Baseline has always been committed to international academic education within the Graphic Arts. From issue 52 onwards, four pages are now dedicated for a series of inspirational articles, essays, course projects, academic research, etc., from schools and universities around the globe.

Prof. Ian McLaren, distinguished academic and designer, has joined our team as an advisor and editor, to establish this new section on aspects of international design education.

What can a short-term study abroad travel course experience offer US based graphic design and illustration students?

Short-term study abroad courses offered by colleges and universities may be just as effective in promoting global awareness as the traditional semester abroad experiences. These courses are generally more affordable and appeal to students who might not be able or willing to commit to a semester or a year abroad. Short-term study abroad courses allow students in highly structured professional programs like Graphic Design and Illustration to have an immersive study abroad experience without falling behind or adding extra time to complete required coursework back at their home schools.

For the past nine years, Communication Design faculty members at Massachusetts College of Art and Design* have been engaged in developing and organising short-term travel abroad courses to Western Europe, China, and New Zealand for graphic design and illustration students. One of the benefits of faculty-led programs is that faculty members can develop and define the thematic thread of the travel course plus its deliverables, while ensuring that the travel course curriculum and its objectives are closely aligned and integrated within the students’ primary coursework.

Visual cultures across the ‘Pond’

The cornerstone of each of these particular short-term travel courses is to investigate – through the focused lens of communication design – the differences and similarities of visual language strategies that give shape, form and content to all contemporary visual culture. Within each semester’s short-term travel course, the student group visits and engages in lively discussion with design and illustration professionals on site in their places of business and creative activity. Each trip includes a two to three-day immersion project at ‘sister’ art colleges in the countries we visit. This is a unique opportunity for all the students involved to get acquainted while engaging in a culturally based group design project.

* Massachusetts College of Art and Design is a public, independent college of art and design. The college’s professional baccalaureate and graduate programs prepare students to participate in the creative economy as fine artists, designers, and art educators, and to engage in the well being of their society. As a national leader in visual art and design education, the college influences contemporary culture through the accomplishments of its alumni and the creative activities of its faculty and staff.
In both cities you can feel the history and energy swelling around you and it was incredible to be able to experience that. — Casey McGee, student participant in CTP.

The UK is recognised internationally for cutting-edge and innovative communication design – illustration, design, advertising, motion graphics and animation. The hub of this activity is London, one of the greatest cities in the world for art, design, music, theatre, sports, shopping, and a host of other activities. London is home to writers, politicians, artists, musicians, designers and illustrators. In its metropolitan area are over eight million people representing communities from every corner of the earth. It is truly an international city.

Ireland, with its own proud history and tradition, centres itself in the vibrant capital of Dublin. Dublin is also home to writers, politicians, artists, musicians, designers and illustrators. Sampling both London’s urbanism, and Dublin’s distinctive small city coziness, provides our graphic design and illustration students with a glimpse into what feeds the creative identity of Great Britain and Ireland. Both capitals, London and Dublin, represent the creative and economic heart of their cultures. Each city has made enormous contributions to the growth of the creative global economy. As such, they remain magnets for cutting edge communication design. Outside of the UK, it is more common for communication design professionals to have multiple expressions of their creativity than their American counterparts. Illustrators are also fine artists, designers and animators. Graphic designers animate, design furniture, clothing lines, products and installations and all are engaged in a range of public service and fine art expressions. To our ‘eyes’ this approach fosters a broadened mix to all creative fields and a tradition of appreciation for the artist, designer and crafts person as a valued, vital participant in culture and society. The MassArt students who have participated in past ‘Crossing the Pond’ travel course trips have returned with expanded and inspired perspectives of both global and personal applications for their creativity.

‘Traveling to London and Dublin not only opened my eyes to the global market of creativeness, but altered the way I was thinking about art making, the way I interact with people unknown to me, and the way I am able to share myself with the world.’ – Emily Lawes, student participant.

Why London and Dublin?

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this trip was from the interaction with the students that we met from both Anglia Ruskin University Cambridge and NCAD Dublin. Surprisingly, and despite the differences in our culture, they were really our counterparts.’ – Kaitlyn Beach, student participant.

‘The trip ignited a new flame of motivation and a fresh spark of confidence that I hope will linger with me as I face the endeavors of an artist and an illustrator.’ – Paige Mulhern, student participant.

‘Traveling to these new and fascinating places was liberating, informative and a breath of fresh air. It was definitely an influential two weeks for myself since it filled me with inspiration for my work back home.’ – Jillian Lynch, student participant.

Shannon Knight: ‘I was raised by two excellent cooks and have always loved food, so for me a big part of this trip was the luxury of dining out and eating lots of delicious things! With the popularity of Instagram, it seems like every singular item a person eats needs to be documented and shared, and I liked the idea of taking that documentation and celebration of food and changing the medium. So, in the style of Instagram snapshots (square format, overhead shots), I documented some of my favourite meals abroad by painting them.

‘The carrot cake and cappuccino were at the Victoria and Albert Museum cafe, and I incorporated a tapestry seen in the museum as the tablecloth in my painting.’

‘The red quinoa/edamame salad was from M&S – healthy, tasty convenience store food that you could only dream about in the US.’

Jillian Lynch: ‘In this poster series, I recalled locations and environments that stood out to me the most in England and Ireland. I also was also inspired by vintage travel posters from the London Underground and hoped to bring in similar design qualities. I focused on simplifying colors and shapes as well as finding patterns in the environment in order to make playful and interesting images.’

Julia Paranay: ‘In my travels to London and Dublin I encountered many words and phrases that they use differently than we do. It was fun to talk and laugh about these words, and come up with as many as we could. I decided to document this experience, as it was exciting and interesting to compare phrases from place to place.’