

Graphic Attack

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May 16, 2013



The annual Parkland College Graphic Design Student Juried Exhibition will be in the school's art gallery until June 20. The event is an opportunity for the graphic design students to showcase their work in a public venue. Last year, around 800 people attended the exhibition.

"It's a state-of-the-art two-year program," said Paul Young, the program's director. Young has been teaching at Parkland for around 11 years.

"Most graphic design programs are four years in a university setting, such as U of I, ISU, etc.

Most students who graduate from community college programs usually don't end up holding very high quality jobs in design firms," Young said. "In our case, we manage to instruct students who hold some top positions in Champaign-Urbana. It's a pretty prestigious alumni list."

The program has an emphasis on immersing its students in the local graphic design scene. They're introduced to a lot of industry professionals while also going on field trips and getting to know the local design community.



Chicago Bulls letterpress design by Ghada Yousef. Used with permission.

The exhibition collects the best student work over the past year and displays it in the gallery.

“I think Parkland College has a fantastic art gallery,” Young said.

He considers graphic design to be different from other art and calls it “commercial art.”

“It’s no different in terms of visual communication, creativity, composition, craftsmanship,” he said. “It’s used for marketing, promotion, branding and identity. All of these are commercial activities which support commercial entities; that’s why I call it commercial art.”

The show is juried, meaning that not every submission is accepted for exhibition. The five graphic design faculty members decide on which pieces to show based on their assessment of quality.

“We reach a consensus to determine what group of pieces should be on the show, and what group shouldn’t,” Young said.

For this year’s exhibition, there were a total of 274 entries submitted, of which 209 were accepted. There will be 175 print, 24 Web and 13 motion graphics pieces shown at the gallery.

A bank of computers will be in the gallery for viewers to see students’ web designs. Young emphasizes that graduating students need to have web design in their portfolios.

“This is 2013,” he said. “You cannot call yourself a graphic designer and not have designed a website.”

Young also described the motion graphics items.

“We’ve been tinkering with teaching motion graphics for a while,” he said, and explained how students now work on things that would potentially be used in TV commercials.

The 2013 exhibition is the first year with involvement from the Champaign Urbana Design Organization (CUDO), a group that advocates local graphic design. Young, a CUDO board member, approached them with the opportunity to help students and professionals to network at the event.

“This is a networking opportunity for my students,” Young said.

Many of the members of CUDO are also former students of his.

Matthew Farrell, a Parkland student in the program, had work that was accepted for the exhibition. Young called Farrell a perfectionist.

“He loves to do logos the most, and I guess the definition of a good logo is simplicity and clarity,” Young said. “He can do that really well. He has exquisite taste when it comes to typography. He’s very hard working, detail oriented. I can see him holding a top creative position five to 10 years from now. He’s that good.”

Farrell replied: "Coming up with creative and unique solutions for clients' logos is something I pride myself on. I think that's why a lot of people do approach me. Because I'm a native of Champaign-Urbana, word of mouth about my work gets around much easier, and networking here is great."

Farrell has been working as a professional alongside being a student at Parkland.

"I started in the graphic design program about three years ago, and I'm also a freelance graphic designer," he said. "I have six or seven logos and a couple identities, which is sort of the logo applied. For instance, business cards, letterheads. I'm mostly approached for logos, and the show reflects that."

He has made logos for local businesses, some of which will be on display and others that will be available in a logo book at the show. He'll also be displaying illustrations, such as posters.

Farrell has shown his work at the past three exhibitions and considers this to be his strongest.

"I actually received an award for one of my pieces," Farrell said. "I don't know which one it is yet, they didn't tell me."

Parkland student Ghada Yousef's work also made it into the show for the second year.

"She went directly from Central High School to Parkland," Young said. "I would say she's a dedicated, hard working student who has been bitten by the bug of graphic design, and it's now in her blood. She's very passionate about this creative avenue she now has. She's self-motivated and is passionate about letterpress printing. I can absolutely say that she's easy to work with and someone you enjoy collaborating with."

Yousef replied: "I'm showing a lot of different styles of graphic design: posters, a lot of illustrations, websites. I also have my personal resume and business cards. There's branding, logos and identities. I have around 20 pieces in there. I've gotten better in a lot of styles, especially illustrations."

She's especially excited about showing her large poster illustrations, websites and work she has done for clients. Some of her freelance work came from an internship through Parkland, but she still works for other clients as a designer. Yousef also works part time at The Living Letter Press in Champaign.

"I love doing vintage styles," she said. "Using letterpress machines is one of my biggest interests right now."

Yousef also volunteers for CUDO and is looking forward to becoming a board member in the near future.

The exhibition will have a reception at the gallery on the evening of May 16. The reception, which was attended by about 150 people last year, will feature food from KoFusion and is co-sponsored by CUDO. Awards will be presented at the reception after industry professionals have judged the exhibition.

To win awards, Young said, "It's got to be creative, it's got to be different, it's got to be unique."

There's a level of professionalism that judges and jurors look for, whether or not it looks like student work or professional work.

"The students displayed a solid understanding of design principles, layout, typography, branding, presentation...on and on," said Chris Sims, one of this year's judges.

Gina Manola, another judge for the show, said, "There was a great deal of sophisticated design work on display that showed a very high level of skill and creativity. When I walked in the door and saw the work on display I knew I had my work cut out for me."

"The awards come from a variety of funding sources," Young said. "We have people within Parkland College. We also have donors."

Many donors include local organizations and businesses, such as Presence Covenant Medical Center.

"We'll have a total of \$1,300 in prize money to give away Thursday evening," Young said.

CUDO will also sponsor an independent afterparty unaffiliated with Parkland at Jupiter's in downtown Champaign after the reception on Thursday.

"It's a good self promotion kind of thing," Farrell said. "It's great opportunity to display our work to the public."