

Setting the Course:

Instilling Comprehension, Curation, and Implementation of Research in Four-year, College Graphic Design Programs

Richmond, Virginia

Graphic Design Research

Graphic design students require a foundation in understanding, utilizing and conducting research. The discipline would benefit from standards for quantitative, qualitative, mixed-methods and practical approaches to graphic design-specific research.

This study was motivated by two research questions: [1] what theoretical analysis and practical approaches to graphic design research are graphic design educators currently implementing? [2] How can college-level graphic design educators build a culture of research literacy in graphic design baccalaureate programs?

The intention of this study was to advance the understanding of how graphic design educators define and implement graphic design research, first through qualitative analysis of a survey of four-year, graphic design degree program professors across the U.S. followed by in-depth interviews with published educators practicing research.

A Two-part Study

This study intends to create a framework for the discussion about disciplined inquiry within the education and practice of graphic design. The study was conducted in two parts.

The first portion of the study was an online survey that was conducted over a period of two weeks at the beginning of May 2016. The instrument used for the first part of the case study was a survey of thirty-eight questions, two sample verification questions, and eleven demographic questions.

The participants for the study were located and selected through online data accumulation that was identified through two professional design organizations, the website for AIGA, the professional association for design and the website for National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD).

The second part of the study was a series of in-depth interviews with six key participants who are published researchers who focus on graphic design research and teach in four-year undergraduate graphic design programs. This portion was conducted over a period of two months from May to July 2016.

Interviews used a semistructured interviewing format based on the study's research question. The sample for the interviews was a purposive sampling of a target population who were chosen because they are teaching, practicing graphic designers who conduct research and author articles, books, and presentations on graphic design.

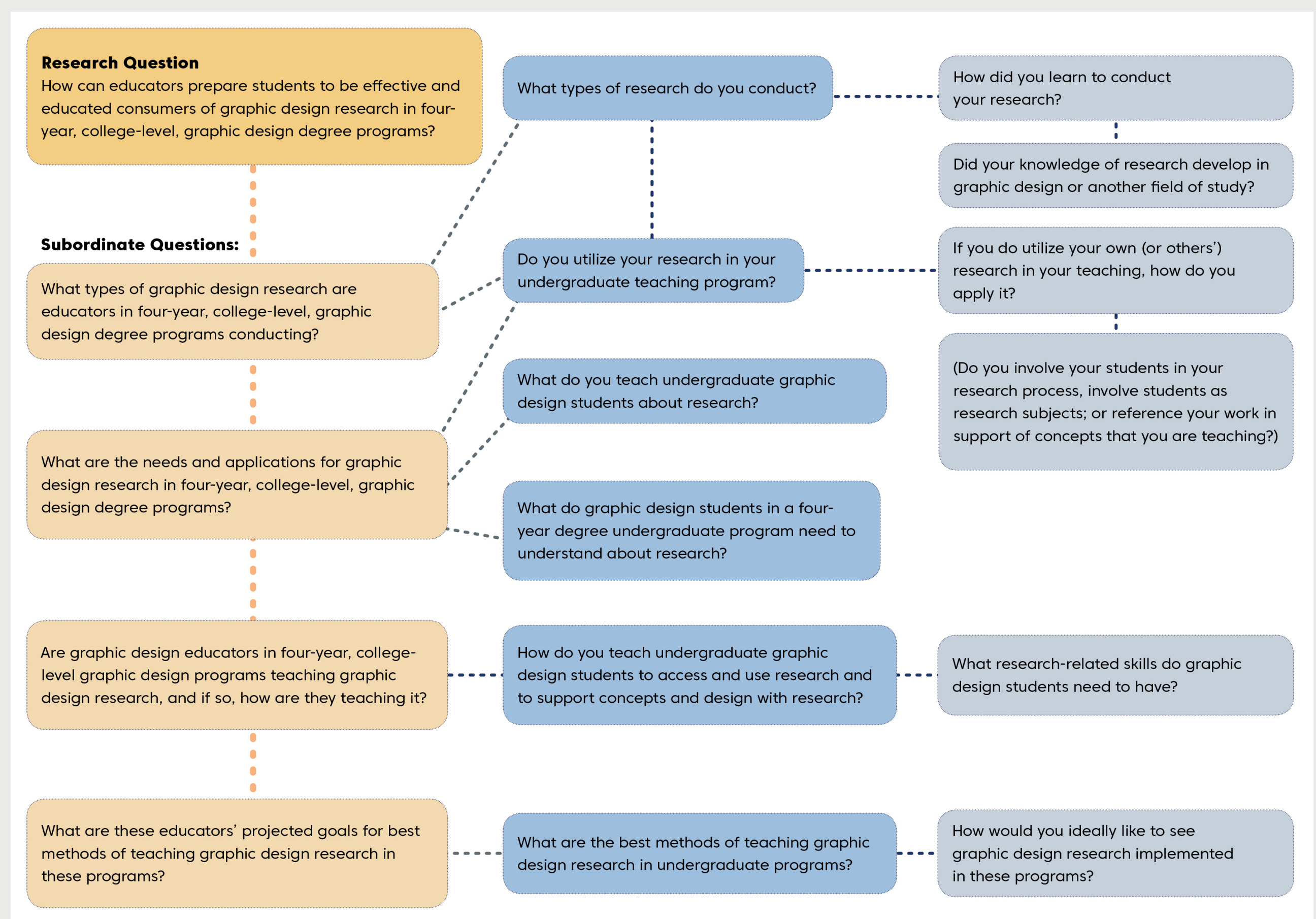
The participants Audrey Bennett, Juliette Cezzar, Behnous McKay, Kelly Murdoch-Kitt, Paul Nini, and Mike Zender were interviewed by phone or skype and recorded on two devices with written observational notes.

