Project Summary

Project Title: The Zine Project: Students Engaged in a National Illustration Event
Project director: Kevin McCloskey, Professor, Communication Design Dept.

The purpose of this grant-funded project was to assess how student participation in a national showcase event impacts their learning. Twenty-one Kutztown University illustration students actively participated in MoCCA fest, an annual event staged by the Museum of Cartoon and Comic Art in New York City. This signature project addressed three of the five Student Learning Outcomes for the Communication Design BFA Program.

Students made zines to share at the event (“zine” an informal term for magazine, and in this content, it represents short-run self-published comics). The zine project is the major assignment for CDE253 Illustration II – it covers 7 consecutive weeks and the zines must be at least 8 pages plus an illustrated cover. Of the 21 students, 19 delivered projects that met at the very least the technical specifications of the zine.

A specifically prepared rubric was used to assess student success related to the Communication Design department’s Outcome Goals in the area of Professional Practice. Most students exceeded expectations in technological mastery and presentation. Although only one student failed at Time Management, others missed preliminary deadlines and were unable to retool and improve their work prior to the final deadline.

A second faculty member from Visual Arts volunteered to review the zines created by KU students and compare them to a sample of work by students from other colleges who were also presenting at MoCCA (the comparison zines were selected by Prof. McCloskey at MoCCA as examples of the state of the art). On the whole, the reviewer found the KU student work comparable to the range of quality from other schools. He found the KU story lines tended to be formulaic, however KU student “artwork was impressive and notable for diversity of styles.”

In this reviewer’s opinion, the finest work he reviewed was by a student at SUNY Purchase. This particular zine was a science-fiction story with high production values. It had a glossy color cover and full-color interior illustrations showcasing the artist’s considerable drawing skill and his storytelling ability. The reviewer ranked two of the 11 KU zines just below the SUNY example, in his words these 2 were “exceptional.” Another 3 KU zines he felt were “above average” of the pool. All in all, his assessment was that “KU student work did not exceed, but was generally comparable to the work of their peers.” His rankings were in line with the recorded rubric scores.

It is worth noting that one of the KU students said of MoCCA, “It shows that I will have to up my game if I want to compete with the work I saw.” The MoCCA event was very popular with the illustration students who attended. KU illustration students have not been involved in many field trips or interscholastic events in recent years, as compared to students focused on advertising and graphic design. With some support from the CD department and college we may be able to make this an annual event.

The zine rubric and a version of this report have been placed online at The Society of Illustrators
Educators Forum, a password-protected forum is open to all art educators. Examples of the student’s zine artwork has been published on the site: www.illustrationconcentration.com.