Within visual arts, a first step toward learning begins with unlearning older values and replacing them with new ones. During the years immediately following World War II, most design students came to education with some predictable preconceptions about art and design, but it was not particularly difficult to move them into new directions.

During the 1950s, graphic design was distinct from advertising allowing students to clearly identify the profession along with its leaders and role models. Graphic design students regularly followed the professional work of men such as Golden, Beale, Lustig, Bayer, Lionni, Bass, Rand, Chermayeff & Geismar among others. The “Fifty Best Books of the Year” exhibition and other design functions sponsored by the American Institute of Graphic Arts were eagerly anticipated. Students read Graphis, Typographia, and other design journals from abroad.

It was thought that the most advanced graphic design was being done in Europe. The primary job market for graphic design graduates in America at the time was in corporate design with some moving into architectural offices, publishing, education and government.

Presently, students come to the university saturated with a disparate array of visual imagery from television, videos, film, computers and print. Graphic design is not clearly defined, standards for performance are confusing or misleading and there are few notable role models. Consequently, the visual values of entering students are muddled. The unlearning process is considerably more extended than previously.

These conditions suggests the need for an education which reduces visual chaos and provides focus, instruction in basic visual values, and if currently there are no outstanding designers, students should be exposed to the best role models of the past. A factor creating present difficulties for graphic design education is confusion between design as a problem-solving function and design as a marketing tool. In many respects, advertising has usurped the term graphic design without changing any of the marketing objectives, values or practices.

At most major cities, older Art Directors Clubs are now called Chapters of the American Institute of Graphic Arts – a traditional graphic design organization. What formerly were called art studios are now identified as graphic design studios. Educational programs in advertising design also changed their designation to graphic design but continue to prepare students for careers in advertising. Many former job opportunities as corporate designers disappeared so more graphic designers moved into marketing design which further adds to the confusion between advertising and graphic design.

Design History and Design Orientation

Design: History vs. Orientation
From its inception, graphic design has been associated with other design fields, printing, book design, architecture and the crafts. As such, it has been identified with problem-solving, function and formal values. It has been an intra-disciplinary profession based on visual communication using design, typography, printing, photography, film, video, and most recently, electronic imagery. Although most graphic design programs have been part of fine art departments in the past, it seems more logical for graphic design to be associated with a school of design or a college of architecture.

Advertising design programs historically have been incorporated into the fine arts. The first commercial illustrations were commissioned by advertising agents from illustrators or painters. The relationship between art and advertising is there because of the visual aspects of marketing including illustration and rendering. Advertising design students were expected to carry many fine art courses in drawing, painting and art history. These were supplemented with courses in illustration, calligraphy or lettering, layout and design. More recently, business and marketing strategies have been added to the curriculum, especially at universities. The objective for advertising is sales, so that becomes the most important criteria for evaluating the quality of advertising design – if it sells, it is good design!

What graphic design students require today goes far beyond instruction in visual principles or the professional/technical aspects of design. There has never been a period of greater need for professional ethics, high performance standards, exemplary values and a clear understanding of career goals than now. Good role models are essential to communicating these traits to students. It is amply apparent that for students to better cope with the present, it is going to be necessary to provide them with greater exposure to the past. Beginning in the mid to late 1960s, there was a growing perception among graphic design educators that there was an obvious need for developing a Design History and bringing it into the curriculum. The precedent at most institutions had been to require several Art History courses for all art students including those majoring in design programs.

It was the early 1980s that the first national conference on Design History was held at the Rochester Institute of Technology. Interest in Design History as an integral part of curriculum was strongly reinforced by the fact that the most notable graphic designers of the past have been well versed in art and design history. Some institutions such as The Museum of Modern Art and Walker Art Center had significant collections, curators and publications devoted to design. There have been few with sufficient interest to educate themselves in the history of design, and for the most part, these individuals were studio instructors or practicing designers. The history of type and printing was well documented with many persons being extremely knowledgeable about the origins and evolution of type, printing and related subjects. There can be little question but what interest in graphic design history sprang directly or indirectly from involvement with type and printing history. However, within the educational context of graphic design, there was a vacuum insofar as design and type history were concerned. At the time, most programs were in advertising design where there was more concern for lettering than for typography and printing production. Alvin Eisenman at Yale during the early 1950s was responsible for the most significant introduction of type and printing history into graphic design curriculum. Graduates from Yale who entered teaching took the historical orientation with them. They incorporated it into their courses, and from there, it spread to other graphic design programs.

With the publication of Philip Meggs’ book, *The History of Graphic Design*, and following that first conference on design history, numerous books on the subject have now been published about designers, design periods or styles. Many educational programs currently include Design History in some form or another. Sometimes it is a lecture course, other times it is annual lectures or historical research as part of class work. Some teachers show slides in conjunction with studio work.
Students enrolling in graphic design programs are woefully ignorant of the history of type, printing, design, art and contemporary designers. This has been true for as long as I have been teaching. Particularly at universities, administration has been remiss in recognizing the need for Design History, establishing courses or creating faculty lines to instruct in Design History. Recently, my concern has been regarding what form Design History might take in the future. I would not like to see it relate to design as Art History now relates to the fine arts. At most institutions, Art History is totally separate from studio courses with little or no interaction between the two. In some instances, Art History has been removed from the college or school of art and put into the humanities. There are strong indications that a number of design historians and journals are currently following patterns set by art historians. This is happening to some extent because a few art historians have converted from art to design, and they have brought their values and practices with them to the new discipline. The influence of art historians is strongly reflected in the new design journals through emphasis on research, theory or sociological issues rather than on professional practice. Many articles border on the esoteric and have little to contribute to the betterment of graphic design as a profession. For these reasons, there should be a distinction between design history and design orientation.

