

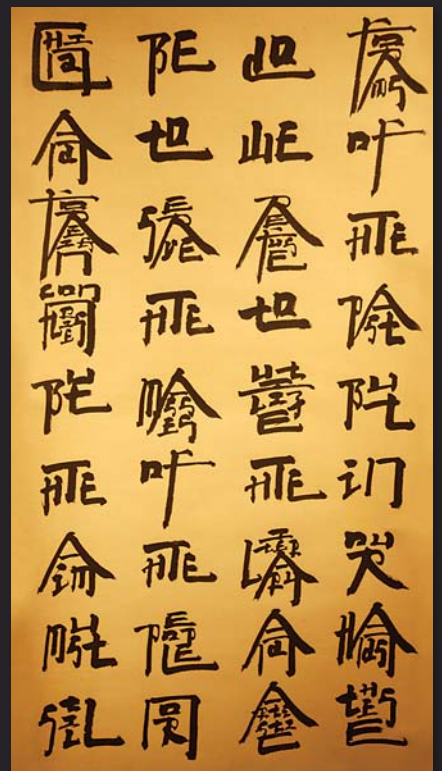
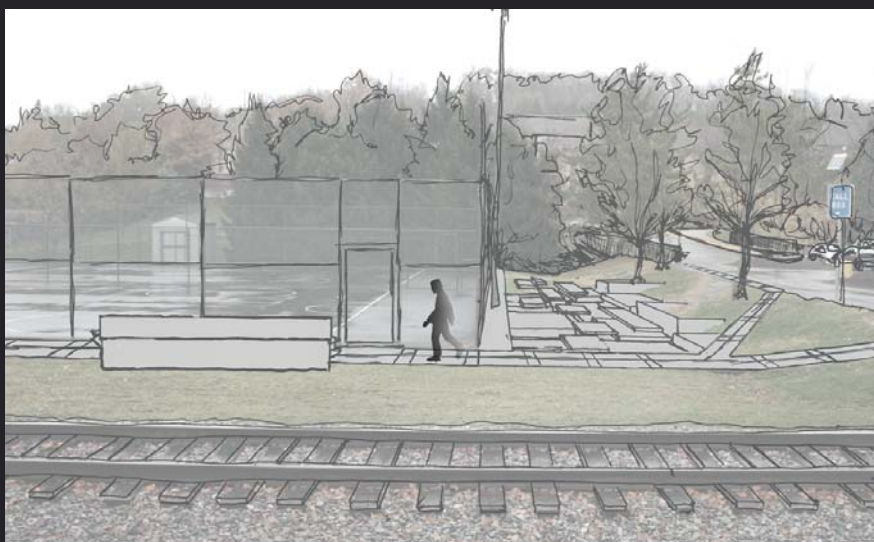


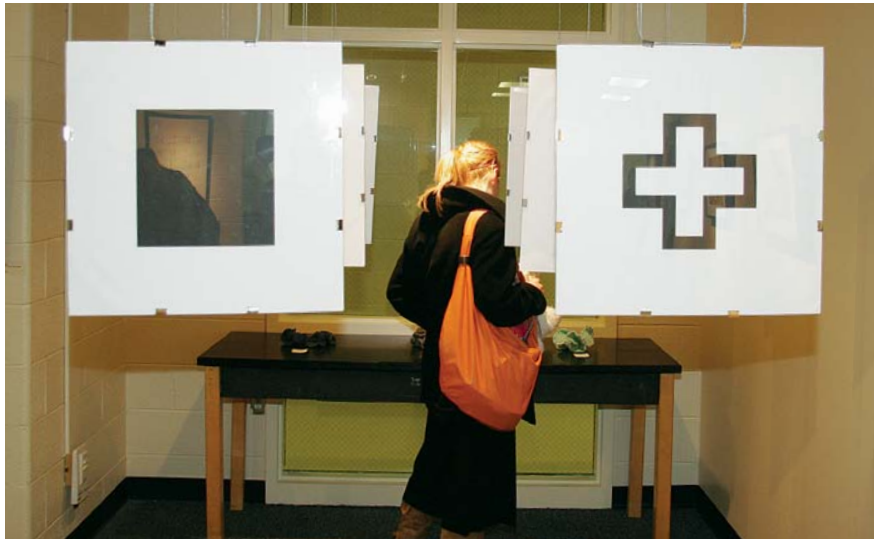
SEE ING DIF FER ENTLY



Spring 2011 IVS seminar students will help redesign the sculpture garden near Duke Hall with IVS Fellow and noted architect Michael Singer (above). 2008 IVS guest artist and lecturer Xu Bing (left) shared his artwork and philosophy with students and the campus and local communities via lectures and an exhibit.

