

FROM TPST 170: Principles of design; Deb Sivigny; Theatre and Performance Studies

BUSINESS CARD PROJECT:

To get started introducing the approach to the connection between identity and ethics in my Principles of Design class, I began the semester by doing an in-class exercise that involved making a list of what students “claimed as their own.” I asked them to think about their lives and create a list of everything they could claim—whether it was a place they considered home, an ethnic or cultural background, a relationship, a hobby, an identity of sorts.

I began by introducing myself—a New Englander, Korean adoptee, coffee drinker, artist, lover of bourbon, wife, daughter, a clutter maker, etc. This got the students thinking about how they could identify, and maybe even think outside the box.

I asked them to share what they were willing to and we went around the room. As we discussed things, there were a lot of “me too’s” and I think they got to know each other better as people (even those who were good friends coming in to the course were surprised at some of the responses.)

Then I assigned homework: they were to take four elements from their list and design four individual business cards to introduce themselves to the world.

The results were fantastic. There was a card for “Butter lover” that smelled like butter and had an oily sheen; there was a Poet card that incorporated a poem the student had written all the way around the edge; there was a “Skeptic” card that was typed, very minimal and had a footnote that wound around the back. Once the cards were shared, I had them redesign them in another format during class: cards that were landscape were now portrait orientation and vice versa.

While this exercise wasn’t intended to be central to the course, the students referred back to it on several occasions, so I think it was more influential than I initially gave it credit for. I think they responded the way they did because it allowed them to really take a hard look at themselves and then translate it into something visual. They believed art to be a separate act of creation—not one that was so individual and personal. This exercise brought that personal act to the forefront of their minds.

Rubric: because it was the first assignment, there was no grade attached to the project, however it gave me a window into their artistic ability and aesthetic inclinations.

If I were to grade the project, I would approach it like this:

50% “craft”: the overall care in creating the elements of the card itself

25% clarity of idea, translated into visual elements

15% the design: color choice, composition, font choice

10% in on time, clarity of presentation