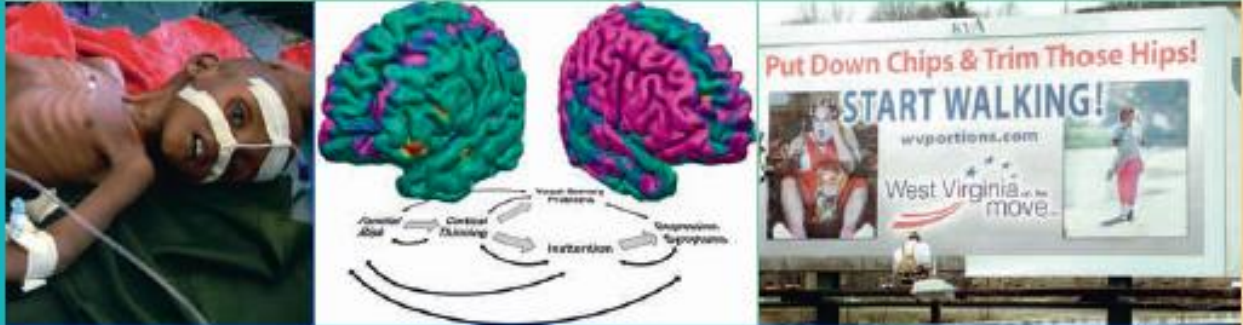


Visual and Multimedia Arguments



We don't need to be reminded that visual and multimedia images have clout. The images above, for example, all make powerful arguments — about the face of malnutrition in Somalia today, about how psychiatric drugs combat depression, about the need to confront and hopefully conquer obesity. Of course, some images are so iconic that they become part of our cultural memory. Just think of the first images you saw of planes slamming into the World Trade Center towers. Or the photographs of Japanese cities after the 2011 earthquake and tsunami. Or maybe you recall YouTube video of President Obama standing at the end of a long hall announcing the death of Osama bin Laden, or the dramatic opening ceremonies of the 2012 Summer Olympics in London. Images like these stick in our memories.

The Power of Visual Arguments

Yet even in mundane moments, images—from T-shirts to billboards to animated films and computer screens—influence us. Media analyst Kevin Kelly remarks on the “ubiquity” of screens and their images in our lives:

Everywhere we look, we see screens. The other day I watched clips from a movie as I pumped gas into my car. The other night I saw a movie on the backseat of a plane. We will watch anywhere. Screens playing video pop up in the most unexpected places—like ATM machines and supermarket checkout lines and tiny phones; some movie fans watch entire films in between calls. These ever-present screens have created an audience for very short moving pictures, as brief as three minutes, while cheap digital creation tools have empowered a new generation of filmmakers, who are rapidly filling up those screens. We are headed toward screen ubiquity.

—Kevin Kelly, “Becoming Screen Literate”

As technology makes it easier for us to create and transmit images, those images become more compelling than ever, brought to us via Blu-ray and high-definition television on our smartphones and computers, on our walls, in our pockets, in our cars. But visual arguments weren’t invented by YouTube, and they’ve always had power. The pharaohs of Egypt lined the banks of the Nile River with statues of themselves to assert their authority, and over thirty thousand years ago, people in the south of France created magnificent cave paintings to celebrate and to communicate.

Still, the ease and speed with which all of us can create and share images seems unprecedented. Beginning with the introduction of personal computers with image-controlled interfaces in the 1980s, slowly and then with the force of a tsunami, these graphic computers (the only kind that people use now) moved society further away from an age of print into an era of electronic, image-saturated communications.

Most of us have adjusted to a world of seamless, multichannel, multimedia connections. The prophet of this time was Marshall McLuhan, who nearly fifty years ago proclaimed that “the medium is the message,” with the play on *message* and *massage* intentional. As McLuhan says, “We shape our tools and afterwards our tools shape us. . . . All media works us over completely.”

Shaping the Message

Images make arguments of their own. A photograph, for example, isn't a faithful representation of reality; it's reality shaped by the photographer's point of view. That's probably one reason why so many Facebook users change their photos so often—to present themselves at their very best.

Those who produce images fashion the messages that those images convey, but those who “read” those images are by no means passive. To some extent, we actively shape what we see and have learned to see things according to their meanings within our culture. People don't always see

things the same way, which explains why eyewitnesses to a particular event often report it differently. Even instant replays don't always solve disputed calls on football fields. The visual images that surround us today and compete for our attention, time, and money are designed to invite, perhaps even coerce, us into seeing them in a specific way. But we all have our own frames of reference and can resist such pressures—if we are sharp!

Analyzing Visual Elements of Arguments

To figure out how a visual or multimedia argument works, start by examining its key components:

- the creators and distributors
- the medium it uses
- the viewers and readers it hopes to reach
- its content and purpose
- its design

Following are brief analyses of several visual arguments, along with questions to explore when you encounter similar texts.

Questions to consider when analyzing a visual image:

Questions about Creators and Distributors

- Who created this visual or multimedia text? Who distributed it?
- What can you find out about these people and other work that they have done?
- What does the creator's attitude seem to be toward the image(s)?
- What do the creator and the distributor intend its effects to be? Do they have the same intentions?

Questions about the Medium

- Which media are used for this visual text? Images only? Words and images? Sound, video, animation, graphs, charts—and in what ways are they interactive?
- How are the media used to communicate words and images? How do various media work together?
- What effect does the medium have on the message of the text? How would the message be altered if different media were used?
- What role do words—if there are words—play in the visual text? How do they clarify, reinforce, blur, or contradict the image's message?

The Viewers and Readers

Questions about Viewers and Readers

- What does the visual text assume about its viewers and what they know and agree with?
- What overall impression does the visual text create in you?
- What positive or negative feelings about individuals, scenes, or ideas does the visual intend to evoke in viewers?

The Content and Purpose

Questions about Content and Purpose

- What purpose does the visual text convey? What is it designed to convey?
- What cultural values does the visual evoke? The good life? Love and harmony? Sex appeal? Adventure? Power? Resistance? Freedom?
- Does the visual reinforce these values or question them? How does the visual strengthen the argument?
- What emotions does the visual evoke? Are these the emotions that it intends to evoke?

