New Graphic Design Major
MSU’s Department of Art, Art History, and Design (AAHD) rolled out a new Graphic Design undergraduate major during the spring 2016 term.

“This new major provides students with the advanced technical knowledge, artistic control, and professional expertise to create meaningful communicative designs reflective of their individual artistic styles, their beliefs, and their world view,” said College of Arts & Letters Dean Christopher P. Long. “Graphic design informs so many aspects of our lives that it is critical to give students a broad appreciation of its basic principles and a deep understanding of its capacity to shape relationships and convey meaning.”

The new major offers students more intensive upper-level development in the graphic design discipline and more clearly establishes a link to the profession and its career opportunities.

“Our curriculum is a sequence of learning objectives that addresses all the current needs for a professional degree in graphic design,” said Chris Corneal, AAHD Chair and Associate Professor of Graphic Design. Beginning with enduring design foundations, the Graphic Design coursework progresses toward complexity in the upper-level classes. Form, typography, packaging, motion, interactive web, environmental systems, and identity systems all are included.

“The Graphic Design major reinforces the importance of visual communication as an area of study and practice,” said Assistant Professor Rebecca Tegtmeyer, co-coordinator of the program. “It acknowledges its role in society as a vital force in facilitating change, creating awareness, and influencing progress in how people view information as passive to active participants.”

Each year, Graphic Design students display their best work for critique and comment by faculty, friends, and visitors during Design Day.
Students Laud New Major

In the short time the new Graphic Design major and minor have been offered, the program has grown to more than 60 students majoring in Graphic Design and more than 220 minors. As word continues to spread about the exciting developments in these new programs, expectations are that enrollment will continue to increase over the next few years.

“As an aspiring graphic design professional, it’s important that I come out of school with a BFA in Graphic Design, because today’s employers expect it,” said senior Professional Writing major Will Mianecki, who recently added a second major in Graphic Design.

The program strives to challenge students to think about and practice design from all levels, from components of form to systems of community, and establishes a workable skill set.

“As someone who wants to be a graphic designer, I feel the advantages of the major are that you’re more specialized,” Graphic Design junior Lindsay Poll said. “You’re learning more about graphic design, working more on it, and doing more of what you will be doing after you graduate.”

Faculty: A Strength of the Program

A major strength of the Graphic Design program is its dedicated faculty, including Corneal, Tegtmeyer, Associate Professor Kelly Salchow MacArthur, who is a co-coordinator of the program, and two recently hired tenure-system faculty, Assistant Professors Zach Kaiser and Ben Van Dyke, who are helping ramp up the program’s interactive and new media design areas.

All five faculty members stress that the addition of the major is both in response to continuing gains in prominence and respect for the role of design in business, as well as a move to affirm the rigor and professionalism of MSU’s Graphic Design curriculum.

“We are leaders in facilitating change in meaningful ways,” Tegtmeyer said. “As a result, businesses value and hire graphic designers, a fact borne out by recent job figures and expanding industry roles and titles.”

Job Market Needs for Graphic Designers

Upon graduation, Graphic Design majors have many career opportunities from which to choose.

Graphic designers are needed for identity systems; way-finding and environmental signage; exhibitions; website design; software; mobile and user interfaces; film and broadcast television graphics and titles; typeface design; packaging; poster design; corporate brand development; retail design and more.

“Graduates of the program generally enter the field as entry-level graphic designers and move up the ladder at a reasonable pace to become creative directors and art directors,” said Associate Professor Kelly Salchow MacArthur, co-coordinator of the program.

“Positions exist in large and small design firms; advertising, marketing, and public relations agencies; production companies; publishing companies; and in-house corporate and organizational design offices.”

The skill sets and design areas taught at MSU are becoming more and more important to businesses, corporations, and organizations as designers are increasingly paving the way in creative innovation.

“Today’s graduates are expected to have a working knowledge of both print and interactive design, as well as have professional experience before they graduate,” Salchow MacArthur said. “Our graduates are increasingly being called upon to work on multiple simultaneous projects and lead teams having wide-ranging roles in the execution of large design strategies.”

The College’s Graphic Design alumni go on to work at major agencies such as Leo Burnett, MRM/McCann, Campbell Ewald, and top companies such as Quicken Loans, Team Detroit, General Motors, Ford Motor Company, Shift Digital, Domino’s, and TechSmith Corporation. Common job titles include Graphic Designer, Art Director, Creative Director, User Experience Designer, Media Manager, Web Designer, Marketing Specialist, Mobile Designer, Packaging Designer, Creative Producer, and Communications Coordinator.

Graphic Design students in Kelly Salchow MacArthur’s 3-D Design class work in teams on design projects.