

MISS STUDENT

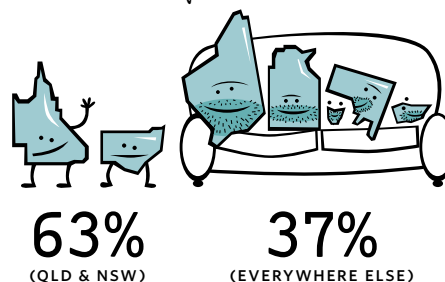
The Desktop Student Survey

Writing, Research & Infographics by Alex Tyers

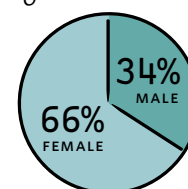
What we did

desktop magazine conducted an online survey of Australian design students to capture their mood, their opinions and, most of all, their responses to a series of questions about the way they communicate, how they rate their course, and their take on design itself – both now and into the future. The survey was open for one week. During that time we received 375 responses. From these Alex Tyers collected 44 pages of data and comments, which he painstakingly sifted through and crunched down into this article.

Where the responses came from



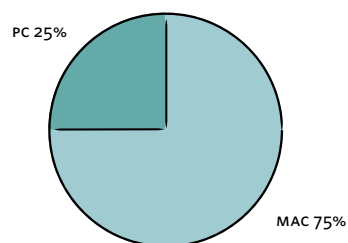
Gender ratio



THE STUDENTS

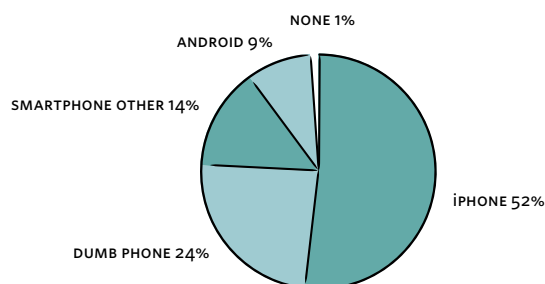
Their computer

75% of students use Macs, while just a quarter are PC.



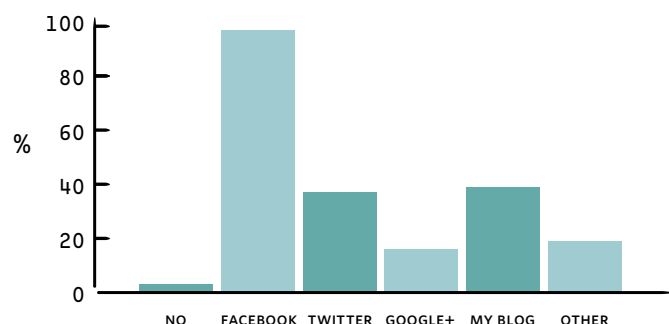
Their phone

24% of designers are still using a 'dumb phone' – I'm guessing they are the same students still using a PC.



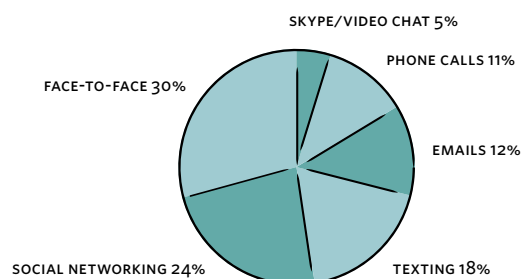
Their use of social networking

Almost everyone uses one or more forms of social networking. Facebook is king, followed by blogging and micro-blogging, i.e. twitter. Despite this trend, students were divided 50/50 when asked whether they thought technology will make traditional forms of communication redundant.