Multimedia, multidisciplinary center is a catalyst for re-envisioning environments and creating change BY CHRIS EDWARDS





Students studying in the Institute for Visual Studies share their final projects in campus exhibits like this one (left) in the Carrier Library.

Mona Lisa, The Last Supper, Vitruvian Man. Even if you're not an art major or an art enthusiast, you are probably familiar with these famous images and cultural icons created by Leonardo da Vinci. Now, imagine what Da Vinci could have done with a Flip video and a computer! That's how professors and students in the JMU Institute for Visual Studies think, work and create.

The institute was created as a center for scholarly, scientific and creative inquiry into the nature and workings of images and our visual environment. "I give professors opportunities to share what they absolutely love — their passions — with students. And the outcomes have been extraordinary," says David Ehrenpreis, institute director and art history professor.

An incubator for new ideas, the Institute for Visual Studies also upholds a longstanding JMU tradition — projects are collabor-

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ative and bring together students and professors from multiple academic disciplines. Students from diverse majors and academic programs collaborate in IVS Studio Seminars to create landscapes, graphic novels, and scientific and mathematical illustrations. Faculty members representing multiple disciplines help guide and shape the students' multimedia, multi-dimensional projects. "IVS is a catalyst for creating change," explains Ehrenpreis, "from theory to lab work to implementing real-world changes. The institute and its studio seminars are the nexus where this creativity comes together."

The seed for IVS took root after Ehrenpreis began noticing "people all over campus and in different disciplines investigating the visual realm."

In 2005, Ehrenpreis found JMU psychologist Sheena Rogers researching the way timing of video images alters viewer perceptions. Around the same time, mathematician/statistician Jim Sochacki spearheaded the JMU "video wall" project, in which students create images includ-

ing planets, fractal geometry and a mouse genome on a wall of 75 TV screens. Sochacki and the High-Resolution Visualization and Animation Group are interested in visualization and animation systems with a resolution that is an order of magnitude greater than that provided by traditional graphics workstations. The group consists of students and professors from computer information systems, mathematics, physics and psychology programs. (Learn more at www.jmu.edu/hyper/visualization/index.html).

AN INCREASINGLY VISUAL WORLD

"Digital technology has changed the way I think, work and teach," says Ehrenpreis. "It also made me think about the democratization of the image, and wonder about how other academic disciplines use this kind of technology. ... The 'vision' or visual part of the Institute for Visual Studies refers to one, the eye; and two, re-envisioning our world."

Ehrenpreis' observations have grown from his own evolution as an art historian. When JMU introduced the Madison Digital Image Database, Ehrenpreis, like many professors, took a dim view of "replacing slides with online files." He soon found MDID not only eliminated waiting his turn to check out that *Mona Lisa* slide, but MDID allowed him to zoom in and study its detail.

Ehrenpreis began to wonder, "How can education best use today's much-discussed visual turn?"

THE BIRTH OF THE IVS CENTER

"We got faculty and students together and investigated visual transformations happening everywhere," Ehrenpreis says. "I organized a group from many academic disciplines — now an advisory board including Sochacki and Rogers — that envisioned a kind of crucible, an experimental site. We tried to create the conditions for creation."

Paradoxically, while technology sparks the changes, IVS's vision is Renaissance-inspired: Can creativity transcend the rigid specialty boundaries that we may accept unquestioningly but Leonardo da Vinci did not?



An IVS studio seminar team project – “Alluvial Garden” – became part of an environmental stewardship presentation to university officials. (Left): President Linwood H. Rose and IVS Director David Ehrenpreis listen to students Brittany Lyn Boveri ('10) and Phillip Gockel ('10). (Below): A student checks out an exhibit on *The Gilgamesh Machine*, a graphic novel by two students.

IVS planners refused to limit the institute to technology. “We agreed that the important thing for students was actually using their hands and creating,” Ehrenpreis explains.

Hence, the IVS Studio Seminar was born. These multidisciplinary, collaborative studio seminars most clearly exemplify the IVS philosophy. Each course begins, conceptually, in “the seminar” with ideas, then moves from implementation to “the studio;” or in scientific parlance, lab and field work.

Consensus emerged among the planners to keep seminar classes small. IVS Studio Seminars are team-taught by professors from two disciplines, while students (also from diverse disciplines) team up to work on projects. Ehrenpreis says, “We don’t want the artist to become a mathematician, or vice versa, but for each to learn from the other.”

