KATE LAMERE, PH.D. • CFAC GRANT REPORT • 2012

The Research/Creative Activities Grant I received for the 2011–2012 academic year was put toward the purchase of qualitative analysis software called ATLAS.ti. This software is key to doing coding and data analysis for the research project I describe below. ATLAS.ti allows researchers to not only code qualitative data (PDFs, Word files, even images and video), but also create various types of visualizations (think mind maps) of the data and its relationships, as well as export the data in a variety of formats. Because my current research involves mixing qualitative and quantitative methods, as well as a large data set, having ATLAS.ti is critical to doing this work. I attended an ATLAS.ti training session in March 2011 (not part of the grant), which was instrumental in getting this research project underway.

THE GRAPHIC DESIGN BODY OF KNOWLEDGE

This project uses, for the first time, empirical evidence to document and define the profession of graphic design's body of knowledge (GD BoK). The research combines qualitative and quantitative methods in a large, two-part, multi-stage study to answer the research questions, “What do graphic designers know, and how/when do they acquire this knowledge?”

The GD BoK study uses an integrated mixed methods design and is divided into two phases. The first phase of the research, which is currently underway, employs a sequential exploratory strategy, focusing on identifying, describing, and defining graphic design work areas and work/career stages. In the next quantitative step, codes will be used to analyze a purposive sample of graphic design periodicals and blogs. Descriptive and inferential statistics will interrogate the themes’ interrelationships and establish the themes’ weights and distributions. The first phase will conclude with a preliminary model of graphic design's body of knowledge.

The second phase will apply a concurrent triangulation strategy in which quantitative data will be collected with an online survey delivered to a large sample of US graphic design students, educators, and practitioners. Inferential statistics will be used to weight the data and distribute it across the graphic design career stages. Concurrently, open-ended qualitative interviews from an ethnographic standpoint will be conducted with a quota sample of graphic designers. In the last step of the research, data will be compared and integrated to create the final GD BoK model. Abbott’s theory on the system of professions (1988) will be used as a lens through which to understand graphic design’s jurisdiction, or control over work.

This research departs from other projects about graphic design knowledge by using an integrated mixed methods design, maintaining internal validity, and focusing on transparency in research design and process. As such, the final GD BoK has the potential to inform curricula decisions, educational accreditation standards, spark debates and discussions about the future of graphic design practice, and encourage the continued exploration of graphic design knowledge. The GD BoK will add to the small, but growing corpus of graphic design research, providing scholarly evidence about graphic design knowledge to inform decisions about the future of graphic design education.

Want to know more? Please email lamerek@ecu.edu