

# **PGSF and Illinois State University Study the Influences for Pursuing Graphic Communication Careers**

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## **Background**

The Print & Graphic Scholarship Foundation (PGSF) and Illinois State University undertook a study to examine how PGSF recipients were influenced to pursue a career in print-production-oriented graphic communication programs. The goal of the study was to better understand these influences as a means of suggesting the most pragmatic methods for increasing the number of high-achieving students seeking professional opportunities in the graphic communication industry.

The research design for this study involved two phases. The first phase involved a group of graphic communication educators at the high school, 2-year, and 4-year college levels. This group developed a list of 24 potential influences, ranging from learning about the field on websites to receiving help from career counselors. The second phase of the study involved surveying all college students receiving the PGSF scholarship award. The Web-based survey asked the students to rate those factors that most influenced them to choose a career in graphic communication. The students were also asked to add additional influences as well.

The resulting data strongly suggest that “high-touch” experiences are required to motivate students to pursue graphic communication careers. High school graphic communication classes were the strongest influence for students to choose college majors in graphic communication. Experience on Yearbook clubs and employment in printing companies were also highly influential. It also appears from the data that just reading or viewing information about the industry is not highly influential. Also career counselors, peers, and family have minimal influence in these students’ career choices.

## **Introduction**

The Print & Graphics Scholarship Foundation (PGSF) and Illinois State University designed a study to examine how students, specifically PGSF recipients, were influenced to pursue a career in graphic communication. The results of the study suggest the most effective methods for increasing the number of academically high achieving students seeking professional opportunities in the graphic communication industry.

### **Research Methodology**

The research design for this study involved two phases. A mix of faculty leaders in high school, 2-year, and 4-year college graphic communication programs developed a list of potential influences. This was done over a span of three rounds in a Delphi group activity. The list produced 24 potential influences. The second phase of the study involved surveying 217 college students who were receiving the PGSF scholarship award for the 2008 academic year. Of the 84 students who chose to respond, 24 were graphic design students while 60 students were enrolled in print production-oriented degree programs. These 60 students' responses were used for data analysis and are a sample that can be statistically extrapolated to all high-achieving, motivated young people pursuing production-oriented graphic communication majors at 2-year and 4-year colleges and universities throughout the U.S.

A Web-based survey was used for data collection and included an unordered list of the 24 potential influences developed by the expert panel. Participants were asked to rate each influence as Not Applicable (N/A) meaning it had no influence or from 1 (minimally applicable) to 4 (most applicable), meaning it was highly influential toward their decision to pursue a career in graphic communication. Students were asked to add influences not thought of when they responded, but no new influences were suggested.

### **Results**

Student responses were analyzed on two separate but interrelated scales (see table of results). The “N” scale, or the number of students who rated the influence as having significance, provides insight into how common the influence is to this group of students. For example, almost all students surveyed (51 out of 60) were influenced by learning graphics applications on their own, as a hobby, while very few (26 out of 60) students were influenced by a visit from a college representative to their high school. While the “N” measure shows how common the influence is, it does not signify the strength of the influence. Each

influence was rated on a scale from 1 (minimally applicable) to 4 (most applicable). Influence ratings for all 60 students surveyed were averaged to determine the relative impact of the influence, expressed as means. For example, high school graphic communication technology classes had the highest mean, indicating the most impact of all the influences. A graph showing the relationship of impact, frequency, and relative cost was developed to help interpret the data.

## **Conclusions**

The data clearly suggests that “high-touch” experiences are required to motivate students to pursue graphic communication careers. High school graphic communication technology classes were by far the strongest influence for students to choose college majors in graphic communication. Participation in Yearbook clubs and employment in graphic communication companies were also highly influential. The data also shows that just reading or viewing information about the industry is not highly influential. For example, websites and literature about the industry and career opportunities were not influential. Also, career counselors have minimal influence in these students’ career choices.

The most influential experiences tend to have a higher cost associated with them. With trends toward eliminating the printing equipment in many graphic communication high school programs across the nation, the pool of high achieving young people choosing graphic communication majors may dwindle. Keeping these programs strong requires a commitment of support at the grassroots level. Also, graphic communication companies who hire high school and college students for summer or part-time work are likely to have a positive influence. Hiring these students may not be immediately profitable, as these employees are less skilled and experienced.

