

# Map Design + Social and Environmental Issues: Graphic Design Education at its Best

Jessica Ring  
Towson University  
Towson, Maryland, USA  
jring@towson.edu

## 1. Introduction

Foster engagement in social and environmental issues through a graphic design assignment focused on the creation of visually interesting folded, printed maps and instruction about aspects of sustainable print production and design techniques and processes.

## 2. Overview

This talk will present an overview of the instructional techniques and learning objectives used in a graphic design class project: the design of folded, printed maps. The process of developing and designing the maps is in itself a complex and challenging design problem. By specifying the subject of each map to be one of many possible social or environmental topics, students are immersed in research of the topic and therefore gain a greater understanding of that topic. Exposure to sustainable print design, collaborative learning and information design are also emphasized.

## 3. Elaboration

Design for social issues and sustainable design or design for the environment have recently been gaining more and more attention in the fields of graphic design and graphic design education. While class projects pertaining to social and environmental issues are not new, the combination of social issues, environmental issues, sustainable design, collaborative learning and information design is a less familiar and more unique approach. Because students are tasked with the creation of a visually engaging and useful object, the design ideas presented in the class become experiential and students necessarily become engaged in the social and/or environmental topic of their map's focus. Research, site visits, interviews and guest lectures aid in connecting students to the community and the issues. Collaborative techniques are utilized in teaching, learning and creating, including the use of online collaborative tools such as blogs and shared online documents. Students developed the ability to apply the principles and generalizations of information design, and learned terms and facts related to design for the environment or sustainable design.

## 4. Conclusion

The various components and learning experiences that accompanied this project were broad ranging and of great value to the education of tomorrow's designers. One of the maps designed by a group of students was presented to the university community and selected for production and dissemination across the campus. In this instance, students experienced the possibility of design entrepreneurship. Through group work and reflection, students learned about their own working styles, strengths and weaknesses as well as the importance of communication and organized digital files. The idea of user-centered design was introduced, and students learned firsthand that the audience and its understanding

of the designed object is of prime importance. This design assignment and others like it can enable students to become better designers and more knowledgeable citizens of our communities and our planet.

<http://www.towsonugreenmap.org/>



Figure 1. Towson University Student Green Map

## References

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