

Finding Purpose in Design Education

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In today's world, the ability to respond creatively to new challenges is demanded by everyone but making the switch from imitative and rule-bound behavior to creative innovation and flexibility requires a profound change in our attitudes about the environment, our capabilities and our selves. We currently teach a course entitled 'Finding Purpose' within the College of Design at a major university. The purpose of the course is to complement students' design skill development (a.k.a. know thy craft) with intrapersonal reflective development (a.k.a. know thyself).

'Finding Purpose' is a personalized professional orientation course designed for upper division students studying design, architecture, studio art, art or other related programs. This course provides students with the opportunity to explore alternatives open to them once they have graduated with an undergraduate degree. It also provides a time to explore and discover unique talents, and ways to express those talents in the world of work. While the course is offered within the College of Design, the number of students from outside disciplines (including journalism, education, and business—to name a few) and the number of graduate students who enroll in the course serve as testament to the powerful learning experience it offers.

Students often report that this is the single most important course they take during their academic career and we would like to share their experiences as well as reflect upon how the lessons from this course can inform and improve design education. This paper offers a descriptive overview of the course beginning with an explanation of the conceptual framework guiding its development and delivery. This is followed by a description of the course curriculum, including the learning modules and related assignments/deliverables. We conclude with the words of the students, reflections from those who have taken the course and the value they have taken from it.

Conceptual Framework

The framework that best describes the foundation for the Finding Purpose course was popularized by Daniel Goleman's 1995 book, *Emotional Intelligence*. The four primary skills (see Figure 1) that comprise emotional intelligence (or EQ) include self awareness, social awareness, self management and social skills (or relationship management). *Self awareness* refers to an individual's emotional awareness, self confidence and ability to provide accurate self-assessment. *Self management* describes one's self-control, trustworthiness, conscientiousness, adaptability, innovativeness, and self-motivation (comprised of achievement drive, commitment, initiative, and optimism). *Social awareness* relates to empathy as characterized by a service orientation, interest in and skills for developing others, valuing and leveraging diversity, and political awareness. *Social skills* describes ones styles and preferences in terms of influence, communication, leadership, being a change catalyst, conflict management, building bonds, collaboration and other team capabilities. With this framework as a foundation, the Finding Purpose course seeks to give students an opportunity to understand the nature of these skills and how they can be honed for both personal and professional benefits.



Figure 1. The four primary skill sets of emotional intelligence.

Course Curriculum

The course design is meant to be flexible. While there is a chronology that we use for the syllabus, we reserve the right to rearrange the order of the modules depending upon the students' needs and preferences. The following descriptive list of learning modules and assignments is presented as it is envisioned to progress over the semester. It does not, however, include a description of the poetry and stories that are read at the beginning of class, nor does it include a list of the numerous guest speakers who have come to share their wisdom over the years.

Design Your Time

*An inch of time is an inch of gold:
Treasure it.
Appreciate its fleeting nature;
misplaced gold is easily found,
misspent time is lost forever.*

—Loy Ching-Yuen

This module is dedicated to increasing self awareness and promoting deliberate self management. The lecture addresses the need to balance various aspects in our lives and to be conscious about how we want to spend our time. The three steps involved in designing time are 1. Analyze, 2. Strategize, and 3. Act. Analyzing one's time involves an honest assessment about what is holding one back (including technical errors, external realities, and psychological obstacles). Students are asked to use a pie chart to represent how they spend their time for one day (24-hour period) according to six categories: Personal,

Relational, Vocational, Recreational, Spiritual, and Sleep. Each category is represented by a proportion, literally a piece of the pie. The students then have to do another pie chart that illustrates how their time is divided over an entire week. When this activity is completed, students are asked to reflect upon how they spend their time and how their own perceptions of what they value match (or don't) the proportions of time spent in the various areas. The third and final part of the assignment is a schedule where students are to determine how to design their time for the semester to best satisfy their wants and needs. This is usually completed in a spreadsheet format though the students are encouraged to design their schedule in whatever way best ensures that they will create a schedule they can stick to.

Hero's Journey

Trust only movement.

Life happens at the level of events, not of words.

Trust movement.

—Alfred Adler

Based upon the writings of Joseph Campbell (Campbell, 1968), the Hero's Journey is an eleven stage template for a journey that can be recognized in the myths of many cultures across centuries of time. The eleven stages include the following:

1. Ordinary World
2. Call to Adventure
3. Refusal of the Call
4. Cross the First Threshold
5. Meeting a Mentor Who Acknowledges
6. Road of Trials
7. Supreme Ordeal
8. Ultimate Boon
9. Refusal of the Return
10. Crossing the Return Threshold
11. Master of Two Worlds

Without going into tremendous detail, this journey is easily illustrated by many of your favorite films. Try to imagine Star Wars, Lord of the Rings, or even Little Miss Sunshine according to this model. This is exactly what the students are asked to do. They are given the assignment to watch any movie they choose and apply the model of the Hero's Journey to the plot. The deliverable is a written paper reporting how different events in the movie illustrate the steps of the journey. They are also required to conclude with a paragraph describing which stage(s) the students feels him/herself to presently be at in their own Hero's Journey.