The Design

Questions about Design

- How is the visual text composed? What's your eye drawn to first? Why?
- What's in the foreground? In the background? What's in or out of focus? What's moving? What's placed high, and what's placed low? What's to the left, in the center, and to the right? What effect do these placements have on the message? If the visual text is interactive, how well does that element work and what does it add?
- Is any information (such as a name, face, or scene) highlighted or stressed to attract your attention?
- How are light and color used? What effects are they intended to create? What about video? Sound? Animation?



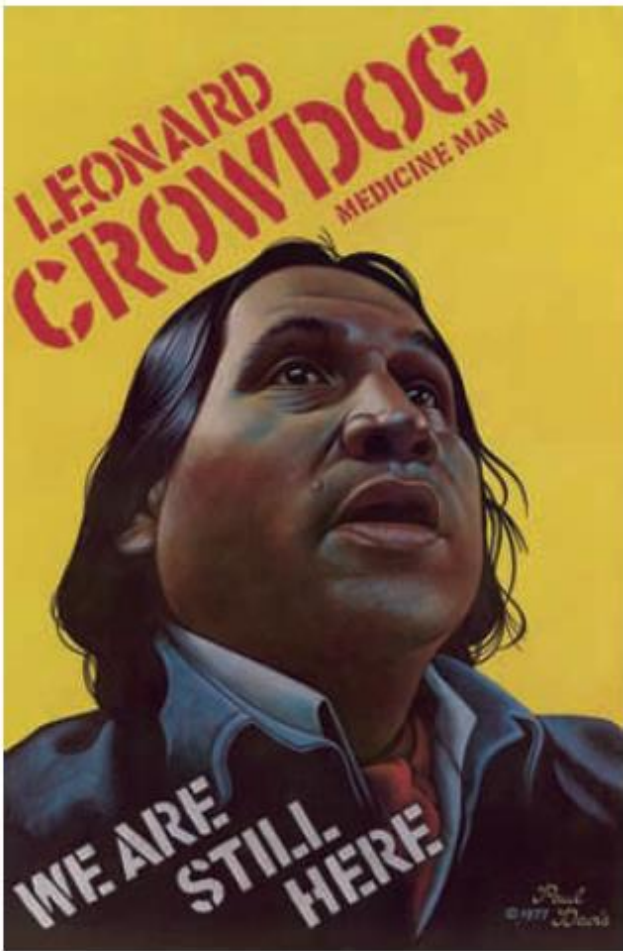
This image from Amnesty International calls on viewers to help "Abolish the use of child soldiers worldwide," noting that "Children have the right to be children." This group, a nongovernmental organization with three million members in 150 countries around the globe, has as its mission to end "grave abuses of human rights." Amnesty International has carried out many campaigns, including Stamp Out Torture, Stop Violence against Women, and Demand Dignity. How does this information help you "read" the image above? Why might the organization have chosen this image to support their campaign? How well does it achieve its purpose?

!



During February 2011, protesters occupied Cairo's Tahrir Square and used their mobile devices as tools to let the world know what was happening. They tweeted and texted and sent cell phone pictures documenting police atrocities, and newspapers around the world printed tweets rather than formal reports from their journalists, like this one sent to London's *Globe and Mail*: "What's worse than being detained three hours by Egyptian army? Watching a four-year-old girl being detained with you even longer." Protesters kept their phones alive by hacking streetlamps to keep them charged. During this period, the medium was indeed a big part of the message. The photo above shows graffiti painted by protesters to promote the use of social media, including Facebook, to share information about the protests. What message is the graffiti sending? More importantly, how does media play a role in sending such a message?

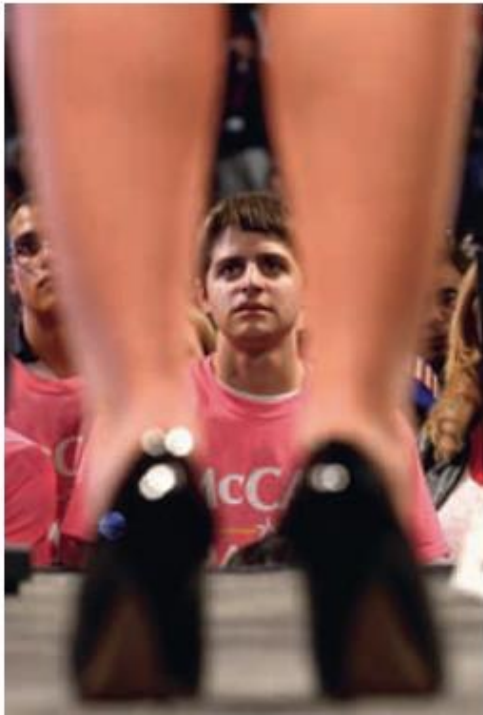
2.



In 1977, Paul Davis created this poster celebrating Native American political activist Leonard Crowdog. The poster uses simple language and a strong image to express solidarity among Native Americans (and their political allies) and to affirm Crowdog's call for renewal of Native American traditions.

In what ways can visual arguments invoke their audiences or even become a part of their cultural histories? With what similar visual items (such as posters or CD art) do you identify?

3.



Take a close look at this photograph taken during the 2008 presidential campaign: is your eye drawn first to the earnest face in the middle, the one with a pink John McCain T-shirt on? If so, pull back and take in the whole photo: what's with that pair of legs? An Associated Press photographer took this photo of Sarah Palin, causing a flap: was the photo sexist and prurient, or was it upbeat and emblematic of a new kind of feminism? What was the photographer's purpose in taking the shot? How do you read its message?

4.

Using Visuals in Your Own Arguments

It's easy today to use images and multimedia in your own writing. In fact, many college classes now call for projects to be posted on the Web, which almost always involves the use of images. Other courses invite or require students to make multimedia presentations or to create arguments in the form of videos, photo collages, comics, or other combinations of media.

Using Images and Multimedia to Appeal to Emotion

Many advertisements, YouTube videos, political documentaries, rallies, marches, and even church services use images and multimedia to trigger emotions. You can't flip through a magazine, watch a video, or browse the Web without being cajoled or seduced by images of all kinds—most of them designed in some way to attract your eye and attention and many of them linked to other media or using animation or some sort of interactive element.

