

Design Students Promote A Community Project, A Case Study



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01 Introduction & Project Overview • Project Brief	02 Phase I Research Group Collaboration • Brainstorming Session • Needs Analysis Questionnaire	03 Phase I Research Group Collaboration • Client Visit & Introductions	04 Phase I Research Group Collaboration • Gathering References • Word Associations • Mood-boards	05 Phase I Research Group Collaboration • Client Visit Group Research Presentations	06 Phase II Design Independent Work • Logo Sketches • Typographic Explorations • Color Schemes	07 Phase II Design Independent Work • Identity Design • Style Guides	08 Phase II Design Mid-Term • Client Visit Student Presentations	09 Phase II Design Revisions • Stationery Design • Revisions For Client Online	10 Phase II Design Identity Design • Client Visit In-class Critique • Client Selects Logo	11 Phase II Design Promotional Design • Poster Design	12 Phase II Design Promotional Design • Postcard Design • Presented To Client Online	13 Phase II Design Promotional Design • Client Visit Final Critique	14 Phase II Design Final Revisions • Production • Implementation	15 Phase II Design Celebration • Students Invited To Present Work At MoMA 15 weeks of creative collaboration
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OVERVIEW

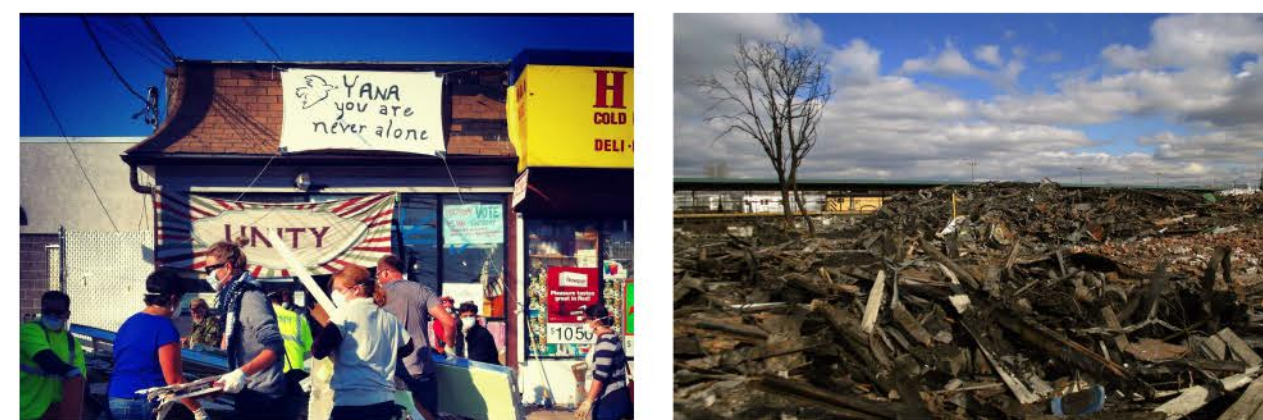
College level design courses can provide students with opportunities to work effectively in collaboration with actual clients. Such projects, undertaken jointly by faculty, students, and clients, develop student skills not only in design, but also in research, and in communicating with the public. Carefully chosen projects can also be of benefit to society, and offer these advantages over work confined to the classroom:

- They create commercial designs for clients that enhance the student's portfolio.
- They provide valuable contacts for the student's professional career.
- They enable the student to make significant impact on critical social issues.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