Stages of Adult Development

Nothing is worth more than this day.

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

In this module, students are introduced to the stages of adult development with emphasis placed on the novice phase (from about 17–33 years old). For each phase, students are introduced to the primary tasks of that phase. For example, in the early-adult transition phase (between the ages of about 17 and 22) these include task 1: moving out of the pre-adult world, questioning the nature of that world and one's place in it; modifying or terminating existing relationships with important persons, groups and institutions; various kinds of separations, endings and transformations made as one completes an entire season. Task 2 involves making preliminary steps into the adult world, exploring possibilities, consolidating an initial adult identity, and testing choices for adult living. This module orients the students to their own development and helps them (those in this age group anyway) to recognize that they are in a period of transition and transformation. This module also provides students with some orienting information about how those around them (i.e., family, teachers, colleagues, managers) may be in different places developmentally and offers tools for developing an empathic understanding of the differences the students may encounter in their interactions with others.

Personality Preferences

*If you follow your bliss, you put yourself on a kind of track
that has been there all the while, waiting for you,
and the life that you ought to be living is the one you are living.
Wherever you are- if you are following your bliss,
you are enjoying that refreshment,
that life within you,
all the time.*

—Joseph Campbell

In the beginning of the semester students are asked to take the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator® to determine their personality preferences. The test is taken online and the results are sent to the professor. The MBTI is a four letter type (i.e., ENTP) where each letter represents a preference for one side of a dichotomous scale. The four scales are Introvert/Extrovert, Sensing/Intuitive, Thinking/Feeling, and Judging/Perceiving. The lecture portion of this module emphasizes that the more the students understand about personality, the better able they are to judge what motivates people - and themselves. Furthermore, the more they understand about their own personality and that of other people, the better able they are to realize how others perceive them, and how others react to their own personality and style. Following the lecture, where each scale is described, students are asked to guess what their own type is. The results are then handed out to the students and they are able to determine how closely their own predictions matched the tests results.

The second lecture of this module includes in-depth descriptions of the 16 different MBTI types and offers insight into how the combination of various preferences can be recognized and accommodated. This module also discusses 'the grip,' a stressful state when an individual is in the grip of their inferior function and operating in an uncharacteristic way. Insight about what puts different personality types in the grip and how they can be dealt with is also offered. This lesson not only helps the students learn about what triggers them and what helps them respond to stressful events and situations, but they also learn about how 'the grip' manifests itself in others and what tools can help them interact with others who are demonstrating 'grip-like' behavior.

Values

*You are today where your thoughts have brought you.
You will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you.*

—James Allen

The module about values begins with a simple story. The students are given a fictional scenario involving six people inhabiting two neighboring islands who choose to act in very different ways according to a few presented predicaments. Students are then asked to individually rank the story characters from one (highest) to six (lowest). Then groups of four students are asked to debate their individual rankings and arrive at a consensus ranking based upon a primary value. Heated discussion typically ensues within the groups and across the class when team rankings are reported. This atmosphere leads into a discussion about types of values (universal, cultural, and individual). The criteria for determining a value are also discussed and include: 1. choosing (a value must be freely chosen), 2. Prizing (the value should be cherished and easily defensible), and 3. Acting (a value should inspire and promote consistent behavior). Values can be instrumental (primarily related to personal characteristics and character traits) or they can be terminal (goals that are desirable and worked towards). Following this discussion students are asked to write 15 values on the front of 15 index cards and to describe on the back any actions in their lives that demonstrate that value. These cards are later used to develop goals and the mission statement.

Multiple Intelligences and Learning Styles

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate.
Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure.
It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us.
We ask ourselves, who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented and fabulous?
Actually, who are you not to be?
You are a child of God; your playing small doesn't serve the world.*

*There's nothing enlightened about shrinking
so other people won't feel insecure around you.
We are born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us.
It's not just in some of us; it's in everyone.
And as we let our own light shine,
we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same.
As we are liberated from our own fear,
our presence automatically liberates others.*

—From Nelson Mandela's Inauguration Speech written by Mary Ann Williamson

The next module takes students from an understanding of what they value to an understanding of what they do and why they do it. The primary difference between a skill and a talent is that a skill requires more conscious development (nurture) than a talent which is a naturally occurring gift. To help orient students to their various talents and skills, they are introduced to the concept of Gardner's multiple intelligences (Gardner, 1983). These seven intelligences collectively represent an alternative approach to the traditional one-dimensional concept of intelligence and offer students the chance to recognize their unique talents. The seven intelligences include Linguistic (writing, reading, languages), Logical/Mathematical (numbers, patterns, categories, relationships), Body/Kinesthetic (body sensations, athletics), Spatial (images, pictures, structures), Musical (sounds, harmonies, rhythm), Interpersonal (communicating, socializing, leading) and Intrapersonal (self-aware and motivated). Students are also introduced to three learning representational systems, also known as learning styles. The preferences for learning include Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic and relate to how the students think and prefer to take in and process/manage new information. While this paper does not lend itself to a detailed description of these theories, the practical impact of this information on the students is profound and easy to describe because it helps them recognize what their strengths are and how to nurture their own learning and development process.

