

Look Around You, Look Inside You: Exploring Heritage in the Design Classroom

Gainesville, Florida



How can students at a federally-designated Hispanic-serving institution in Houston, TX, understand and express culture and diversity through art and design?

Here, the author presents primary results of a project implemented in an introductory graphic design class, which is part of a multidisciplinary arts program. Through a book design project, students learned **basics of design research and auto-ethnography in a studio setting, in order to explore heritage and culture**, their context of living, family history, and personal connections with their past, present, and future. Results from students' research inform brainstorming, sketching, design, and production of **a book that contains multiple visual explorations on "Heritage."**

Some of the most memorable and productive student conversations and interactions took place not only during the development of the project, but during the final project presentation, which demonstrated students' capacity to develop greater tolerance and a more empathic view of *the other*, to be open to reanalyze their context and personal interactions, to better evaluate the design abilities of their peers as they respond to their own individual approach to the topic, and to develop a better and safer sense of place in the classroom.

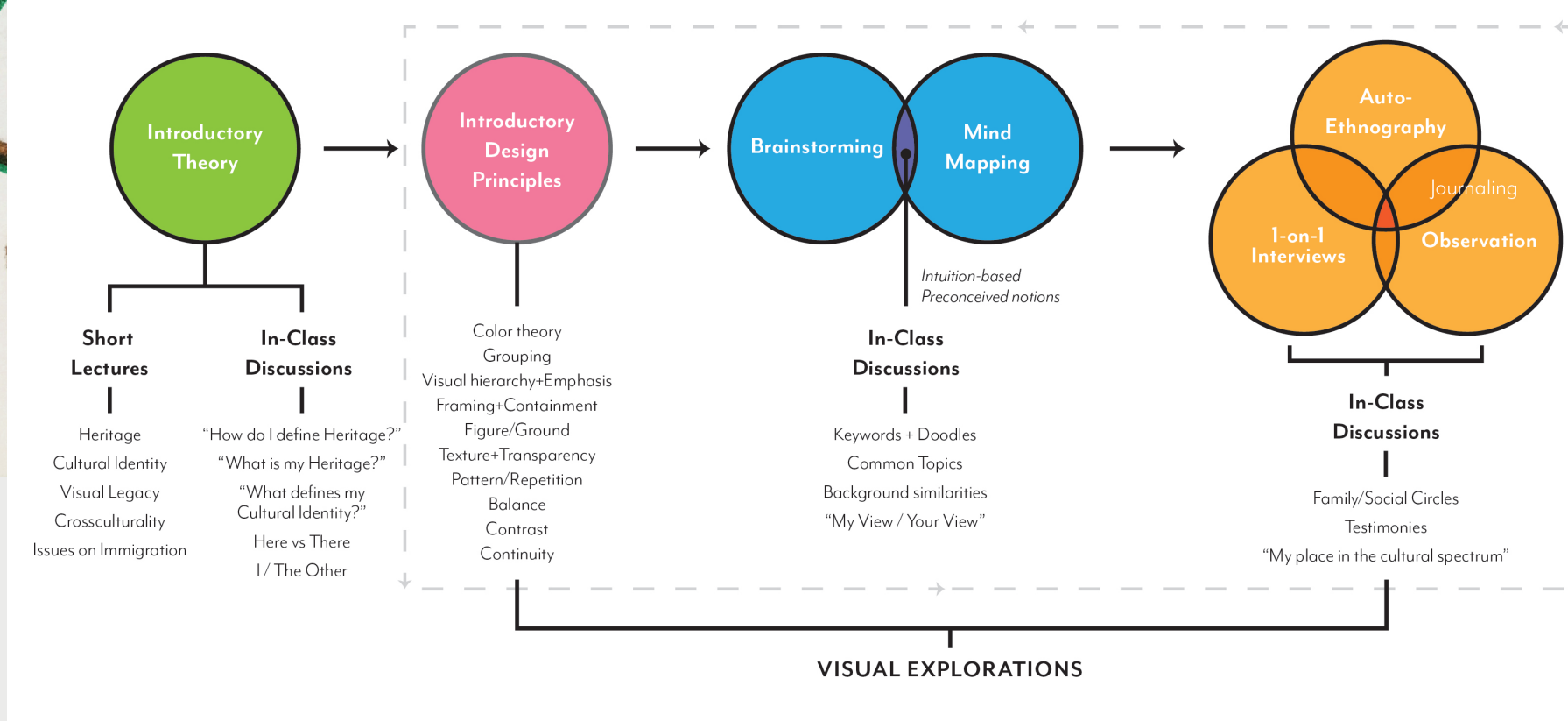
Design students from diverse backgrounds or attending minority-serving universities require alternative learning experiences that relate to their multinational and multicultural heritage.