How they communicate

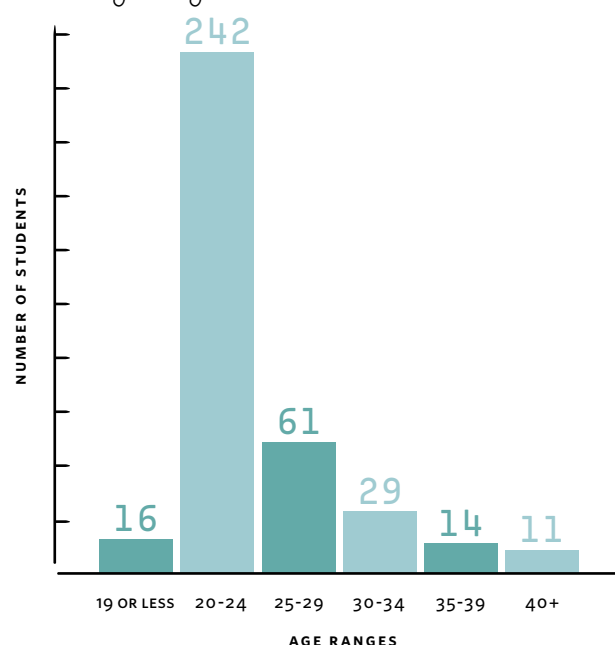
You could almost argue that Facebook and other forms of electronic communication are killing face-to-face, with students using these 70% of the time, compared with only 30% talking face-to-face. But perhaps they are communicating more, any way they can.



Their most important design consideration

1. It is usable
2. It is innovative
3. It is appropriate
4. It is beautiful

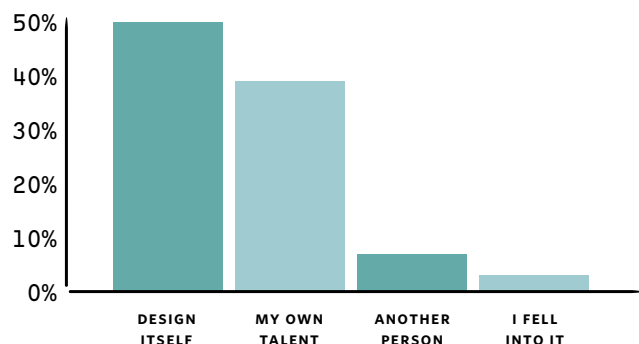
Their age at graduation



The youngest graduating age was 18 – the design equivalent of Doogie Howser – and the oldest was 59. As the graph shows, people are still being attracted to design at later stages in their life, with 115 graduating in their late 20s through to their 50s.

THEIR INSPIRATIONS

What inspired them to choose a design path



Who inspires them

Most students drew their inspiration from artists/illustrators (71) and graphic designers (52), while others were inspired by filmmakers (11), architects (9), musicians (8), industrial designers (7), photographers (6), philosophers (6), writers (4), fashion designers (4) and last, but not least, God (4).

Still others' creative passions were fuelled by people as diverse as Greens leader Bob Brown, Fat Duck chef Heston Blumenthal and ex-Guantanamo Bay inmate David Hicks.

No Australian made it to the top 5. Perhaps the latest crop of students can turn that around in the next 25 years.

RANK	NAME	FIELD OF EXPERTISE
1	Stefan Sagmeister	Graphic Design
2	Andy Warhol	Art
3	David Carson	Graphic Design
	Philippe Starck	Industrial Design
4	Jessica Hische	Graphic Design
5	James Jean	Art

6th on the list of people to inspire students were industrial designer Dieter Rams, graphic designer Paul Rand and artist Salvador Dalí.

Ranked 7th were four Sydneysiders: digital artist Alexia Sinclair, and designers Mark Gowing, Christopher Doyle and Vince Frost (our favourite UK import). Ranked alongside them were Saul Bass, Jan Tschichold, Leonardo DaVinci, Tim Burton and Hoefler & Frere-Jones.

Ken Cato, David Pidgeon and Jackson Mussett were the only Melbourne-based designers to be nominated – each receiving a single nomination. They were just as popular as Antonio Banderas, Frank Gehry and Lady Gaga.

THEIR COURSE

The best thing

1. **Course content** – 60%
2. **Lecturers** – 18%
3. **Other students** – 14%

The worst thing

1. **Cost** – 33%
2. **Workload** – 26%
3. **Facilities** – 14%

Changes that they would like to see

Of the 104 suggestions we received, 37 were industry-related, with students wanting more industry experience through an internship year on graduation, or part-time internship throughout a course, and more contact with mentors and teachers with practical industry knowledge.

