

GE Healthcare + MIAD: “The Compassion Project”

GE Healthcare and the Milwaukee Institute of Art & Design (MIAD) have partnered on a college-wide “Compassion Project” to explore the end-to-end journey of breast cancer awareness, prevention, detection, diagnosis, cure and therapy by finding new and meaningful experiences for all women.

While tapping into the creative minds of MIAD students from all disciplines and years to uncover new ways to improve the overall patient experience of the women’s breast health journey, **the project is profoundly changing the way learning occurs in an art and design college and how artists, with designers, can provide insights to a leading global company.**

The Fall 2012 and Spring 2013 semesters each kicked off with a daylong deep-dive Menlo innovation workshop at GE Healthcare focusing on empathy and compassion (including meeting breast cancer survivors of varied ages and backgrounds). The day united the students as a team while providing them an opportunity to learn about, and experience, the creative and in-depth research tools and techniques that drive innovation at GE.

After the Fall Menlo workshop, the college, led by students, created a dynamic “community of inquiry” for a project that is unique in art and design education.

As a constantly evolving process, “The Compassion Project” in its first year engages artists and designers – students to faculty – to think differently about themselves and their work, to broaden their understanding of how their talents enter into the women’s healthcare inquiry and to fully embrace empathy as the heart of all meaningful personal and professional endeavors.

Some 250 students each semester, across 14 courses, have created a learning community that encompasses visual, verbal, physical, environmental aspects of the patient experience regarding breast health, and local and global implications.

From freshmen to seniors, industrial designers, communication designers, illustrators, service learners, writers, researchers, photographers to other artists, the entire creative community that is MIAD is embracing dialog, inquiry, research and making in regard to Compassion.

The result is higher order thinking that knows no boundaries of major or discipline; a deepening of MIAD’s mutual learning environment; and the development of leaders in creative visualization and understanding who will transform cultures and transcend boundaries.

As Robert T. Schwartz, FIDSA, General Manager, Global Design & User Experience, GE Healthcare, told MIAD students at the college’s Professional Symposium last month, *“The Compassion Project is about the ‘why,’ not the how, of your learning. It’s a leveler – something that cuts across all the disciplines and majors in the college. It’s about the human condition.”*

(continued)

'The Compassion Project' Takes Off

With Industrial Design students taking the initial project lead in Fall 2012 as part of their Senior Design Studio, they create and maintain a living "Learning Wall" while serving as ambassadors in leading community research, dialogue, awareness, problem-solving and making. Integrated Studio Arts students in "Integration and Intersection" work with them, for example, to complete compassion projects through studio-based explorations and installations.

"The Wall" is accessible by all classes and working groups to exhibit process work, critiques, discussions, writings and design thinking activities. It is the most public space for the entire student population, and the public, to gather and participate in the immersion of findings and continually add input.

Their content, entered through a blog and through additions of sticky notes to the Wall, centers on "Wouldn't it be nice if" relating to themes of "Pre-Diagnosis," "Diagnosis," "Treatment" and "Living and Facts." The wall also contains the photographs, drawings and color tests resulting from the research insights that fuel the Industrial Design students' projects; design thinking exercises from nine sections of a freshman "Understanding the Visual" course encompassing 150 students; and videos from a "Research Practice and Methods" elective on "Compassion." (see links below)

By the end of the first semester, there are some 4,000 sticky notes on the Learning Wall. Public participants include 35 students from Ronald Reagan High School. One of the most poignant public blog entries following viewing of the Learning Wall by nearly a thousand visitors during October's Gallery Night/Day follows:

"The 'visitors' are people who are reading the wall in awe, in silence, in anticipation. The ideas on the wall, the photographs, the drawings, color tests, they stir ideas and emotions and stories. Men and women tell stories of loved ones stricken by cancer. Survivors and loved ones lost. There are tears. And laughter. Lots of listening.

*This is a site of learning, of wonder, of empathy, of sharing. It's a site of feeling. There is compassion here in the creators and the visitors. **This is ... inquiry into our humanness.**"*

The Idea Lab

The Industrial Design students also create an Idea Lab for ideation, critiques and brainstorming sessions. It is used by "Editorial Illustration" students for an assignment on inner-city access to healthcare, "Art Direction" students who create PSA posters and videos on critical awareness moments in the women's health journey and Integrated Studio Art students, among many others. Ideas remain on its walls, serving to cross-pollinate and broaden the insights of the successive classes of students from differing majors who use the lab.