Survey

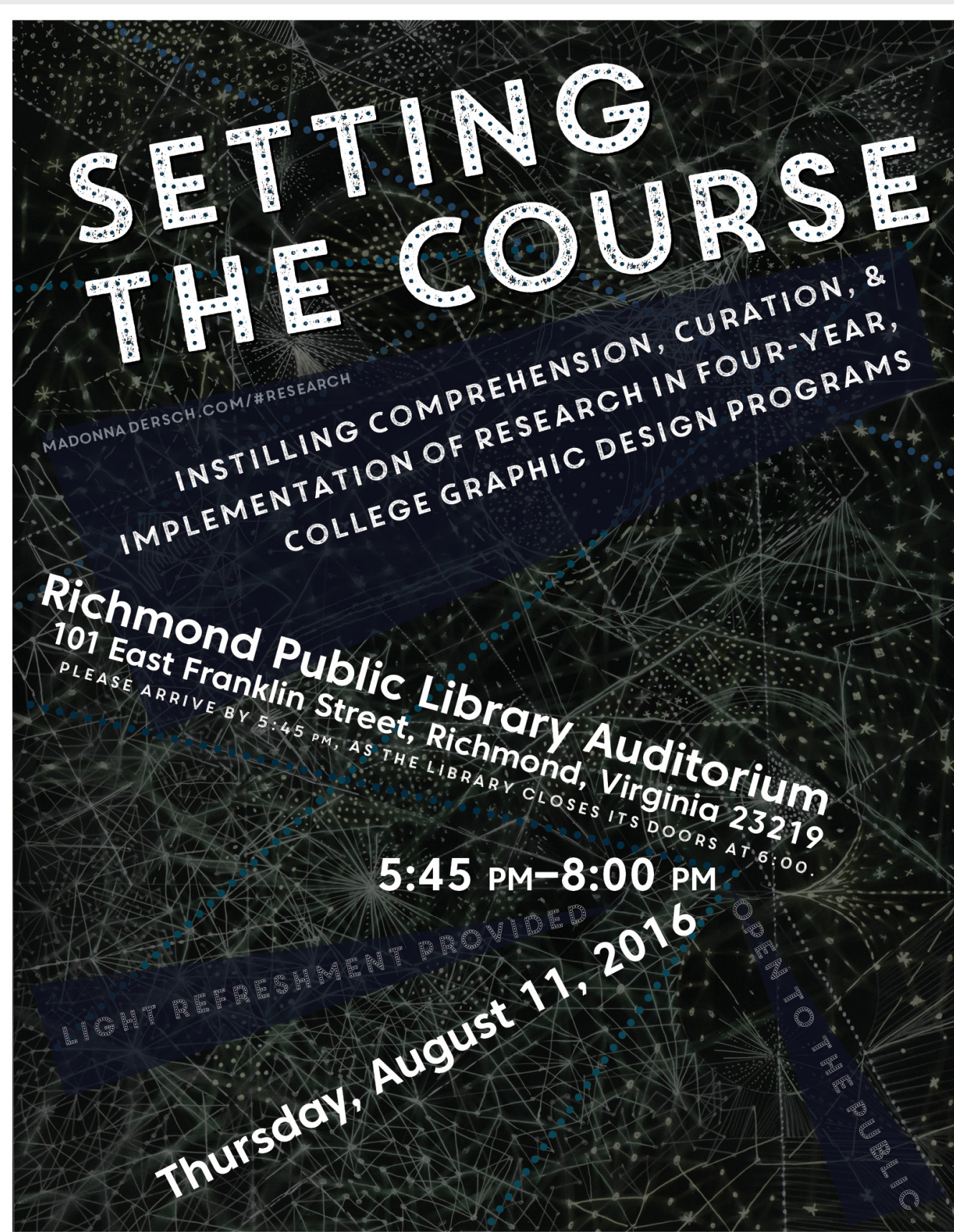
Around 1,200 email invitations for the survey were sent, with a return of 131 responses, a 10.9% response rate. While noting that the sample was limited by size, themes that emerged during analysis of the survey data supported an interest in graphic design research autonomy, an interest in interdisciplinary collaboration, and a desire to mesh research into existing curricula. Survey comments confirmed that graphic design research is an enigmatic and heated topic.

Interviews

Much of the literature to be found on design research is theoretical and not about the changes being implemented or the explorations in pedagogy to include design research. Absent in the conversation are