

# How digital design skills can improve staff and student experience in learning institutions.

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## Introduction

With the web being the main focus of marketing and communication in the 'internet age' we live in, Universities have a need and a responsibility to stay at the forefront of new technologies and trends within the digital sphere. Decision makers recognise this fact, however in order to fully embrace this, there needs to be a universal understanding amongst all university staff of how to use digital media to its full potential. The design of all things digital, or 'digital design', is often overlooked, and it is something that all staff members will come into contact with, whether they recognise the term 'digital design' or not.

Basic digital skills such as how to use Photoshop to crop an image to size, or how to use Indesign to write a document, as opposed to Microsoft Word (which does not allow nearly as much control over design aspects) should be taught to all staff members. It is something quite easy to pick up, and even easier if one can incorporate it into daily tasks.

There is a misconception that you need to be a computer wizard to make use of programs like Photoshop or Indesign, but is much easier than Word once you become familiar with it. The advantage of using more visual programmes on a day-to-day basis is that a greater understanding of design and web software can unlock a creativity that would positively impact people's work and eventually be of benefit to students.

## The Teacher

Let's take, for example, a lecturer in 'Fisheries'. With basic knowledge and access to design software, he or she could design more visually stimulating and professional course materials, tailored exactly to his classes. Data could be visualised in a way that would be more inspiring to both the teacher and the student, and therefore the learning experience would be enriched.

## The Student

Unless you are a design student, you are not expected to have an understanding of design software such as Illustrator or photoshop. Yet if this software was taught as a compulsory part of the prospectus, you could unlock a whole new level of creativity in the course projects. Not only this it would make them vastly more employable in a rapidly digitalising world.

If students had basic web development skills for example, to create an interactive online project, they could develop projects that could be shown to the wider world and give exposure to both students and the University alike.

Ultimately, a global understanding of technology, and crucially the importance of designing technology well, would create an a culture of creativity and excellence within a university, and this needs to be omnipresent within any university. If the purpose of a university is to explore new ideas and to push boundaries, then a desire to use the most up to date technology is essential.

## **The Rector**

If a University needs to use technology to fulfill its potential, then a knowledge of technology needs to be present at every level, especially at the top. The reason is that an institution's culture is set by the top level decision makers, and so how can decisions be made successfully, without leaning on a very good knowledge of how technology and design works? Many larger institutions with bigger budgets do not pay as much attention to this fact, and as a result, eventually these institutions will find themselves being overtaken behind by organisations that who do pay attention to this.

## **Conclusion**

"Study without desire spoils the memory, and it retains nothing that it takes in."

*Leonardo da Vinci*

With the vast improvements in the visual and creative possibilities of technology, there is a need for universities to harness the creative potential that has arisen in this digital age. In order to stay at the forefront of learning, in a world where self-learning through the internet is more common, and huge companies such as Google and Facebook offering their own learning resources, staff and students alike need to have a desire to use the ever expanding visual and creative possibilities of technology to enhance their study and creating more in-depth, innovative and compelling work.