

Title of Paper: **Embedding Research into a Practice-Based,
Creative Course**

Paper submitted and to be presented by:

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Bio

Molly Owens MA, PGCE and BA(Hons), is a Senior Lecturer in Advertising Design at the University of Wales, Newport. Her recent research has been centered around the ideas of learning spaces, creativity, and communities of practice and collaboration.

Research Domains:

- Learning, Teaching and Assessment
- Student Experience

Part 1, Abstract:

The need for 'employability' of graduates is being balanced with the traditional purpose of higher education. This leads to a conundrum: must the development of individuals as intellectuals be sacrificed for the need to provide 'training' for jobs?

In a move to embrace both employability and the purist ideal of a university education, to become a better, more knowledgeable individual who can contribute to society, I began to feed research into practice-based, 'training' modules.

The results of these efforts will be examined. Along with more graduate hires and stronger portfolios, students have a better understanding of the world and the people with whom they are trying to communicate. Interestingly, student identities were transformed as a result of their research about the world and their place in it, as they mature into individuals who can eloquently speak about their research processes and the meaning behind their creative concepts and ideas.

Part 2, Outline of paper entitled **Research-Led Creativity**

Background

I joined the University of Wales, Newport, in late 2008, teaching on the Advertising Design course. I moved from the United States, where I was a full-time creative director and a part-time lecturer at a Minnesota university. Having taught for 15 years, and having completed post-graduate study myself, I knew the core need for academic rigour and investigation, weighed against the outcome of professional employability upon end of study.

Having taught in the States for over a decade, I was used to the American philosophy of the sake of learning for learning in higher education. Students pay a great deal of tuition to attend four-year liberal arts universities in order to not just become qualified as a practitioner, but to experience the purist purpose of higher education: to become a critical thinker, to examine a number of subjects in varied disciplines, to become able to contextualise the world around them and their place in it, while also being able to critically analyse any situation, literature, art, and so on. Creative advertising students attend university in the States for this purpose: to become critical and creative thinkers. Simply learning software packages to be trained as a typesetter or other 'manual/non-thinking' position can be achieved through other two-year institutions or training schools.

The course as I found it had a distinct lack of research or academic rigour, and felt like a factory churning out 'software jockeys'; students who could film or design a piece of work, but that lacked any depth, creativity, originality or value. They were unable to speak to their audience or consider anything other than the way something looked, whether it was appropriate or not.

To implement the use of research and theory in the eight practice-based modules I teach per year, I used open educational resources such as a blog and Facebook group page. According to Browne and Newcombe, 2009, these resources can contribute to a more constructivist and connectivist pedagogy, where teachers and learners co-create knowledge and understanding.

I also introduced a number of other tools for research: research booklets, formal and informal presentations both remotely and in the classroom, and reflective and analytical journals, in order that students would examine the world around them and then feed this knowledge into their creative projects. The course was ultimately redesigned to embed research and academic rigour into all modules, theory and practice, in July 2011. Inherent now to the programme, there is a healthy balance of research and analysis with the need for creative outcomes.

The new 'research-informed creativity' assisted students in generating ideas and creative concepts by allowing them to approach a design 'problem' and find its solution through various steps of research.

Although many designers' work is shaped by colour, typography, and other formal elements, the primary need of an advertising designer is the ability to move a particular audience. Because there are psychological, anthropological, and sociological elements to any form of advertising or mass communication, it is necessary for students to participate in forms of research before ever putting pen to paper.

Since embracing the need for research in tandem or prior to a creative concept execution, the ability of students to 'meet the briefs' has developed. Conducting research before or during the creative process helps give direction to and helps with development of creative idea generation (per surveys and interviews). Research-led design and writing helps students on the jumping-off point of 'what do I draw/write/make'?

The results of the introduction of theory and research into the practice-based modules, and the rewritten course, will be shared. Along with the hard numbers of successful student placements and hires, I will also discuss how student identities were transformed as a result of their research, as they became individuals who are able to eloquently speak about their research, analyse pertinent and relevant information, and how this led to their creative concepts, ideas, and campaigns.

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