



Up until the 1970s, fabrication and design in experiential graphics were closely linked. Most designers graduated from graphic and fine art schools, where hand skills were part of the curriculum or taught through in-house apprenticeships. In 1979, the first major book on experiential graphic design, architectural signing and graphics, was created through a partnership between a designer and sign fabricator. This partnership emphasized the degree to which fabrication skills were closely interrelated with design skills.

Fabrication Education in

# Experiential Graphic Design



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Not long after that, however, new advancements in technology began to shift the balance of both the signage industry and its academic programs. Digital routing and large format printing changed traditional craft techniques, while academic programs in vocational schools and colleges began to center their focus on digital skills.

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Over the years, EGD and sign fabrication expanded from insular craft-based cottage industries to overlapping and interrelated fields, including exhibition design, placemaking, brand environments, and wayfinding. The unfortunate byproduct of designers broadening their horizons was the sacrifice of expertise in specific fabrication approaches. Drawings became more conceptual, and technical knowledge decreased.

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At the same time, fabricators also became more specialized with companies focusing on project management-specific areas like ADA signs and channel letters. The result has been a fundamental rift in the industry between design and making that has hindered new professionals entering the field and contributed to the major drop-off in architectural fabricators who have experience working with designers. This has also impacted sign fabricators as students in vocational and design schools are not provided a clear path into the industry.

**5** The Spatial Experience Design Program of the Fashion Institute of Technology has partnered with the S&D Institute to develop a series of methodologies to explore best practices for integration of making skills into the classroom. The goal of our research is two-fold:

- Discover the most effective techniques to integrate fabrication and design education for the next generation of experiential graphic designers and fabricators.
- Explore the best methodologies for educating students interested in fabrication and project management, particularly for complex projects.

**6** Over the last two years, the partnership between FIT and the S&D Institute has launched pilot endeavors and research in these four areas, and we are currently at the stage where we can provide specific observations and recommendations on approaches as well as visual examples of successful student approaches. Our goal is to open a dialogue with the designer and fabricator community about how best to recruit and train the next generation of talent.

Experimenting with

# Fabrication Education

for Designers



**7** Areas of analysis:

**Core Educational Programs:** The introduction of making skills in high school, vocational school and the beginning of college education as part of a graphic design and fabrication education, as well as an overview of the field.

**College Level Programs:** Fabrication, documentation, specification, and project management as part of a more in-depth design education. This includes utilizing courses as a platform for promoting jobs in the sign industry.

**Internship and Apprenticeships:** Working with designers and fabricators to gain valuable knowledge and hands-on experience.

**Professional Education:** Courses offering ongoing professional education, provided by manufacturers, including case studies and specification approaches.



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