

# A pioneer interactive proposal in brazilian graphic design education

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## Abstract

We present the structure of a pioneer and specific course in graphic design, which includes interaction between subjects. Design history and brazilian law system are mentioned. The intention is to expose concept, project method, objectives and activities that are responsible for the identity of the course.

## Key words

Graphic Design Education, Interaction of Subjects, Continuous Studies

## 1. Graphic Design Education in Brazil and Our Specific Purpose

In Brazil, Design Education formal starter in 60's at ESDI – Escola Superior de Desenho Industrial, affiliated to the Rio de Janeiro state University – UERJ (Universidade do Estado do Rio de Janeiro). The major ideas to compose the first structure came from two different origins. In one side the thoughts of Alexandre Wollner, from Ulm School, and, on the other hand, from Aloisio Magalhães - a self made designer.

As Wollner, Karl Bergmiller and Max Bill, both from Ulm School, were very important to establish the initial concepts and its adaptation for the brazilian reality, like local industries and demands. Aloisio Magalhães, working with them, founded an specific Design office named PVDI. Aloisio used his personal contacts with institutions and governmental agencies to difund our graphic design results. Also, he participated of many international meetings showing students and professional works.



1966

At PVDI design office, many brands were developed, as Light (electricity services), INSS (social security service) and Furnas (energy company).

Many of our most important designers worked with Alosio Magalhães, and his way of giving credits for all assistants, certainly was a great influence for the following generations.

At 70's many other schools, in Rio de Janeiro, São Paulo and Rio Grande do Sul, started to offer design courses. All courses were called Industrial Design with two subdivisions: graphic design (or visual communication) and product design (or product project).

Till today, Design in Brazil is not legally recognized as a formal activity, so in our legal system we are not allowed to have a structure of a council. On its origins, many professional associations had start and finish. Nowadays, we can verify some regional and national initiatives to integrate Design and Industry. Also, academic and professional communities are always trying to upgrade recognition of Design activities.

The point is that after computer graphics possibilities, many other related activities started to be named as Design. Architects, for example, when working with interiors are here called interior designers. Fashion stylists are called fashion designers, even scene directors are called designers.

It seems that, in Brazil, the specific design education, as its origins all around the world, have lost a little of its identity. Although, to be important to mention that we promote some scientific meetings and have publications, and also, a permanent concern about research and with the *criteria* to Master and PhD courses. We recently conquered a specific representation in governmental agencies – CAPES and CNPq – that provide funds for academic research and researchers.

The Ministério da Educação – MEC, brazilian Minister of education, register, in all the country, 318 four- year courses using the term Design and 46 named Industrial Design.

A specific law, called LDB (number 9394, recent version of 1996), authorized a new possibility for educational system in general. It means an offer of a course shorter than a four year regular under graduation.

So, in 1998, Universidade Estácio de Sá, a private University, founded the Instituto Politécnico Universitário, where professors had the opportunity to purpose new courses. Based in accessibility, efficacy and employment, the IPU offer 84 undergraduate courses, in very specific fields, with low prices and shorter time than *traditional* under graduation (2 ½ years).

A group of professors identify that Graphic Design could be considered as a specific field of work, and that we could contribute for the education in design.

In January, 1999, starts the Design Graphic Course of the Instituto Politécnico Universitário composed by a specific academic structure based on a document elaborated by Specialists Design Commission (DSc. Rita Couto, DSc. Gustavo Bomfim and DSc. Vicente Cauduro). Its document purposes that subjects can be separated in 4 groups: history and theory; graphic planning and project; usability and production. We introduced an extra group related with design management.

## **2. Formal Structure**

The course is offered in two different neighborhoods in Rio de Janeiro (campus Centro I and campus Barra V): in the morning – between 7 and 12 am – and at night – between 7 and 11 pm.

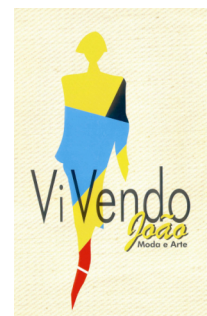
Thus, the academic structure is based on 5 groups of subjects: visual language (4 credits); graphic project and production (11 credits); image and computer graphics (11 credits); management and law studies (4 credits) and essential theories (12 credits).

The 42 credits are distributed in 5 *terms*. In each one we purpose integrated projects joining the contents of the specific term and the former one. The subjects are pre-established in each of the terms. In periodic meetings among teachers, we exchange experiences and ideas of integrated projects for each term. The first exams are composed by theoretical tests and practical ones, and for the second the projects join principles of many of the subjects.

For the beginning, are 9 subjects: two of visual language and drawing; three of art, gestalt and communication theory; typography; photography; graphic expression and materials; bases of computer graphics. The main purpose is to develop graphic and visual expression. At the end of this first term, the students develop a poster and a flyer, examined for each professor considered specific skills. The contents must consider a social concern as violence, health, childhood, among many other possibilities. In theory, we ask students to find institutions and other kind of groups that can provide real information about the situation choose, and also is been requested a visual research and analyses. They should present the results and explain technical, graphic options and the conceptual intentions.