clear concepts and terminology about these developments. The interviews with the research-driven faculty revealed the ways that research is implemented and taught in their respective departments and institutions.



Development of questions for one-on-one interviews.



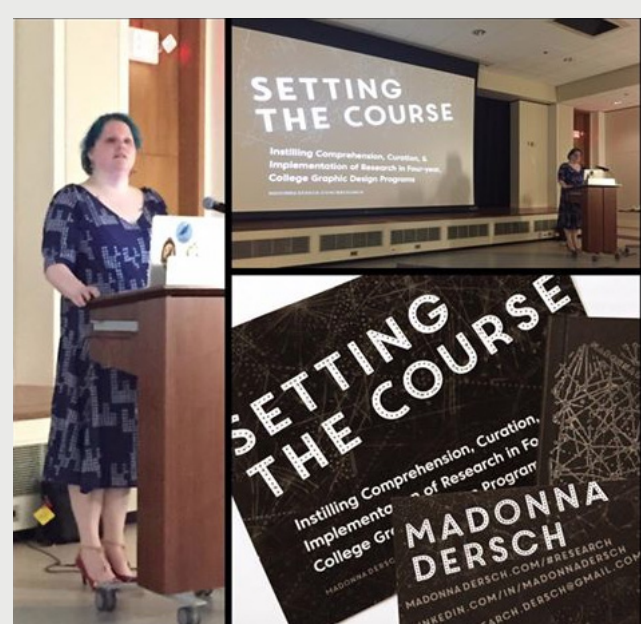
Study Findings

Challenges facing graphic design research include a lack of consensus in nomenclature and standards for graphic design and the ambiguity of design research. Development of research methodology from other disciplines does not meet all the needs of graphic design. Changes in the role of graphic designers as well as changing media requires constant evolution of the process and needs of graphic design research.

