely demanding. Full-time students have diminished time for family commitments and a personal life.
- To be successful, you must ask questions. Go beyond what is being asked of you; always push yourself to do more, to learn more.
- Join professional organizations and clubs and participate in events and activities they sponsor. AIGA (the American Institute of Graphic Arts) is one club in particular that I recommend to students.

What skills will a student learn when pursuing this career?

To think outside the box, to possess a keen understanding of the disciplines and techniques necessary for problem solving. A student should be able to develop a schema for projects - a very detailed plan that takes your project, step by step, from the beginning to the end. To be able to understand the standards of this industry as it applies to web and print design. To complete an entire body of works for their portfolio, develop a resume, and master the skills that will be critical in helping to find employment.

For a student needing part-time employment while in college, what types of jobs provide the best experiential learning opportunities?

Seek out jobs in the retail industry where design and production are the primary tasks. Small businesses are often good prospects, too. Immerse yourself in cultural trends and stay open to the ideas that present themselves from this discovery.

If a college student is unable to find related work experience in this career field, how do you suggest he/she prepare for the workplace?

Volunteer, especially for industry-related organizations like AAF (American Advertising Federation) and AIGA. Go beyond your comfort zone. Create ideas that will cause a viewer to consider, to question. Practice drawing. Drawing anything. It is really important to understand that drawing comes first in this business. The graphic designer uses his/her computer skills to bring to life the ideas originally crafted on paper. Accept free-lance and pro-bono opportunities. They help build both your portfolio and resume and can later be an important link to a job.

Is there a selection process for entering this program?

No. However, we do conduct a Portfolio Review each semester. Nine graphic design professionals from our local business community visit and complete, without faculty or students present, a review. Each student's works are ranked on a 1-10 scale and then also ranked within their peer groups. This on-going review will provide the students with a very honest critique of how they fare with the competition, a critique that anticipates the rigors of the working world.