Spring 2013

The Compassion Project expands from six to eight classes and to 250 more students, including:

- Industrial Design seniors who are pursuing capstone thesis projects based on their research into the women's healthcare journey (see materials below and in e-mail)
- 150 additional freshmen in courses that foster design thinking and critique

- Juniors of all majors in “Service Learning: Compassion & Community Health,” who are exploring poverty and health through community-based research that will move into individual explorations of specific Milwaukee neighborhoods
- Juniors in “Advertising Design,” who will complete a multimedia Compassion Campaign
- Students of multiple years in “Soft Space Fibers,” who will produce a quilt in collaboration with GE Healthcare to assist in the advancement of breast health awareness and care while providing comfort to those who view it
- 150 freshmen in “Human Thought & Action,” who are reading Susan Sontag’s “Regarding the Pain of Others” and will develop a “compassion action plan”
- Students of multiple years and majors in the Fine Arts “Compassion” elective, who are being asked to consider the materials, strategies and processes that open pathways and new forms of engagement to authentic connections between artist, public, individual and community
- Students of multiple years and majors in the GE Creative Leadership course, who are developing their creative and organizational skills while addressing the cataloguing, documenting and presenting of MIAD work that has been done for “The Compassion Project.” Information, Communication and Logistics, local to global, are being addressed.

The spring semester also encompasses two college-wide public lectures and presentations relating to “The Compassion Project”:

- March 29 - The annual Service Learning Symposium, part of the college’s nationally award-winning Service Learning curriculum, will feature the senior director of health policy for the First Focus healthcare initiative in Washington, D.C.
- April 24 – MIAD DEFINE, the college’s daylong education conference, will include student and faculty lectures, panels and presentations related to “The Compassion Project.”

Project Impact on inquiry and learning through external and internal voices

From the first moment of the fall daylong deep-dive Menlo innovation workshop, “The Compassion Project” has a profound impact on students’ thinking about their relationship to their work and to the larger community that extends far beyond the projects within each class. This life-changing perspective has occurred, and is occurring, regardless of students’ year of study, major or discipline.

The intensity, breadth and innovativeness of the learning are such that when the project is presented by leading Industrial Design students to GE researchers conducting an unrelated week of internal team-building workshops at MIAD, the researchers’ response is:

*“As we work this week to build a team, what advice would you give **us**?”*

Mark Rios, FAIA, FASLA, principal of Rios Clementi Hale Studios and first visiting creative in the MIAD Creativity Series, comments on his many visits to art and design colleges around the country and the uniqueness of the cross-pollination at MIAD. After seeing “The Compassion Project” presentation by students, he calls the community of inquiry an “extraordinary instance of collaboration and interdisciplinary learning.” ([Click here](#) to hear Rios talk about MIAD.)

The lead Industrial Design students go on to present “The Compassion Project” to 35 company leaders from around the country whose responses are similar to those of the GE researchers, Robert T. Schwartz and Mark Rios.

Following are representative comments of students who participated, or are participating, in “The Compassion Project.”

As a freshman in the fall “Understanding the Visual” course noted on “The Compassion Project” blog on Dec. 4:

“It was interesting to see all these creative, thoughtful ideas collaged together.... It was also interesting to collaborate with others and help each other formulate and revise ideas. My thought process and the ideas being formulated transitioned from general to specific quite a bit. It was challenging to come up with ideas for something so out of the ordinary being a foundations [first-year] student but I think it was a very insightful experience. It really got me thinking of how our problem-solving skills that we develop through art can apply to many other fields of study. And that was the most awe-inspiring moment, when I realized that art is universally applicable.”

As Trenice Ferguson ’14, who developed a [powerful video](#) in the Fine Arts elective on Compassion said:

“The process of making my ‘Compassion’ video opened me up to others who are in my life but whom I have never really tried to make a connection to. I made it for myself as well as for the people who share the same upbringing as me.

“It is a struggle to live in my Milwaukee neighborhood. But we’re still people over there, even though we are labeled as living in ‘rough’ territory. I wanted to show people inside and outside my neighborhood that if you take the time to walk around it, you could see that we are still beautiful.”

As Sean Simmons ’13, one of the leading Industrial Design students said,

“One of the most valuable parts of “The Compassion Project” has been the opportunity to listen to many different women as they explain their stories regarding breast cancer. Through these personal stories and face-to-face conversations, I have been able to acquire a great amount of empathy for what these women have experienced and are currently experiencing. This knowledge and empathy will ultimately allow me to have a unique perspective on the women’s health journey and therefore permit me to create impactful solutions for areas in the journey that need improvement. This is a remarkable opportunity to help improve the quality of people’s lives.”