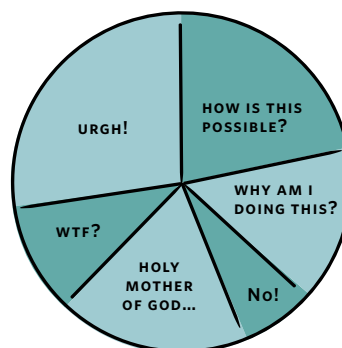
There were 17 suggestions for changes to course content, again much of it industry-related, including a compulsory intern semester, industry-relevant briefs, teaching different production methods, more training for core design skills such as typesetting and use of software, additional time to complete their course (i.e. a four year degree), less group projects and less workload overall.

Students were highly critical of the push for increased school enrolments, requesting smaller class sizes and stricter selection criteria for new students.

'Make the course more difficult to get into.'









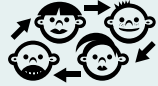





















Having taught as a sessional lecture, I believe that making the selection criteria more stringent for both local and international students is pivotal to raising the standard of design graduates. To illustrate this point, I recently had to explain what Pantone colours were to a third year student!

Lecturer response to a 3rd year student that does not know what a Pantone colour is...



THE FUTURE

Factors that will impact on design

PERSONAL	HUMAN ACTIVITY	PHILOSOPHICAL	TRENDS	EXTERNAL POWERS	APOCALYPTIC EVENTS
Being original 	War 	Übermensch (Friedrich Nietzsche) 	Scarce resources 	White people 	Global warming destroying the world 
Being unable to find employment 	Globalisation 	Crowdsourcing 	Social advertising 	Aliens 	Aliens invading and probing mankind 
Not knowing what to do 	Breeding 	Post-structuralism (Jean Baudrillard) 	Overpopulation 	Apes 	Rise of the apes, humans dumb slaves 
Keeping up-to-date with technology 	Space exploration 	Futurism (Jacque Fresco) 	Technology 	Artificial Intelligence 	Artificial intelligence terminating humanity 
Living in the wrong town 	Ageing 	Christianity 	The unknown 	God 	Armageddon 

What they're worried about

Students were extremely worried about 'not being original', with 155 separate comments about their inability to come up with original ideas and designs, or to sustain a level of originality:

'Most ideas are taken or done already.'

'It's hard coming up with a new look for an already exhausted concept.'

'Creating something new in a world full of diluted ideas and designs that you see everywhere.'

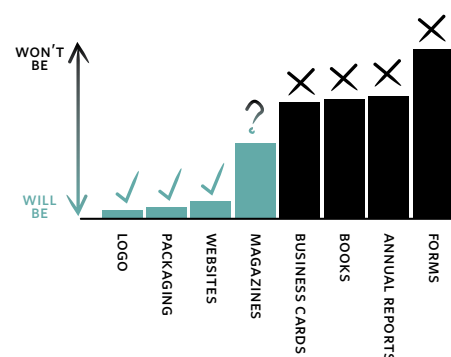
Sounds bleak? It is, especially if you are a prospective employer.

Their second major concern was not being able to find employment, despite 84% believing that their course had adequately prepared them for a career in design. Students identified the environment and the impact of technology as other major concerns.

What they won't be designing

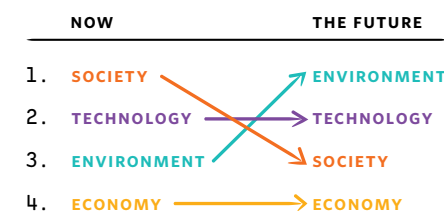
We asked students what they won't be designing in 25 years time. If their responses are correct, there won't be any forms, annual reports, business cards, or new books.

While I can live without forms, I'm not sure too many businesses or government organisations could function without them. And I'd like to think we'll still be reading books, in one form or another.



How outside influences will change

We asked students to rank four major influences on design today and what they might be in 25 years time.



The biggest change they saw occurring was the environment overshadowing society as a major influence.