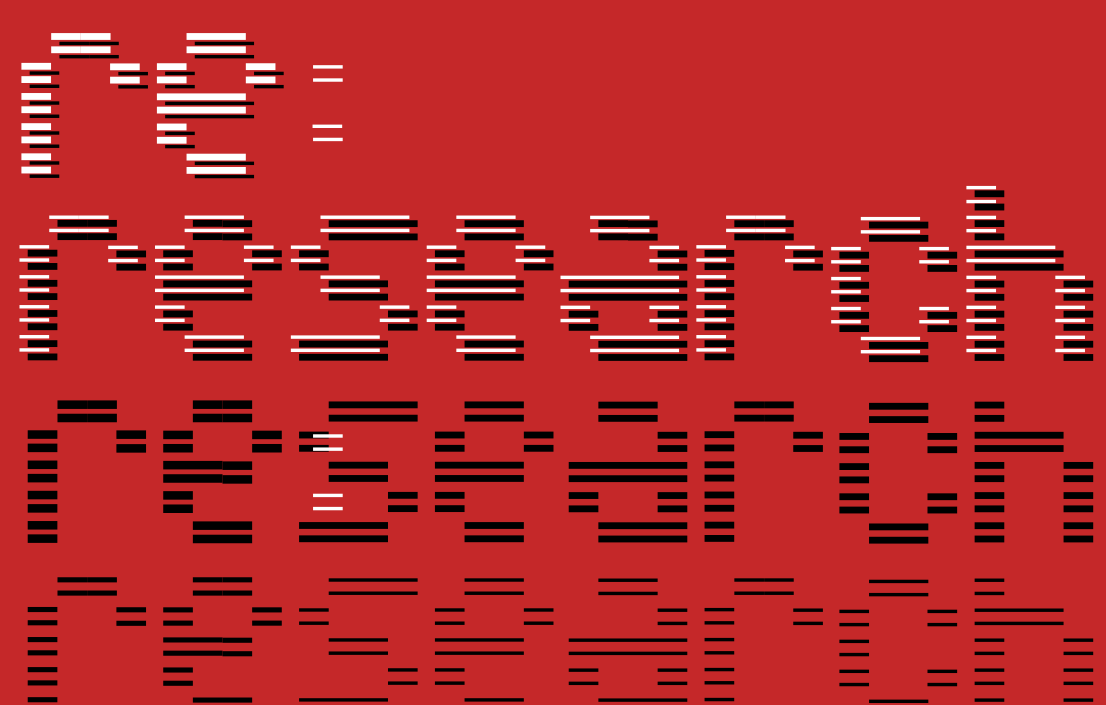
The discipline's areas of strength include collaboration between graphic designers, interdisciplinary collaboration, intercultural design, building research into curriculum instead of creating separate research courses, adaptation from other disciplines, and socially conscious and ethical concerns.

Recommendations established from the study are to validate nomenclature, share knowledge, increase dialogue, continue to collaborate with those within and outside the discipline, and to embed research into curricula.

The nomenclature and taxonomy of graphic design research that is described in this study is a working foundation for future research in the study of graphic design research, which would give basis to future conversations on the methodologies and applications of graphic design research.



Event photos (left), notebook takeaways (center), and poster (right) for research presentation held at the Richmond Public Library. The presentation was announced by poster, postcard, email, social media, public radio ad, and the AIGA Richmond contact list.



Author

Madonna G. Dersch

Organization

SCAD
Savannah College of
Art and Design