Many of these students struggle with finding their own place in society and within the higher education system as immigrants or children of immigrants in an environment that is dual and many times conflicting, where family and community traditions, language and culture confront the pressure to acquire, adapt and prevail in the American society and economy.

Cultural diversity should be cultivated and celebrated by current design education curriculum in the United States.



Diagram of project methods and activities, considering the Research Through Design model

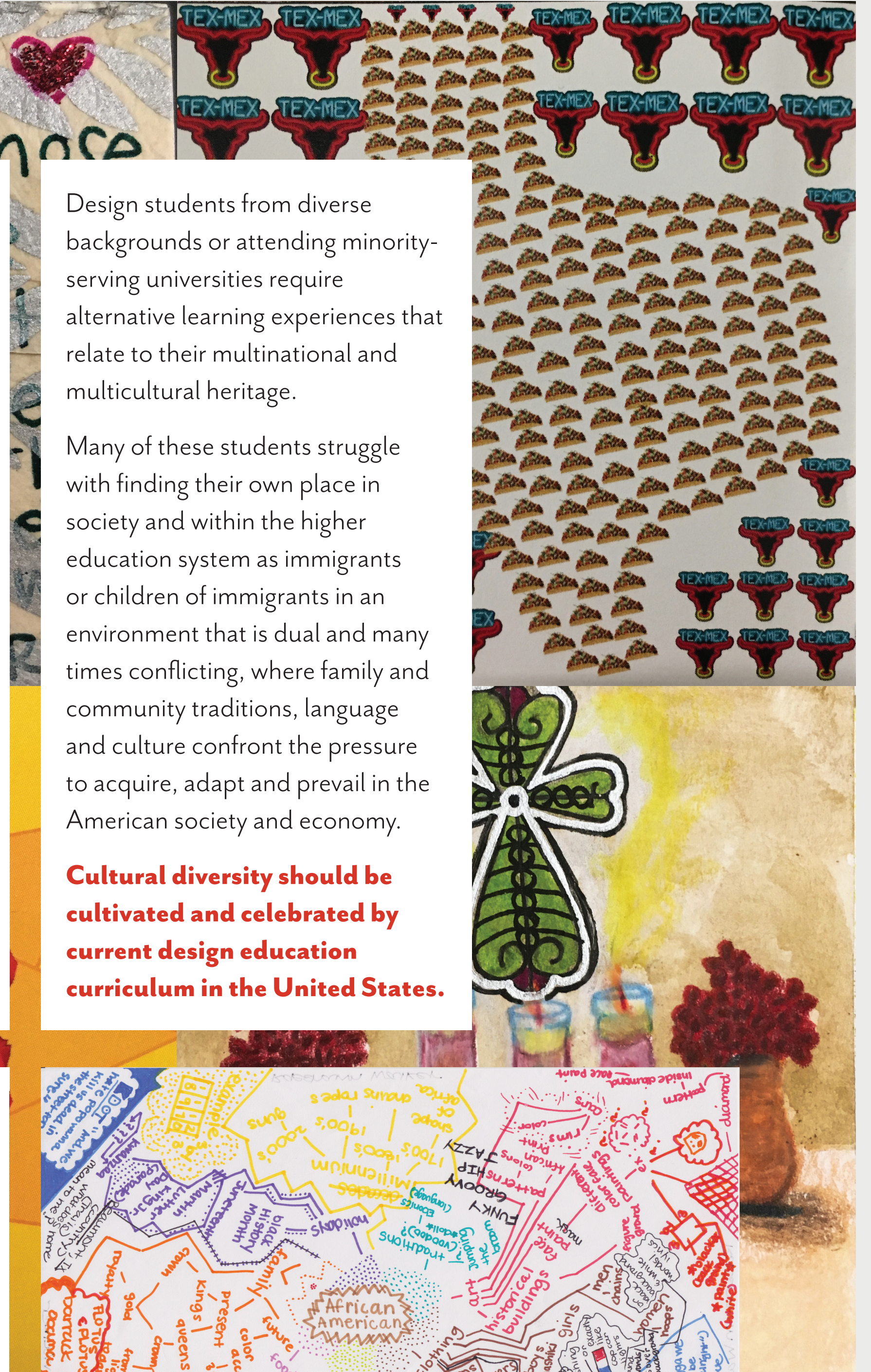


"40 WAYS TO VISUALIZE HERITAGE" – ACCORDION BOOK SAMPLES

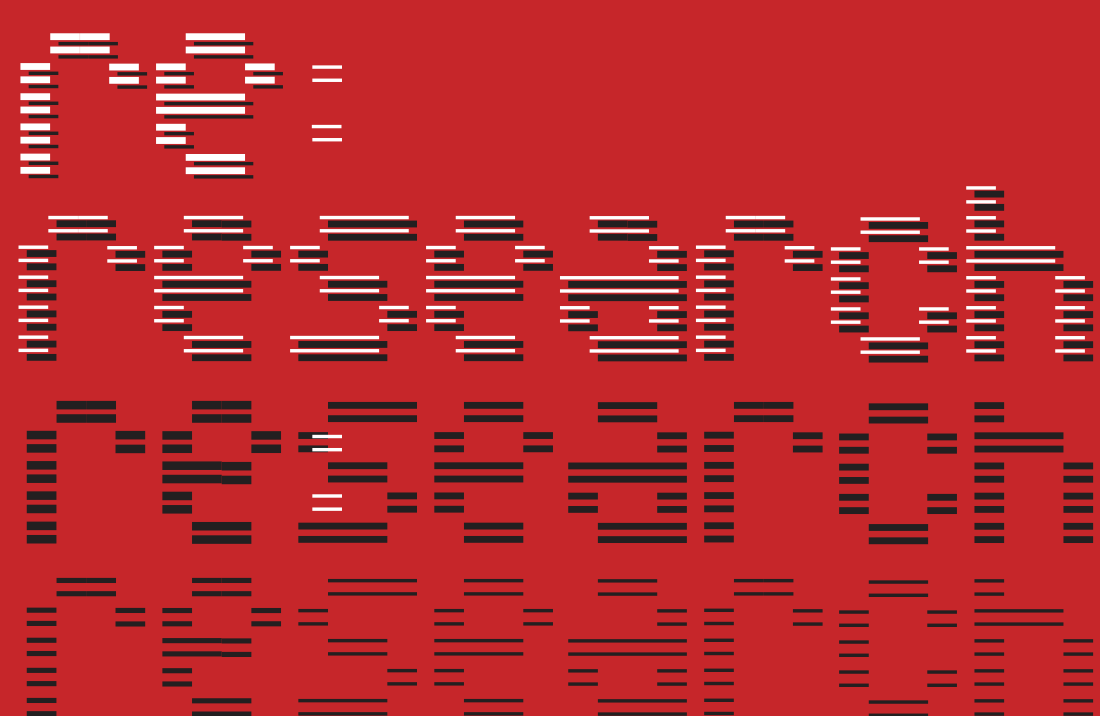
The examples below show some visual compositions contained in two student books. The project was applied during two long semesters (2016-2017) in an introductory design class composed by freshmen and sophomores, many of whom have never been exposed to exploratory visual methods or art and design principles. The development of the project facilitated design learning by focusing on cultural identity and the democratization of heritage engagement, while supporting students with developing a sense of place, self-worth, and understanding of the other.



After the project, students demonstrated a deeper understanding of heritage and cultural identity. They gained stronger reasoning of their own world vision, discovering that it is based on different beliefs, interpretations of forms and practices of everyday life that underpin culture, their provided explanations of origin, as well as understanding of their own "self."



Mind Mapping and Brainstorming are useful tools for preliminary discovery of students' own backgrounds, cultural stereotypes, and implicit bias. Examples by R.Walker and J.Negrete.



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