CHOOSE IMAGES CAREFULLY

You want to take advantage of technology to appeal effectively to your readers' emotions. To do so, think first of the purpose of your writing: you want every image or use of multimedia to carry out that purpose. Look at the famous *Apollo 8* photograph of our planet as a big blue marble hanging above the horizon of the moon. You could use this image to introduce an argument about the need for additional investment in the space program. Or it might become part of an argument about the need to preserve our frail natural environment, or an argument against nationalism: *From space, we are one world*. You could make any of these claims without the image, but the photograph—like most images—will probably touch members of your audience more powerfully than words alone could.



A striking image, like this *Apollo 8* photograph of the earth shining over the moon, can support many different kinds of arguments.

REMEMBER THE POWER OF COLOR

As the photo of the earth demonstrates, color can have great power: the blue earth floating in deep black space carries a message of its own. Our response to color is part of our biological and cultural makeup. So it makes sense to consider what colors are compatible with the kinds of arguments you're making.

In most situations, you can be guided in your selection of colors by your own good taste, by designs you admire, or by the advice of friends or helpful professionals. Some design and presentation software will even help you choose colors by offering dependable "default" shades or an array of pre-existing designs and compatible colors (for example, of presentation slides). To be emotionally effective, the colors you choose for a design should follow certain commonsense principles. If you're using background colors on a political poster, Web site, or slide, the contrast between words and background should be vivid enough to make reading easy. For example, white letters on a yellow background are not usually legible. Similarly, any bright background color should be avoided for a long document because reading is easiest with dark letters against a light or white background. Avoid complex patterns; even though they

might look interesting and be easy to create, they often interfere with other more important elements of a presentation.

When you use visuals in your college projects, test them on prospective readers. That's what professionals do because they appreciate how delicate the choices of visual and multimedia texts can be. These responses will help you analyze your own arguments and improve your success with them.

Using Images and Multimedia to Appeal to Character

Careful use of images and multimedia can help to establish the character and credibility of your text as well as your own ethos as a writer. If you are on Facebook, LinkedIn, or other social networking sites, you will know how images especially create a sense of who you are and what you value. It's no accident that employers have been known not to hire people because of the images they find on their Facebook pages—or just the opposite: we know one person whose Facebook page use of images and multimedia so impressed a prospective employer that she got the job on the spot. So whether you are using images and multimedia on your personal pages or in your college work, it pays to attend to how they shape your ethos.

USE IMAGES AND MULTIMEDIA TO REINFORCE YOUR CREDIBILITY AND AUTHORITY

Just like the Red Cross, the Department of Homeland Security, and the Canadian Olympic Committee, you want to use images and multimedia that will build your trustworthiness and authority. For a Web site about a



American Red Cross



Take a look at these three images, each of which intends to convey credibility and authority. Do they accomplish their goals? Why or why not?

5.

group or organization you belong to or represent, you might display its logo or emblem because such images can provide credibility. An emblem or a logo can also convey a wealth of cultural and historical implications. That's why university Web sites often include the seal of the institution somewhere on the homepage or why the president of the United States travels with a presidential seal to hang on the speaker's podium. Other kinds of media can also enhance ethos. For an essay on safety issues in competitive biking, you might include a photo of yourself in a key race, embed a video showing how serious accidents often occur, or include an audio file of an interview with an injured biker. The photo shows that you have personal experience with biking, while the video and audio files show that you have done research and know your subject well, thus helping to affirm your credibility.

CONSIDER HOW DESIGN REFLECTS YOUR CHARACTER

Almost every design element sends signals about character and ethos. For example, the type fonts that you select for a document can mark you as warm and inviting or as efficient and contemporary. The warm and inviting fonts often belong to a family called *serif*. The serifs are those little flourishes at the ends of the strokes that make the fonts seem handcrafted and artful:

warm and inviting (Bookman Old Style)

warm and inviting (Times New Roman)

warm and inviting (Georgia)

Cleaner, modern fonts go without those little flourishes and are called *sans serif*. These fonts are cooler, simpler, and, some argue, more readable on a computer screen (depending on screen resolution):

efficient and contemporary (Helvetica)

efficient and contemporary (Verdana)

efficient and contemporary (Comic Sans MS)

Other typographic elements shape your ethos as well. The size of type can make a difference. If your text or headings are in boldface and too large, you'll seem to be shouting:

LOSE WEIGHT! PAY NOTHING!*

Tiny type, on the other hand, might make you seem evasive:

*Excludes the costs of enrollment and required meal purchases. Minimum contract: 12 months.

Your choice of *color*—especially for backgrounds—can make a statement about your taste, personality, and common sense. For instance, you'll create a bad impression with a Web page whose dark background colors or busy patterns make reading difficult. If you want to be noticed, you might use bright colors—the same sort that would make an impression in clothing or cars. But subtle background shades are a better choice in most situations.

Don't ignore the power of *illustrations* and *photographs*. Because they reveal what you visualize, images can communicate your preferences, sensitivities, and inclusiveness. Conference planners, for example, are careful to create brochures that represent all participants, and they make sure that the brochure photos don't show only women, only men, or only members of one racial or ethnic group.

Even your choice of *medium* says something important about you. Making an appeal on a Web site sends signals about your technical skills, contemporary orientation, and personality. If you direct people to a Facebook or Flickr page, be sure that the images and items there present you in a favorable light.

Visual Arguments Based on Facts and Reason

Not that long ago, media critics ridiculed the colorful charts and graphs in newspapers like *USA Today*. Now, comparable features appear in even the most traditional publications because they work: they convey information efficiently. We now expect information to be presented graphically, to see multiple streams of data on our screens, and to be able to interact with many of these presentations.

ORGANIZE INFORMATION VISUALLY

Graphic presentation calls for careful design, which can help readers and viewers look at an item and understand what it does. A brilliant, much-copied example of such an intuitive design is a seat adjuster invented many years ago by Mercedes-Benz (see below). It's shaped like a tiny seat. Push any element of the control, and the real seat moves in that direction—back and forth, up and down. No instructions are necessary.