These are the courses where professors can be completely innovative. The spark for most IVS Studio Seminars comes from one of those moments, explains Ehrenpreis, “where a professor says, ‘You know, I have always wanted to teach ...’

“Fill in the blank,” Ehrenpreis says. “And we’ve made those class ideas and connections among disciplines happen in the studio seminars.”

With a JMU General Education grant, and support from then-Provost Doug Brown, IVS launched in spring 2005 in a computer room in Burruss Hall with the studio seminar World of Maps.

The institute has become a centerpiece of the new College of Visual and Performing Arts, and the center is located on the second floor of Roop Hall. The center includes a learning space, a social space and a workroom that all intersect with an exhibit space. The institute’s flexible learning and work space layout was designed by JMU interior and industrial design professor and IVS board member Ronn Daniel. “We wanted the physical space to mirror this new educational learning experi-

ence,” says Ehrenpreis. “The layout of the institute demonstrates the way we think and put into the world what we create. The IVS space itself expresses the idea of moving from theory to creation to practice.”

WORKING WITH IVS FELLOWS OF DISTINCTION

Ehrenpreis intends two things to happen for IVS seminar students: studying with and receiving critiques from a visiting IVS Fellow of distinction, and creating things that extend out into the world. Books are created to be published; landscapes are designed to be implemented.

In the spring 2008 IVS Studio Seminar Image & Text: The Art of Persuasion, Ehrenpreis and writing and rhetoric professor Kurt Schick brought together students from creative writing, art and art history.

“As director of JMU Learning Centers, Kurt was interested in the intersection of image and text,” says Ehrenpreis. “Who better to ask to come to campus than internationally renowned artist Xu Bing, whose art reflects communication styles. Bing, the first-ever IVS Fellow, has investigated the relationship between image and text since his arrival in America in 1990. He strives to create art that communicates across cultures.”

Xu Bing’s visit to campus included a Sawhill Gallery exhibit (including pieces never before exhibited), class visits, critiques of M.F.A. students’ art, and a public lecture that drew more than 900 participants.

As a program assistant for IVS, Christine Bednarz ('08) helped prepare for the visit. “I was privileged to help Dr. Ehrenpreis research, design and organize an exhibition for noted artist Xu Bing,” she says. “I learned how to organize art exhibitions from start to finish and explored new technologies. I always felt



like my voice was heard in IVS. My time as a student and employee of IVS was the most memorable part of my years at JMU.”

IVS is not a typical academic program that offers a major or minor. Having no catalog prefix, IVS seminars have attracted students majoring in at least 25 fields. The spring 2010 seminar, Writing and Illustrating Literature, included literature and graphic arts majors who formed eight author/illustrator teams to create children’s books, graphic novels, a Flash-animation video and other multimedia projects.

A professional editor has expressed interest in publishing one of the student collaborations, *The Gilgamesh Machine*, by writer Chris Parthemos ('10) and graphic artist Julia Lichtblau ('10). Parthemos describes the graphic novel as “an attempted fusion of science fiction with a blend of world mythology.” (www.jmu.edu/bethechange/stories/telling-showing.shtml.)

The idea for the course began three years ago when graphic design professor Rich Hilliard spoke to Ehrenpreis about his dream to “link student artists with writers.” When writing professor Jared Featherstone expressed a similar idea, Ehrenpreis (who calls himself “the glue”) suggested they talk.

Hilliard says, “In the 12 years that I have been teaching at JMU, my IVS class was the most rewarding and inspiring classroom experience by far. The support of the IVS staff, combined with the enthusiasm and drive of the students and my partner instructor, made this the highlight of my career in higher ed.”

COLLABORATIVE, REAL-WORLD APPLICATIONS

Each IVS studio seminar culminates with a public exhibit by students. Creative solutions are offered to answer real-world challenges.

When planning the fall 2009 IVS seminar, Environmental Design, Ehrenpreis invited JMU facilities management staff members to talk about areas of campus that needed “creative solutions to challenging problems.” The seminar was team-taught by graphic design professor Dawn Hachenski McCusker and interior design professor and architect Ronn Daniel.

Phillip Gockel, Brittany Lyn Boveri and Emilia Randler — 2010 grads in graphic design and interior design — chose an irregular area near Black’s Run that Ehrenpreis calls “a marshy mess.” The students came up with a plan for Alluvial Garden, a walkway, garden and layout directing water away from flood-plagued Mr. Chips. After presenting the plan to JMU President Linwood H. Rose, the students followed up with an independent study and created a budget.