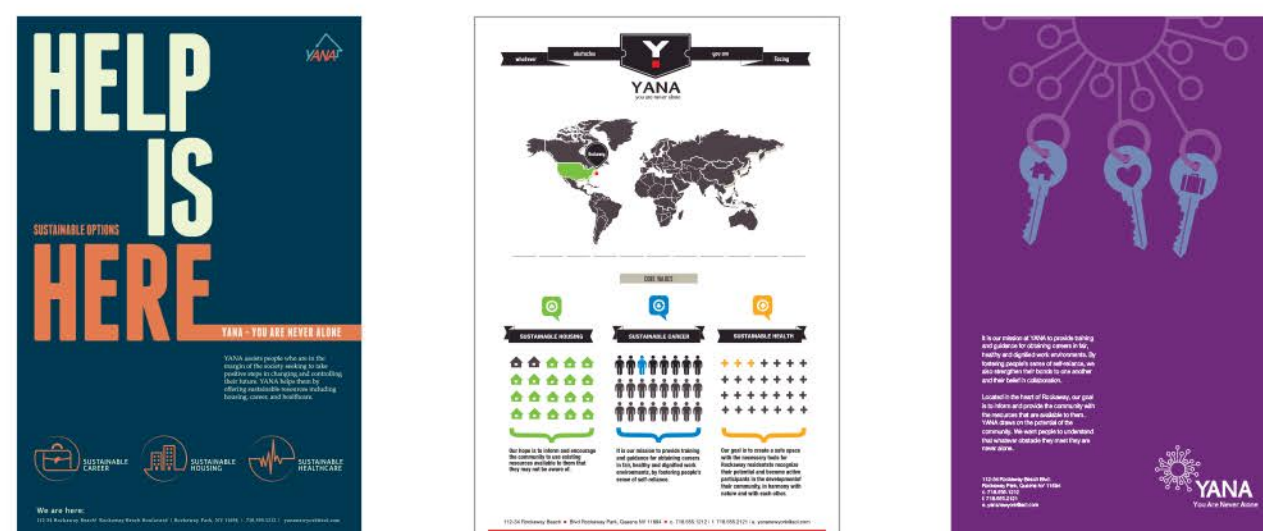
I would like to thank my Spring 2013 Advanced Vector Art class at the New York City College of Technology and my colleagues in the Living Lab General Education Seminar Fellows program, in particular Living Lab co-directors Karen Goodlad and Jonas Reitzand, and also a very special thanks to Salvatore Lopizzo, founder of YANA, who gave unsparingly of his time and made the project possible.

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A Case Study: You Are Never Alone (YANA)

You Are Never Alone (YANA) is a worker training center located in Rockaway Park, Queens, New York, that creates jobs focusing on the development of green, sustainable technologies. It was established a week before super-storm Sandy devastated the area. Students were asked to design the organization's visual identity, communicate its mission, and generate public awareness of an environmental issue.




Designers: Jessie Chen (left), Dielza Kasimi (center), and Verónica Jeanette Silva Vélez (right and below right)

The pro-bono YANA project was an ideal challenge for undergraduate students taking Advanced Vector Art in the Advertising Design and Graphic Arts department at New York City College of Technology, CUNY. It provided 15 weeks of creative collaboration that not only fulfilled the needs of the client, but enabled students to explore the design process in a structured and mentored classroom environment, while coping with the realities of client-based work – meetings, deadlines, presentations, revisions, and disagreements they would encounter as professional graphic designers.






LOGISTICS

- The semester-long project was divided into two parts, research and design. Students worked collaboratively in groups during the research phase, but were responsible for creating their own individual design solutions.
- Over the 15-week period the client was continuously shown the work in progress online, and to evaluate their efforts, he joined the students in the classroom once every three weeks. During these sessions, students were able to learn more about the client's needs and receive frank, professional appraisals of their progress.
 

Salvatore Lopizzo, of YANA, reviewing class work
- During the research phase students were paired into teams. Each team was responsible for presenting its findings to the class and the client. Group presentations generated a variety of ideas and proved effective in allowing everyone to participate.
- The feedback and direction provided by the client was typical of what the students might encounter during any real-world design assignment. Students gained knowledge of the client's needs, competition, and market. The dynamics of having a client present for class critiques generated stimulating discussions and provided dramatic evidence of why and how the students needed to refine their work.
- Also, having to defend their design concepts impressed the students with the importance of their preliminary research, which gave them the tools to explain their approaches to the project.

OUTCOMES

- Having a dedicated, knowledgeable client was critical to what proved to be a particularly rewarding semester for faculty, students and client alike. The creative work allowed students to develop comprehensive design pieces that will advance their careers.
 
- The client was able to choose from a variety of concepts, and settled on one that he felt captured perfectly his organization's ethos, providing a highly effective visual representation of its brand.
 
- To express his gratitude the client presented the project to a curator at New York's Museum of Modern Art. She was so impressed with the student work that she invited the class to present their final pieces at MoMA PS1 VW Dome 2 in Rockaway Beach, a geodesic dome erected as a lecture and exhibition site after the area was devastated by Hurricane Sandy.
 

CityTech students presented their work at MoMA PS1 VW Dome 2 in Rockaway Beach
- The YANA project empowered its student participants to serve their own community while providing them with a real-life example of how their design skills can be applied to a range of services beyond commercial advertising.