Good visual design can work the same way in an argument by conveying information without elaborate instructions. Titles, headings, sub-headings, enlarged quotations, running heads, and boxes are some common visual signals.

- Use headings to guide your readers through your print or electronic document. For long and complex pieces, use subheadings as well, and make sure they are parallel.
- Use type font, size, and color to show related information within headings.
- Plan how text should be arranged on a page by searching for relationships among items that should look alike.
- Use a list or a box to set off information that should be treated differently from the rest of the presentation or for emphasis. You can also use shading, color, and typography for emphasis.



Mercedes-Benz's seat adjuster

- Place your images and illustrations carefully: what you position front and center will appear more important than items in less conspicuous places. On a Web site, key headings should usually lead to subsequent pages on the site.

What Should “Diversity on Campus” Mean and Why?

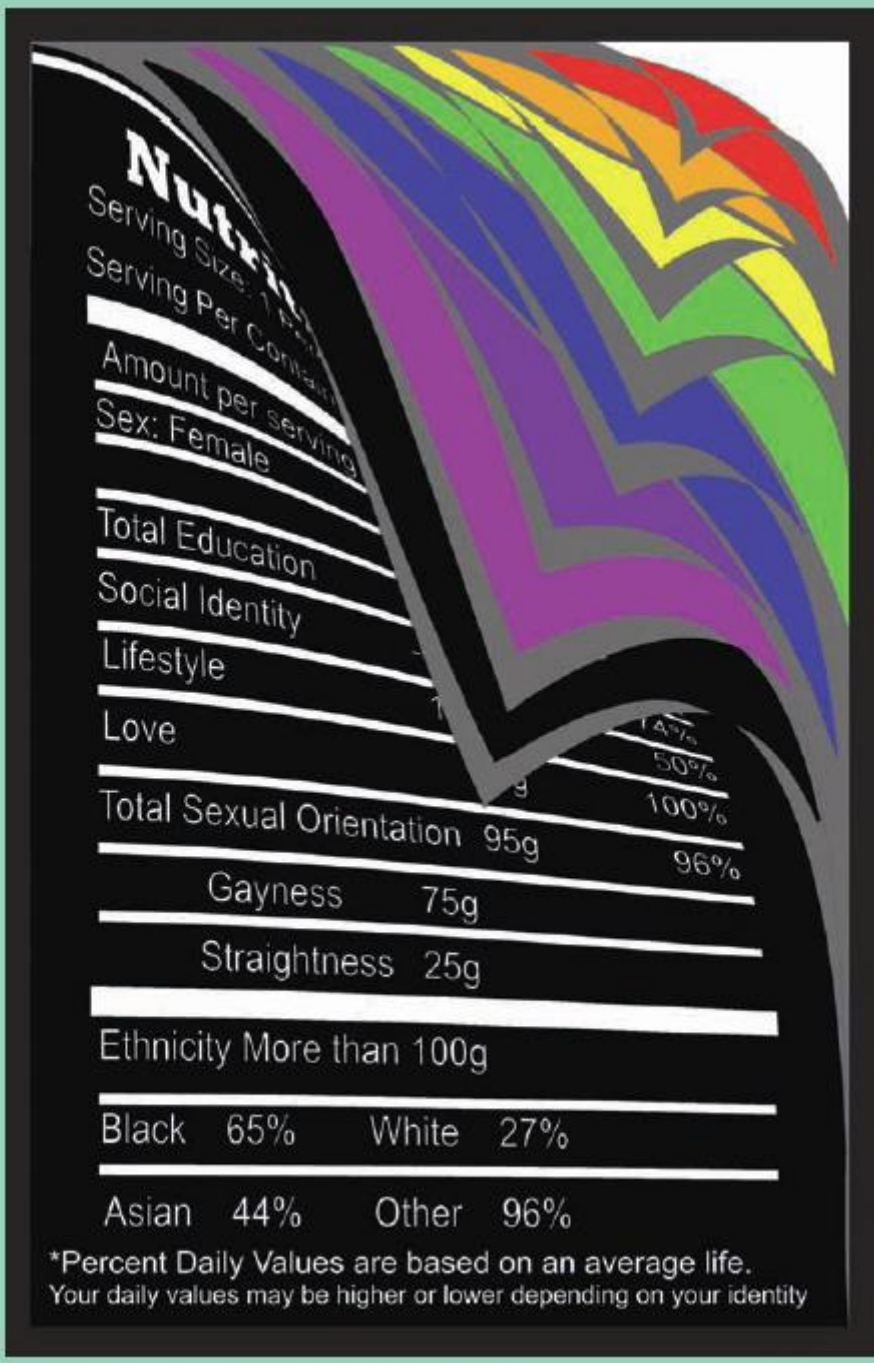


Visit your school's homepage, and look for information about diversity; if there isn't a link from the homepage, use the search function to see how long it takes to get information about diversity on your campus. We predict that it won't take long. If your school is like most, you might conclude that *diversity* has a meaning that is narrower than the *Oxford English Dictionary's* definition of the term: "the condition or quality of being diverse, different, or varied; difference, unlikeness." (For linguists, cases of semantic narrowing like this one often stand as evidence that social change of one sort or another is taking place in the community where the narrowing occurs.) The arguments in this chapter challenge you to think about the meaning of *diversity* on your own campus—what it might mean, what it should mean, and whether it's relevant at all.

The chapter opens with a portfolio of visual arguments, award-winning posters in an annual competition with the theme of diversity at Western Washington University, each of which serves as a definitional argument of sorts.

The following pages show different posters showcasing campus diversity. For each poster, go back to the questions to consider on pages 4-5. Answer 3 different questions for each poster.

6.



Joseph Wagner, *Peeling Off Labels*, 2009

Making a Visual Argument: Student-Designed Diversity Posters

◀ Since 1997, the Office of University Residences at Western Washington University in Bellingham, Washington, has sponsored an annual poster contest in which students are invited to submit posters about the year's theme, always some aspect of diversity, and to submit a written statement describing how the poster design relates to that theme. As the University's Web page about the poster contests explains, "Historically, the poster contest has served to offer students an opportunity to visually display how diversity impacts their lives based on a specific theme identified by a student committee. Artists are encouraged to capture the look, feel, and character of diversity. While the structure for how winners are selected has changed with technology, the overall winner's design is published by University Residences and displayed around campus." To learn more about the contest, visit <http://bit.ly/sf40An>. As you study these winning designs, consider the definition each directly or indirectly offers of diversity.