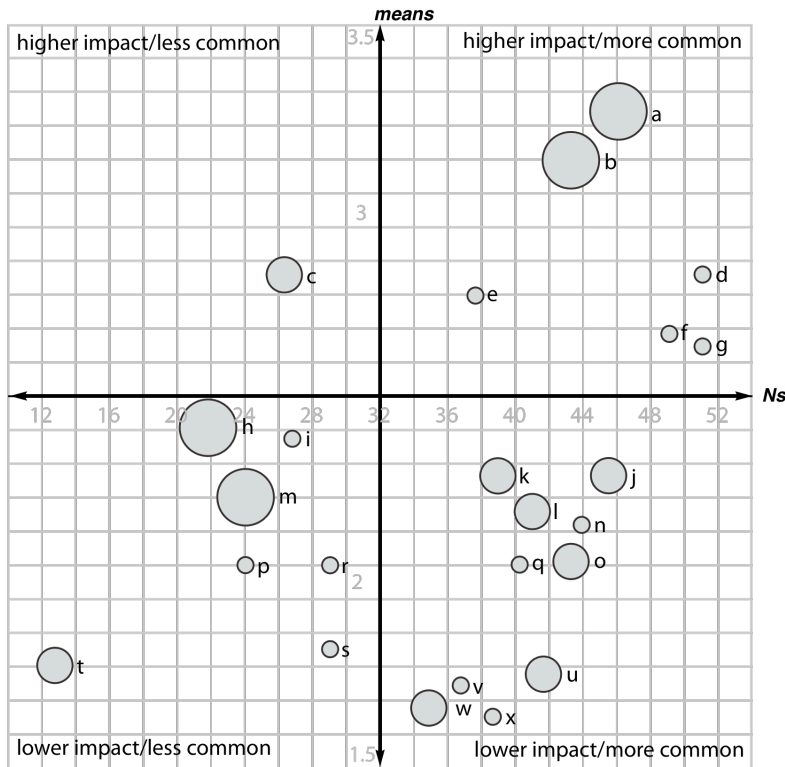
Many of those in our industry may not realize the high cost and time commitment required to effectively attract the best and brightest to the graphic communication industry. The path to maintaining and increasing the number of college-bound students choosing to major in graphic communication degree programs is clear: print providers and supply companies must get involved in the recruiting process. Contact with high schools has to be at the “grassroots” level, with support from local industry to respective schools. With a concerted, industry-wide effort, the long-term impact on the industry can be great.




## Table of Results

Influences to choosing a graphic communication major	N	Mean	Std. Dev
a) High school technology teacher/classes (including graphic communication classes)	46	3.24	1.079
a) Work experience in the graphic communication industry	44	3.14	1.047
a) Participation in high school Yearbook club	27	2.85	1.350
a) Learning graphics applications for fun on your own (i.e., Photoshop, Dreamweaver, etc.)	51	2.82	1.108
a) Field trips to graphic communication companies	37	2.76	1.164
a) Campus visits/program tour	49	2.65	1.251
a) College catalog (online or print versions)/graphic communication major description	51	2.61	1.078
a) Vocational school experience	22	2.5	1.336
a) Changing major field of study from a related area (like graphic design or computer science) as a result of being exposed to graphic communication through course(s)	27	2.44	1.251
a) College's graphic communication program brochure/poster	47	2.34	1.069
a) High school art teacher/classes	39	2.33	1.177
a) Exposure to graphic communication through career fair exhibits at a high school or college	41	2.32	1.213
a) Participation in high school newspaper club	24	2.29	1.268
a) Prestige associated with the profession	46	2.22	1.153
a) College's graphic communication program website	44	2.18	1.126
a) A visit to your high school class by a representative from a college graphic communication program	26	2.08	1.093
a) College guidance/career counselor	41	2.05	1.182
a) A peer (friend, roommate, etc.) showing what is taking place in his/her graphic communication courses	29	2.03	1.149
a) Opinions or pressures of family members in the graphic communication industry	28	1.86	1.079
a) Exposure to graphic communication career websites, like Make Your Mark	13	1.77	1.092
a) High school computer science teacher/classes	41	1.73	1.025
a) The results of a career survey	36	1.67	0.828
a) High school business teacher/classes	37	1.62	0.924
a) High school guidance/career counselor	39	1.56	0.940

N=60

Relating the potential impact, frequency, and relative cost of influences



-  Relatively high investment
-  Some investment required
-  Minimal or no specific investment required

Author Bios: Dr. Dan Wilson is a professor and coordinator of the graphic communication degree program at Illinois State University. Dr. Wilson has been teaching graphic communication in higher education for 20 years and has authored several Printing Industries Press books. He also works with ISU Technology Education students preparing to be graphic communication high school teachers.

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**About PGSF:** *The Print and Graphics Scholarship Foundation (PGSF) is a not-for-profit, private, industry-directed organization that dispenses undergraduate college scholarships and graduate fellowship assistance to talented men and women interested in graphic communication careers. The mission of the PGSF is “To strengthen the print and graphic communication industry by providing scholarship assistance.”*