In the second term, they start to learn desktop publishing, where the main project is about brand visual system. We purpose the real experience of finding a small business – can be informal – which should be visited regularly. All knowledge from the first term are considered.

The following project is devoted to books and magazines design. In computer graphics they are also learning multimedia and animation. We also push them to real situations and social concerns.



*Project developed with students of Fashion Course.*

The last two terms allow them the possibility to choose their own interests, and develop more complex projects. At the end, they have a subject dedicated to organize a portfolio and a formal curriculum.

### **3. Creators and Creatures**

The group of professors is mostly graduated at the Pontifícia Universidade Católica, catholic University in Rio de Janeiro (PUC-Rio), and was chosen as having academic researches and professional experience. Considering



*Multimedia Project at Museu Nacional de Belas Artes.*

this, and our regular meetings, we are certainly always maintaining our classes up to date with Design.

Eighty percent of the group is formed by graphic designers and we have a significant number of Masters and PhD in Design (2 PhD and 8 Masters). It's relevant to mention that in Brazil we only have one Master and PhD program offered at PUC-Rio.

We are a group of 38 teachers and each of us is responsible for two subjects at least. It means that even in a private university structure, that in Brazil don't offer employment guarantees, during those 7 years, we built a kind of identity to this specific course.

Our group of students is very heterogeneous. Some already works on the field, generally in clerical positions in the graphic industry, but we receive also people without previous knowledge, looking for a free-lance activity.



*Student and teacher - Banda Gráfica. Inspired in Bauhaus activities.*

So far, we have already graduated around 600 graphic designers. Eighty percent of these are already working in the field: some have started their own business, some are in free-lance activity, and others have achieved better positions at companies, and these are the clerks mentioned above.

We maintain contact, personally and by e mail, with these professionals, always inviting them for exhibitions and some other special projects of the course, trying to establish a continuous evaluation of our purpose.

#### **4. Designing with, most as for**

In terms, of the professional future perspectives, we offer multiple possibilities to work on, based on local and national demand. We trust that the Social Design methodology provides flexibility for each student to find and improve your own talents and skills.

Even that our formal education in Design had started 45 years ago, the use of scientific methodology in Design is still in process. Along all these years, some schools developed their own identities revealed in students' project results and in teachers' scientific communications.

The catholic University (PUC-Rio), from where Graphic Design teachers came, adopts as basis the Social Design methodology. It means that graphic design projects, even inside the academy, must consider as a priority the real life and must, necessarily, starting on the anthropological method of participant observation.

Our concept and project method starts on the moment the choice of a subject. Everything can be accepted, as if we feel a real intention to develop the research. Then, it became necessary to have an approach with a community that has the desire of design. To identify more precisely this desire, students can adopt many techniques (taking pictures, talking, using drawing resources), as acquired knowledge. An investigation of the daily activities, it's useful to define objectives. Hypothesis and alternatives are next the steps. The final result is not understood as a personal creation, but as a translation. That's why we don't design for, as all process is developed with.

## 5. Interactions

The methodology adopted gives importance to desire and dream. In a certain way, we believe that we are offering a possibility for each of students to build their own identity as a graphic designer. A professional with abilities and capacities to find opportunities and develop them, as projects, in a creative way.

Even considering the hard structure of the course, we purpose a intense immersion in Graphic Design along the 2 years duration. So, other activities for the week ends are organized. Can be marked:

a. Graphic Design Experimental Office

On Saturdays, a group of voluntary students, supervised by a professor, develop graphic projects for the University. It's a way to improve professional responsibilities.



*Students and teachers presenting a visual project for the inauguration of a new campus – Tom Jobim.*

b. Exhibitions

The University offer the space of an art gallery for Graphic Design students in July and professor use a small restaurant, located at campus Centro I, for one week exhibitions.



*Students participating of volunteers campaign.*

c. Special Events (with other courses)

We participate of many events, interacting with other courses offered by the University, developing graphic design projects.



## 6. To Be Continued ...

Along the years, we could identify a request, from the students, for continuous studies. Facing this new project as the serious initiative, we start with an offer of a Master Course in Visual Arts. It also means that we could test our recognition between educational design and arts system.

The course started in October 2004, and another class in April 2005.

Among the classes we have 30% of former graduates from Graphic Design looking for improvement in the theoretical-practical field of academic research.

The group of professors mixes some from Graphic Design Course with special guests. *Old professors* are having the experience of seeing the results of their work, and *special guests* are having the opportunity of an experience beyond a very special and emotional purpose in graphic design education.

For 2005 and 2006 we are organizing other courses in Typography, Brand System and Semiotics.

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