Through Our Identities We Create a Community of



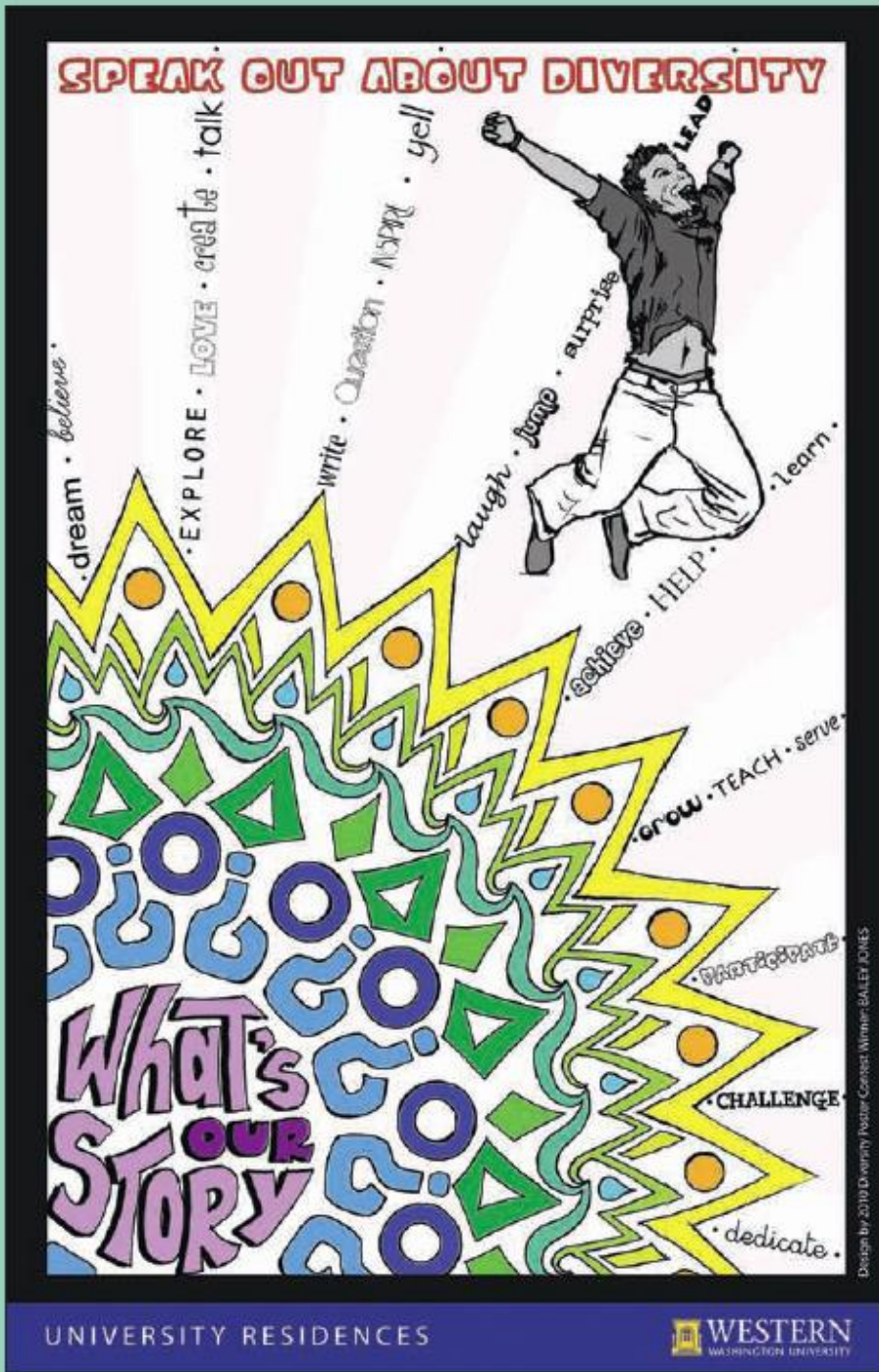
CELEBRATE DIVERSITY EVERY DAY

University Residences

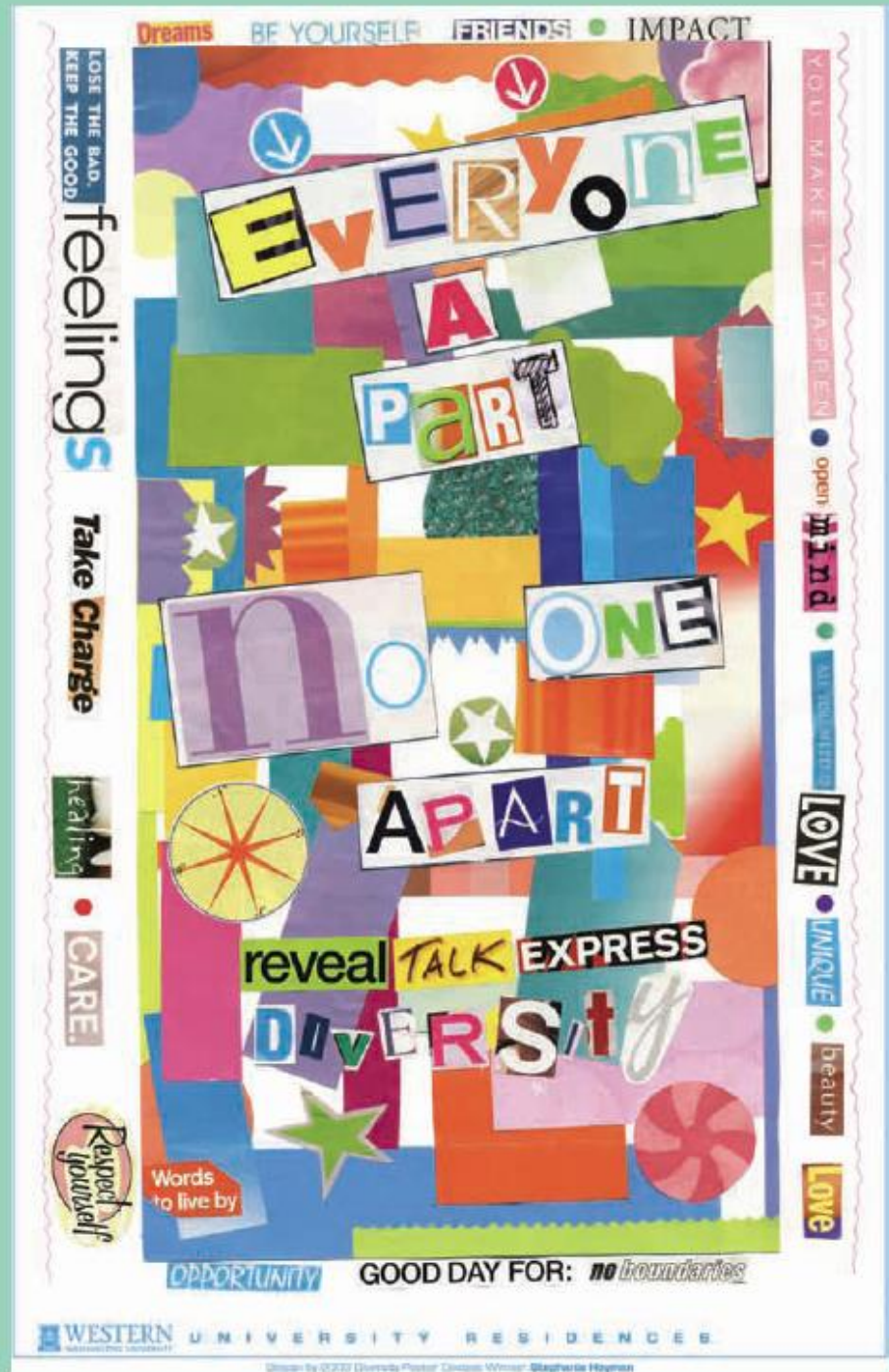


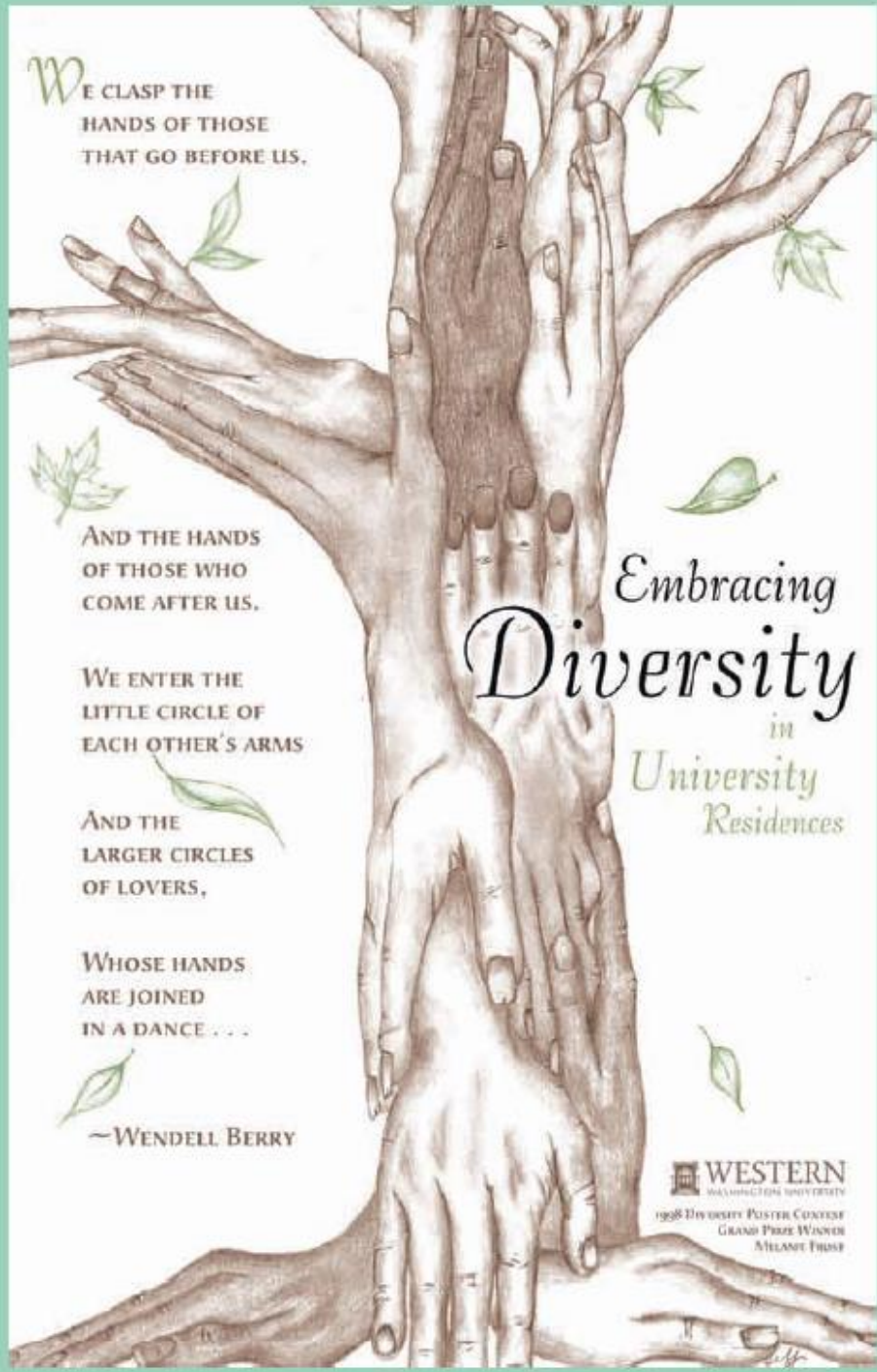
2011 Diversity Poster Contest
Grand Prize Winner:
Anthony Jackson

Anthony Jackson, *Through Our Identities We Create a Community of Diversity*, 2011



Bailey Jones, *Speak Out about Diversity*, 2010





WE CLASP THE
HANDS OF THOSE
THAT GO BEFORE US.