Creative Process/Mind Mapping

here I feel that know human being anywhere can answer for you those questions and feelings that deep within them have a life of their own: for even the best err in words when they are meant to mean most delicate and almost inexpressible things. But I believe nevertheless that you will not have to remain without a solution if you will hold to objects that are similar to those from which my eyes now draw refreshment. If you will cling to Nature, to the little things that hardly anyone sees, and that can so unexpectedly become big and beyond measuring; if you have this love of inconsiderable things and seek quite simply, as one who serves, to win the confidence of what seems poor: then everything will become easier, more coherent and somehow more conciliatory for you, not in your intellect, perhaps, which lags marveling behind, but in your inmost consciousness, waking and cognizance.

—Rainer Maria Rilke

The course also includes a module dedicated to introducing tools for the creative process (whether it be a design project or writing a paper). Students are introduced to the design process as both a problem-solving endeavor as well as a reflective practice with discussion about the primary differences between the two theories and how to use both concepts to develop design skills. Different methods of creative problem solving (including brainstorming for example) are taught and practiced. Students are also introduced to the practice of mind mapping, a tool which assists the brain in receiving, holding, analyzing, outputting, and controlling information through the use of radiant (as opposed to linear) thinking. This technique is particularly interesting to design students who tend to prefer more visually stimulating methods of ideation and information management. The mind mapping unit is also the day that the final autobiography assignment is introduced and students conclude the lesson by attempting to mind map the content they will include in the story of their lives.

Time Management

*Whatever you can do, or dream you can . . . begin it.
Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it.*

—Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

While teaching an understanding of self is a core aspect of the course curriculum, being able to act upon this knowledge for the benefit of self and others is also a valuable skill to develop. For this reason, a module dedicated to time management is included. Students are introduced to various methods for managing their time and particular emphasis is given to project management. For example, we discuss the 'Five Steps to Accomplish Any Task' as described by Allen (2001) which are 1. defining purpose and principles, 2. outcome visioning, 3. brainstorming, 4. organizing, and 5. identifying next actions. We also explore the concept of mapping out the various steps required to complete a given task and then assigning adequate time in a scheduled chronology to assist with completion of coursework (i.e., the autobiography assignment). Another simple but powerful technique is the "5-a-day" method of starting each day with a list of five tasks that must be completed each day. Whenever one feels distracted or unsure of how to proceed in the day, they can refer to this little list and take steps to ensure completion of all five activities. For those students who find it difficult to rely upon typical 'laundry' lists or schedules, this simple method offers a great way to manage the most important elements of the day.

Vision/BHAG

*If what we focus on is magnified by our attention,
we want to be sure that we are magnifying something worthy.*

—Edgar Cayce

Students are taken through an in-class visualization exercise in which they close their eyes and imagine waking up five years from now to the life of their dreams. They are asked to experience with all of their senses a day in the life they have awakened to. This exercise typically lasts 10 minutes and is followed by having the students write down the details of what they visualized. From here, we move to a discussion of the importance of having a vision and a BHAG (big hairy audacious goal) to strive towards. This module also includes discussion about key elements for creating SMART goals (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, and Time Sensitive) that become steps towards achieving the BHAG. Students are also introduced to the concept of the goal as an affirmation and a way to harness the power of positive thought.

Decision Making

*You are never given a wish without also being given the power to make it come true.
You may have to work for it, however.*

—Richard Bach

In this module students are introduced to six methods of decision making. The first method, Paetro Analysis, is also known as the 80/20 rule. Essentially the goal is to select a solution whereby the greatest benefit can be derived from the least possible expenditure of energy. The paired comparison method involves a side by side comparison of potential alternatives to determine which offers the most benefits. The grid analysis is particularly helpful with large amounts of data (which become the y-axis) and numerous criteria for assessment (which become the x-axis). Each alternative is weighed (and ranked or rated) according to the criteria until, finally, the best solution emerges. The decision tree involves the mapping of how different decisions affect aspects of the problem context (i.e., project) and allows one to see the consequences of choices. PMI is a helpful system for weighing a few alternatives that can each be assessed according to Pluses, Minuses, and It Would Be Interesting If. The six thinking hats approach allows one to view the same problem (and/or solution) from various perspectives. These 'hats' include the white hat (data driven, fact-based), the red hat (intuition and instinct based), the black hat (negative, Devil's advocate), the yellow hat (optimistic outlook about all possibilities) the green hat (the creative, innovative, outside-the-box approach) and the blue hat (the process-oriented, facilitator, synthesizer).