“This is about as real as it gets,” says Ronn Daniel. Though the concept did not fit JMU’s long-range plans (the 10-year master plan calls for an extension of Grace Street that will go where the garden would be installed), Ehrenpreis feels it went beyond mere exercise. “You can demonstrate new possibilities, whether they happen immediately or in the future.”

IVS Fellow and noted architect Michael Singer, who advised the fall 2009 IVS seminar groups, found that team interaction was the “most challenging and rewarding aspect for students.” That is much like the case in real-world working environments, he adds. “Autonomy is usually an earned position, and collaborative skills are a helpful asset. The JMU students’ work was beyond my experience of what undergraduates usually produce.”

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— MICHAEL SINGER
IVS Fellow and architect

Environmental Design Studio Seminar professors McCusker and Daniel and their students were ecstatic to work with IVS Fellow Michael Singer. Ehrenpreis says, “Michael is the exemplar of these two academic fields, graphic design and industrial design. He also models the importance of multidisciplinary approaches to projects. His architectural project team includes an engineer, draftsman and an environmental scientist. He shows that a designer doesn’t have to be a ‘master of all’ — he just needs to see everything and bring it together.”

Because of his work with the IVS studio seminar, Singer has returned to campus to serve as a fellow for the 2010–11 academic year. He is designing improvements to Newman Lake and the landscaping in the bowl area near the College of Integrated Science and Technology.

MULTIDISCIPLINARY APPROACHES

The IVS students’ Alluvial Garden project brought together students and professors from three academic areas. The student team that planned the garden also worked with Environmental Rhetoric students from the JMU Institute for Stewardship of the Natural World (their project’s “client”), explains Daniel. “The projects became part of an environmental stewardship PowerPoint presentation, which the IVS and ISNW students collaborated in presenting to officials and President Rose.”

The IVS Studio Seminar Environmental Design and the School of Media Arts and Design Environmental Rhetoric course were running concurrently in fall 2009. Faculty members from SMAD and the College of Integrated Science and Technology guided multidisciplinary student teams through the process of creating a campuswide environmental stewardship communication campaign. The team’s campaigns included target audiences, tactics, brands and slogans to address important focal points such as waste and energy consumption.

One team’s campaign — “Choose Stewardship” was adopted and refined by the Institute for Stewardship of the Natural World and marketers in the JMU Division of University Advancement as the official university stewardship campaign. The “Choose Stewardship” logo designed by Kevin Edwards (’05, ’10M) is a visual reminder to the campus community



The JMU Institute for Stewardship of the Natural World adopted this logo by Kevin Edwards (’05, ’10M).

about JMU’s commitment to environmental stewardship.

Although students often consult each other, says design professor Dawn

Hachenski McCusker, “to actually have to rely on each other for the success of a whole project was difficult. These students met that challenge with pure professionalism.”

Ehrenpreis agrees. “We raised the bar, and they went right over it.”

A CATALYST FOR CREATING CHANGE

“IVS Studio Seminars take theory into practice” says Ehrenpreis. “This new educational experience is creating a multidisciplinary learning community of professors and students and is creating solutions for real-world problems. Faculty members from departments throughout the university are encouraged to develop new course proposals and submit them at the IVS website.” (www.jmu.edu/ivs)

Since 2005, IVS Studio Seminars have explored cross-disciplinary connections in art, advertising, animation, computer science, creative writing, mathematics, philosophy, psychology and science. Art history professor Corinne Diop and mathematics professor Elizabeth T. Brown have co-taught Math and Art: Beautiful Rigor several semesters.

This semester’s IVS Studio Seminar: Gender Issues and Visualization in Science poses the challenge of freeing scientific illustration from gender bias. JMU professors Louise Temple (biology) and Alysia Davis (women’s studies) are working with IVS Fellow and Brown University geneticist Kathy Takayama.

In addition to IVS Studio Seminars, IVS sponsors multidisciplinary colloquia such as inference mapping and illustration and creative writing (graphic novels). The IVS board hopes to conduct more community outreach projects like a photography workshop that part-time IVS assistant Daniel Robinson conducted with middle-school students in summer 2009.

Ehrenpreis says, “Our IVS seminars not only teach students to be critical consumers of visual culture, but we help students build collaborative skills and critical thinking. The IVS Studio Seminars have changed the way people on campus think about what a course can be.”

Perhaps they are seeing differently. 