Students Take Social Justice to the Web

They Create Websites Based on Lasallian Principles

There are thousands — maybe millions — of websites on the Internet dedicated to social justice causes and issues. How do you make your website stand out from the rest?

That's the question students in the "From Web Design to Interactive Art" class had to answer. Their professor challenged them to learn the best principles of web design in just a month and then use their newfound knowledge to create a working interactive website based on a Lasallian-inspired message.

More than 20 students brought a cause or issue based on a Lasallian-concept, such as prevention of animal abuse, sustainable living or inclusive community, to life through an interactive web design.

"My inspiration for my website, 'Love Sees No Gender,' was based on the Lasallian principle of having an inclusive community, which welcomes all kinds of people, regardless of sexual orientation or gender," said Lisa Phan '13.

The students applied their new skills in typography, design and color theory plus basic skills in Photoshop, Dreamweaver and Flash to create the Lasallian-themed sites.

Thinking Outside the Box

Freund encouraged students to "think in a multi-linear way" and to "design something that calls for a much more weblike structure of thought." Students read texts to learn more about transitioning from nonlinear thinking to conceptual interactivity.

The web is full of examples of art, but the challenge for the students was to build a design that included an interactive aspect that went beyond website navigation.

"I never knew that a website required so many elements to make it professional and organized," said Andrea Mairena '14, who designed a site called "Genetically Modified Food." She said her goal for the site was "to teach our peers how world hunger is a very important issue and the way governments are trying to resolve this issue is by genetically manipulating food."

While some of the sites focused on broad concepts, others were inspired by specific issues discussed on campus. Mike Aguilera '13 remembered seeing a flyer about a talk sponsored by CILSA on Nike's alleged use of sweatshops to produce its athletic gear. "I couldn't make it (to the talk), so I did my own research on the subject," he said, and then he designed a site to bring the issue to a wider audience.

The Power of the Medium

Many students had no idea how much graphic design could impact the world, and through their

projects, they came to understand the power of the medium. “It has basically been the most useful class I have taken at Saint Mary's so far when it comes to my career goals,” said Jacqui Lindo ’11, a digital arts major.

Most of the student websites aimed to simply increase public awareness of a social justice issue, but others added ways for the public to provide feedback or take action. Lizza Garcia ’14, designed a website to get people involved in the American Cancer Society’s Relay for Life. “There are so many opportunities to help out,” she said, “and my website is just the start for getting the word out there.”

During the course, the students realized that without raising awareness of social justice issues through an online outlet, many of the topics would never earn the support they need and deserve. The web design project gave them a chance to demonstrate their understanding of the issue and represent it through an artistic expression.

Melinda Madden ’14, said she hoped her site, “Equality,” would make an impact on the audience. “I hope that the community can learn through my website the true meaning of equality and gain a deeper understanding of it,” she said.

Kelly Fisher ’11