While it may seem obvious that design is driven by economics – clients who want 1. bums on seats, 2. products sold or 3. better public perception so that 1 and 2 can occur – students ranked the economy as having the least influence on design.

STUDENT OPTIMISM

Give me some of that good stuff

I'm not sure what students are on, but I want some! Students are wildly optimistic about graphic design and the benefits it can bring to their lives and the lives of everyone else around them. This unbridled enthusiasm is a fantastic thing for any employer – anyone hired with these übermensch qualities would surely provide an incredible morale boost for the studio.

My biggest worry is that schools are overselling design (the bums on seats economic scenario), setting up students for a great big crash once they hit the workforce. It might be time for some plain packaging laws for design schools.

DESIGN WILL MAKE ME RICH

60%

Research shows that design is not the easiest road to riches. According to the latest AGDA Industry Survey¹ 40% of designers earn less than \$50k, while just 5% earn more than \$150k. As a graduate expect \$40k. That will rise to an astronomical \$70k for senior designers. In the UK 49% of design studios have an annual turnover of less than £50k².

I WILL BE WORKING IN DESIGN 10 YEARS FROM NOW

63%

The reality of the situation is that 25-34 year olds make up 46% of the industry workforce and that by the time designers hit their mid 40s, this number is reduced to just 10.5% of the workforce.

DESIGN WILL REDUCE THE NO. OF USELESS PRODUCTS BEING ADDED TO OUR WORLD

66%

Um, isn't industrialisation the reason we have piles of 'things' in the first place? According to Phillipe Starck (in his reality tv show – *Design for Life*), better designed products have greater longevity, and they are 'sexy'.

DESIGN WILL IMPROVE THE ECONOMY

72%

According to Design Victoria, the design sector contributes \$7 billion to Victoria's economy, and businesses that use design are more likely to show profit growth, as well as higher rates of profit growth.³

DESIGN WILL BE PART OF THE AVERAGE AUSTRALIAN'S VERNACULAR

75%

When travelling overseas, particularly in Europe, one of the things that was a real eye-opener for me was how design is an integral part of society. It is expressed in the way people think, talk and live. They are positive and proud of their design heritage, rather than seeing it as 'a wank'. I think Australian designers have a huge job ahead of them to make design a positive part of our vernacular.

DESIGN WILL SAVE THE ENVIRONMENT

85%

If the trucks roaring past my parents' house in Tasmania are anything to go by (one every half hour) – loaded up with old growth Myrtles, King Billy Pine and ancient gums, en route to the woodchippers – design isn't going to save the planet any time soon.

DESIGN WILL FLOURISH

95%

Design can flourish, but it seems it can't be BIG. According to the Design Institute of Australia⁴: "Small business pressures dominate the industry and the high levels of competition make it difficult to grow larger business structures." Their survey found there is an average of 3.1 people per design business.

DESIGN WILL MAKE COMMUNICATION BETWEEN PEOPLE BETTER

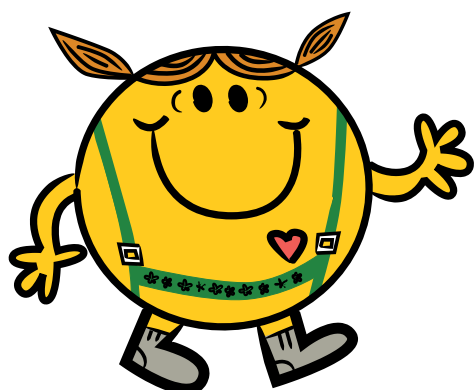
98%

This is what I keep telling my wife but she just won't listen to me.

DESIGN WILL IMPROVE OUR LIVES

98%

We've been repeating this sentiment since we first worked out how to use a rock to club an animal over the head for dinner. Everything we do has a consequence – design is no exception. *d*



footnotes

- 1 AGDA Industry Survey (2010)
- 2 UK Design Industry Research (2010)
- 3 Five Years On: Victoria's Design Sector 2003-2008
- 4 DIA Industry Survey (2004):
www.design.org.au/index.cfm?article=112&id=102

www.alextyers.com.au