AND THE HANDS
OF THOSE WHO
COME AFTER US.

WE ENTER THE
LITTLE CIRCLE OF
EACH OTHER'S ARMS

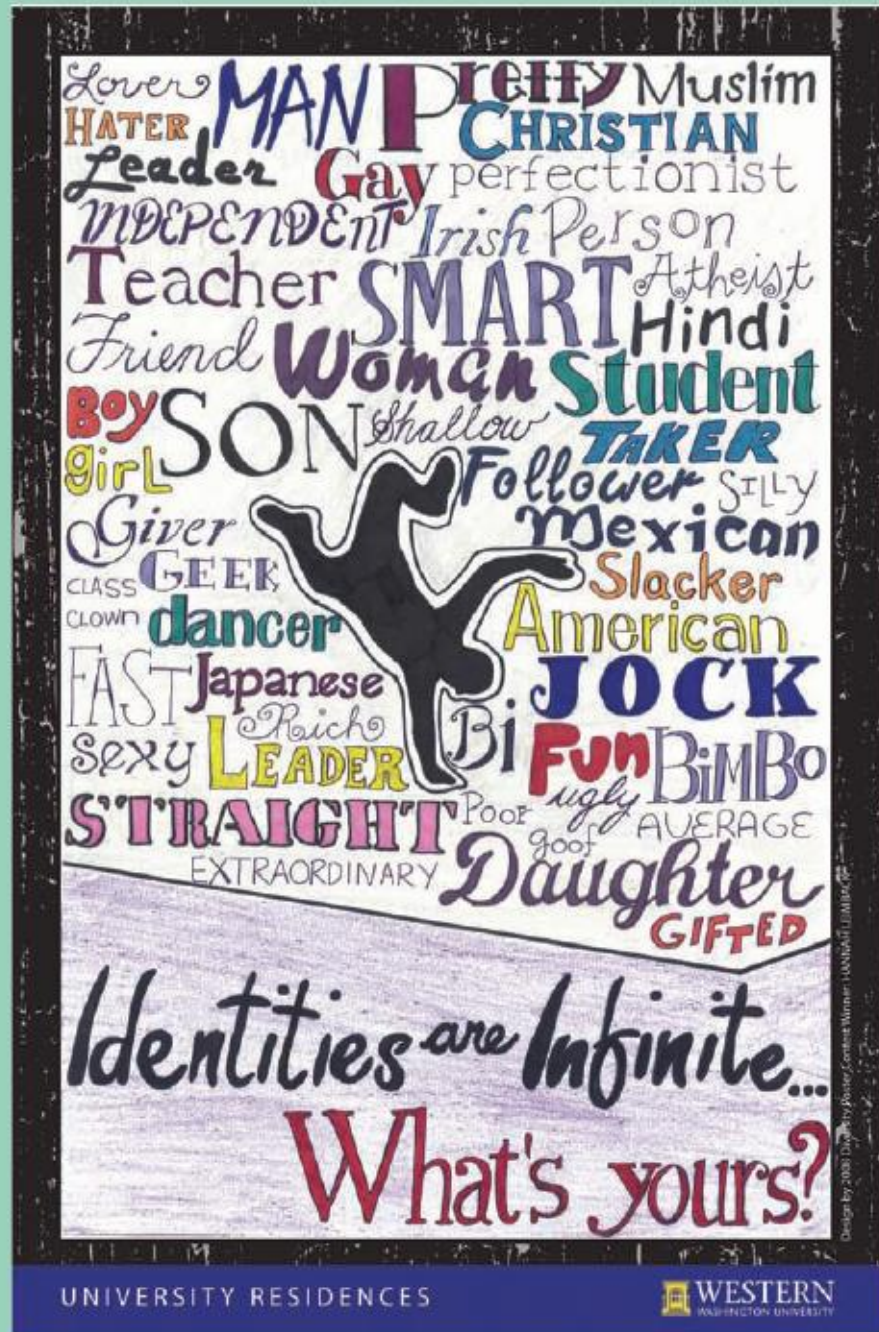
AND THE
LARGER CIRCLES
OF LOVERS,

WHOSE HANDS
ARE JOINED
IN A DANCE . . .