Design History deals with the evolution of design, the chronological progression of design, designers and their works, theory, philosophies of design, historical context for design within periods and places, relationships between graphic design and the other art or design fields, cultural impact of design, etc. Graphic design history should be taught as separate lecture classes, and there should be an initial overall survey class with several additional specialized courses. The survey course might include other design fields such as industrial, interior, environmental, etc.

Graphic design orientation should be viewed as an integral part of the studio program. Design History deals with evolution, context, influences, personages, etc. While Design Orientation includes some of the same information, it deals more specifically with critical analysis of design work. My experience has been that the introduction of type and design history is most effective when related to or taught in conjunction with studio work. When history is related to studio activities, students have more vested interests in the information, they are more attentive and seem to better retain the information.

I see three principal areas where Design Orientation would greatly enrich the educational experience. The first being at the introductory level when students are working with abstract theoretical exercises. The majority of students working on design exercises do not understand why or what they are doing. The lack of understanding affects their commitment and productivity. The introduction of slides showing practical work by designers, photographers, painters or architects that illustrate the theoretical principles students are exploring is an immense boost to student understanding. With comprehension comes the interest, commitment and productivity.

For instructors to make the best use of resources in the slide libraries will require librarians to adopt somewhat different attitudes and practices than have been traditionally associated with use of visual resources. To encourage faculty to make more use of slides, they should be assisted, even subsidized, to make copies from the library that they keep in their own offices. Most slide librarians want teachers to check out and return slides and this is enough of a hindrance in itself to reduce use of visual information in the studio. The making of slides from materials selected by teachers needs to be facilitated as much as possible in terms of cost, time, and availability. The role of slide librarians and the use of slide libraries needs to be re-examined.
A second area where Design Orientation enhances the educational experience is typography. While computer technology has revolutionized typesetting and expanded educational opportunities for instruction in typography, it has tended too undermine typographic excellence. Today, anyone who can operate a computer can select and use type from an enormous inventory of styles. Consequently, it is a typographic jungle with an incredible number of typetstyles and type modifications to draw upon. Large numbers of relatively uneducated individuals are now using type for a wide array of applications. Additionally, most typographic usage today is connected with marketing or promotion. Headlines, novelty, fashion or style are characteristic to marketing and promotional typography. Standards for typographic excellence traditionally have been associated with book design. With the present emphasis in typography, students find few examples of typography that can have a favorable influence on their work.

Emphasis in type education currently might be misplaced in view of existing conditions. The educational focus is on using type with little or no attention to educating students how to distinguish a well designed typeface from those that are badly designed—or to even understand the differences between the two. Students need to know what factors make a typeface appropriate for a particular situation. Perhaps there has to be renewed attention to human factors, function and typographic excellence in the use of type. Largely because of computers, this might be a good time to rethink instruction in the use of type because current demands are quite different from those of twenty years ago.

By and large, students now are seriously deficient in typographic standards. Design Orientation could play an extremely important and necessary role in education through exposing students to worthy typographic models. It provides examples for emulation from the past that should abet student understanding of type, and too aid them in coping at a higher performance level with current demands. There is a continuing role for design orientation throughout the Junior and Senior design classes. The showing of examples from the past should contribute to students acquiring higher performance standards. At the same time, a careful selection of subjects could have a strong influence on shaping student career choices. Presently, in selecting a career, students are at the mercy of what they see in the marketplace. This is even more of a problem for programs in outlying areas where often students are overly impressed with local standards.

An aspect of Design Orientation that has produced commendable results for me in the past is student involvement in research projects. Design History research projects were regularly assigned as this forced students to take initiative to find information for themselves, and in the process, much peripheral information was absorbed. Students should be encouraged to also enroll in art and architectural history classes. Graphic design students having a back ground in art history seem to better understand design history. Periods of art history that I found particularly relevant for me were Renaissance painting where there was emphasis on formal structure in composition, and most paintings had a diagrammatic foundation. Of special interest was the French period from 1860 through the early years of the twentieth century. Perhaps the most significant of all was the period from 1900 to 1930 focused in the various movements such as De Stijl, Supremicists, DaDa, Futurists and Bauhaus. These movements contributed so strongly to the esthetics of modern graphic design. The history of architecture complements design history, and particularly the history of modern architects.

Design Orientation can be taught by the individual responsible for Design History. The studio instructor could request a specific subject and the design historian would prepare a lecture or series of lectures. Perhaps a more preferable option is for the studio instructor to prepare the visual materials themselves. They best understand problem objectives and can better select the appropriate examples. To implement Design Orientation through relying on individual instructors, teachers should be encouraged to use visual materials, and there should be facilities with funds to organize and carry out this function. Students exposed to Design Orientation in the studio should realize greater benefit from Design History. Design History and Orientation are not one and the same. One is taught in the lecture hall and the other is taught in the studio, and students require both.

Pedagogy