Stress Management

A man is what he thinks about all day long.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

The course also includes an introduction to the concepts of stress management. It begins with a simple description of stress and the primary types of stress: survival stress, internally generated stress, environmental and job stress, and fatigue and overwork. The triggers and symptoms of the different types are discussed and students are then introduced to some methods for coping with stress, including breathing, progressive relaxation, thought stopping, maintaining a stress diary, meditation, modifying diet, physical exercise, and therapy. Additionally, the students learn about the VOJ or "Voice of Judgment", a parasitic internal editor that afflicts many of us with negative, skeptical thoughts. The VOJ cannot withstand awareness or humor so students are asked to give their own internal editor a name and character (preferably humorous). Then, when confronted with feelings of self-doubt or fear, they can challenge these thoughts by imagining they come from a ridiculous clown or cartoonish figure for example.

Reflective Journal

Life is without meaning.

You bring the meaning to it.

The meaning of life is whatever you ascribe it to be.

Being alive is the meaning.

—Joseph Campbell

In addition to the aforementioned modules and assignments, students are also required to keep a reflective journal with one entry for each class period (the course meets twice weekly). These are randomly collected throughout the semester and graded wholly on the student's ability to be reflective about the course material. To help with some of the writing exercises, students are encouraged to consider the three R's of reflective writing: *Reaction* (the affective domain, how one feels), *Relevance* (the cognitive domain, how one thinks), and *Responsibility* (the psychomotor domain, what one does in action).

Mission Statement

*Those who do not have power over the story that dominates their lives,
power to retell it, to rethink it, deconstruct it, joke about it,
and change as times change,
truly are powerless,
because they cannot think new thoughts.*

—Solomon Rushdie

One of the final assignments of the course is to create a mission statement. This statement is discussed from the first day as a personal compass; a statement that one reads to remind them where their 'true north' is and to ensure they are headed in the right direction. This assignment represents a culmination of the other modules of the semester and illustrates the values, goals, and purpose of the author. The students are encouraged to design the statement so that they feel proud of it and are more likely to display it in a location that they will see daily. The statements range from short, haiku-like poetry to more lengthy essays.

Autobiography

It's never too late to have a happy childhood.

—Tim Robbins

The final, major project of the semester is the autobiography. This assignment is introduced the first day of class so students have ample time to reflect upon what pivotal people and moments have shaped their lives and the people they have become. We try to encourage the students to think of the autobiography not as a reporting of facts but as a reflective story about how they ended up exactly where they are in the moment. Again, we encourage students to design this assignment and give them ample time to do so. The resulting stories and projects are illuminating (both for the students and for the teachers) and typically demonstrate a depth of thought and feeling that students seem unprepared or unwilling to channel on the first day of the class. Many students report that this was the most profound assignment they completed and often are requested to make copies for family and friends.

Conclusion

This paper offers a general overview of the Finding Purpose course in hopes that readers will recognize the value of complementing the professional skill-oriented courses of design curricula with courses or modules that offer students the chance for intrapersonal, reflective development. Response to this course has been overwhelming with enrollment increasing exponentially every year. Additional courses are now being offered to more deeply explore some of the course topics.

We conclude with the words of the students—thoughts and comments they have shared regarding their experience of the course.

Being shown ways to manage and design my time has greatly improved my efficiency as well as helped conquer my fears and insecurities about the future.

Before taking this course, I had never learned to talk to or listen to myself. I had been taught to listen to everyone else... now I can evaluate others and myself a lot more effectively.

I liked how the instructor spoke with us, not to us. I felt like everyone was learning, including the instructor.

By learning about myself I feel like I have taken a step forward in my design skills.

I think had I not taken this course, I would be living as a blind person, feeling that I do not have control over my life. When in fact it is quite the opposite.

It was interesting to discuss us, the students. No other class did that.

Since design is all about creating something for someone else it is crucial that you listen to others and can decipher what they want from what they say they want.

Each lecture confirmed the fact that everyone finds themselves in the same situation at some point in their life, how it goes depends on you react and deal with it.

As designers we tend to build up "rock star" attitudes when it comes to design and the question of what successful design is. We need to remind ourselves though, that truly good design is something which benefits every party involved.

I realize now that we all come from different backgrounds and well have different filters that we see life through.

The meditation part of the course really stuck with me. It was invigorating and reminded me of how great it is to be in my own mind.

This course is the best I have had in the last five years. It has changed my outlook on life.

This course is invaluable. It should be required for every major.

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