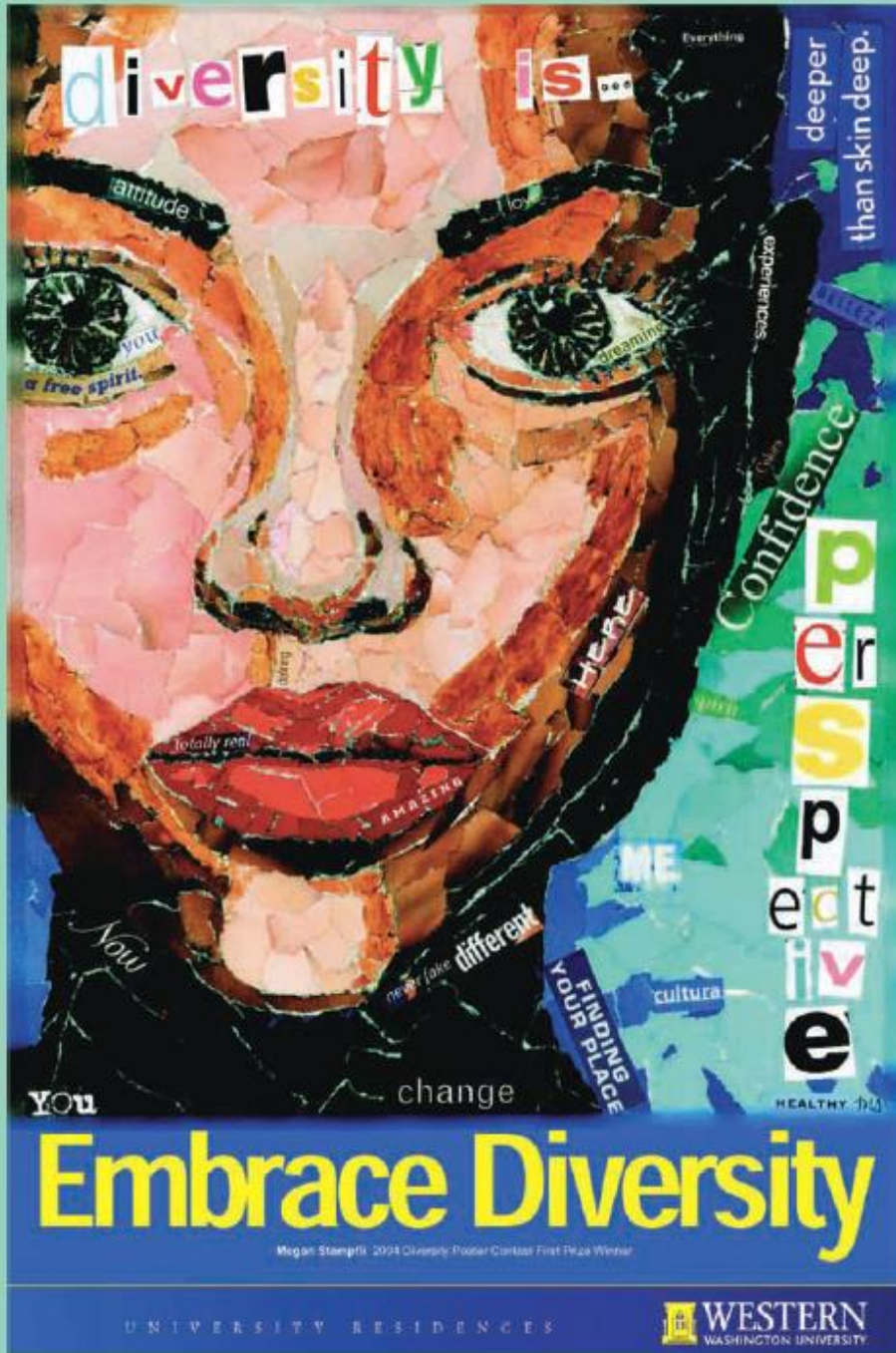
~WENDELL BERRY

Embracing
Diversity
in
University
Residences

WESTERN
WASHINGTON UNIVERSITY
1998 DIVERSITY PASTER CONTEST
GRAND PRIZE WINNER
ATLANTIC PRIZE



Hannah Leimback, *Identities Are Infinite . . . What's Yours?*, 2008



Megan Stampfli, *Embrace Diversity*, 2004

13. Read or listen to the following article:

<http://www.npr.org/2013/12/29/257765543/a-campus-more-colorful-than-reality-beware-that-college-brochure>

Discuss with your partner(s).

14. ASSIGNMENT:

Create your own poster to persuade students to embrace diversity at all Wake County Schools—most importantly, our amazing school.

Before you start, consider these questions:

- What claim are you making?
- Who is your audience?
- What tone do you want to create/convey?
- How can you address the three persuasive appeals?
- Fonts? Images? Image placement? How do you want to put it all together?

TODAY: Sketch out your ideas.

TOMORROW: You will have time to work on your poster when you are on the outer circle Thursday.

***FRIDAY:** You will show the class your poster and you have to be ready to explain your rhetorical choices.

QUICK RUBRIC/REQUIREMENTS:

message can be understood without verbal expression
makes a claim
text is error free
harmonious integration
identifies main points

meaningful choice of typography, color, image placement
aware of audience
use of the three main rhetorical appeals
rhetorical triangle is demonstrated

Student Poster Competition Rubric

Poster Design

Excellent posters are well-organized and provide a clear path for the viewer's eye, directing through the content in a logical sequence. Document design principles are effectively applied: typography, color, and white space contribute to persuasion and professional appearance. The poster has been designed and assembled neatly and attractively. Headings are specific and accurately forecast the content of each section.

- | | | | |
|---|--|--|---|
| 1. Viewers unable to identify main points or navigate sections of content; poster design compromised by sloppy construction or chaotic design | 2. Design creates occasional confusion or distraction; construction may suggest a need for more careful assembly | 3. Visually harmonious design allows viewers to navigate the poster with little difficulty, identifying main points and major evidence | 4. Poster layout integrates all elements into a unified, purpose-apparent design; specific headings help to reveal argument |
|---|--|--|---|

Visuals

Excellent posters incorporate informative (rather than merely decorative) visuals. Visual evidence is designed with a high proportion of data-ink* and is supported by meaningful captions, labeled units, axes, and legends. All visuals are documented with source citations. When possible, explanatory text is integrated into visuals or arranged adjacent in space. The key content of the visuals could be understood even without further oral explanation.

- | | | | |
|---|--|---|---|
| 1. Lacking in relevant visual evidence, or containing very poor quality visuals; visual evidence is improperly cited or has limited relevance to content: a preponderance of non-data ink | 2. Visuals lack key labels or captions, oversimplify data, or may be overly decorative or unclear; the path for the eye may not be clear | 3. Well-chosen visuals are labeled and cited; improvement needed in captioning, image resolution, or integration with supporting text | 4. Visuals aid in understanding complex content and facilitate persuasion |
|---|--|---|---|

Text Blocks or Lists

Excellent posters contain well-organized text that conveys the presenters' main ideas and crucial data. The poster text conveys and explains information designed to teach audience members about the proposal and to convince audience members of the merits of the company's proposal.

- | | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| 1. Text is difficult to understand; sentences, bullets, or lists need to be revised and reorganized because they are too sparse, too dense, poorly organized, or poorly placed | 2. Text conveys substantive information, but may be somewhat sparse or dense, loosely organized, or poorly placed | 3. Generally informative text, but with stylistic errors; the text blocks or lists are clearly in support of visual information, with only minor flaws in length, organization, or placement | 4. Text is nearly error-free and adds usable content; text is fully effective in supporting visual information with controlled length, organization, and placement |
|--|---|--|--|

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GRAB LIFE BY THE HORNS



**IT'S A BIG FAT JUICY
CHEESEBURGER
IN A LAND OF TOFU.**

*Depending on model and properly equipped.