

MGC SYNC: A Digital Networking Alternative That Connects Students and Industry Professionals

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Studies have shown that undergraduates who are given support, who access internship opportunities, and who build professional relationships through networking increase their odds of getting a job offer and a higher salary upon graduation. Public colleges and universities, however, often lack the resources necessary to acquire and implement technology tools that enable students to network with professionals in their target industries in a meaningful way, prior to graduation. To provide this kind of foundational support for students attending the Michael Graves College at Kean University, to address the shortage of resources, to increase students' successful employment in the design industry, to create and leverage a community of potential employers who want to hire Kean University design students, and to increase recruitment success within the design program, Assistant Professor Denise Anderson assembled a team of student researchers and led the development of MGC Sync, a digital networking tool specifically created to provide design students with a platform to showcase their design projects, talents, skills, and other relevant information that communicates their overall value proposition.

This article describes the practical and institutional challenges faced by Anderson and her team that led to the development of MGC Sync. It summarizes the research process used to validate the concept, the methodology employed to develop the digital networking tool, and the outcomes of the Phase I product launch. This article also describes Phase II of the MGC Sync project, which includes planned improvements based on the Phase I outcomes.

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Introduction

As design students move closer to graduation, they work hard at cultivating an ability to articulate their personal brand and to develop a portfolio of projects that will fulfill the expectations and requirements of a professional design practice. Many students flounder when it comes to establishing vital industry connections, because they are intimidated, inexperienced, or lack existing personal relationships with people who are able to help them achieve their professional goals. While students, as part of their formal education, are generally encouraged to reach out to members of the design industry who can provide shadowing and internship experiences and help identify post-graduation work opportunities, many design programs within public colleges and universities simply lack the institutional infrastructure—resources, funding, and personnel—to support students who attempt to make these connections, and/or monitor those developing relationships once they are established. Students are left to identify and pursue professional opportunities on their own, with little formal or ongoing support from the school.

Most design faculty proactively do what they can to forge and foster effective connections between their students and an active pool of professional resources who can provide or refer students to meaningful employment opportunities. Similarly, many design institutions introduce students to industry professionals via field trips, professional lectures, career preparation courses, and alumni networking events. Some design programs require an internship as part of the curriculum; others only encourage internship participation. Despite sincere efforts to help, educators often work with limited resources within a “patchwork” system of hit-or-miss approaches, which offers little guarantee that students, employers, or mentors will ever find one another or be a good fit.

Background

Founded in 1855, Kean University is a public four-year institution offering undergraduate and graduate programs within the liberal arts, natural sciences, social sciences, health professions, applied sciences, and visual and performing arts, as well as in business, architecture, design and teacher education. Its main campus is located in suburban Union, New Jersey, U.S.A., with additional campuses in Ocean, New Jersey and Wenzhou, China—the first American public university in China. Kean University has nearly 15,000 students across its campuses (“Kean University Institutional Profile”, 2017) and is ranked “high” in terms of having an ethnically, racially, and geographically diverse student population (“Kean University Diversity: How Good Is It?”, n.d.), many of whom are the first in their family to attend college.

One of six colleges at Kean University, the Michael Graves College (MGC) is named after the world-renowned architect and designer who was a guiding force in its development and that of the School of Public Architecture (SPA). The MGC consists of two schools with six interdisciplinary degrees, each accredited for general academic standards and operational practices in its area of specialization¹:

Robert Busch School of Design:

- BFA Graphic Design: Interactive Advertising (NASAD)
- BFA Graphic Design: Interactive, Print, and Screen (NASAD)
- BFA Interior Design (CIDA)
- BID Industrial Design (IDSA)

School of Public Architecture:

- BA in Architectural Studies (NAAB)
- MA in Architecture (NAAB)

In Spring 2018, approximately 415 MGC design and architecture students were enrolled at Kean’s Union campus, which operates under the guidance of Dean David Mohny, Associate Dean Rose Gonnella, sixteen professors (thirteen full-time; three part-time), four support staff, and 54 adjunct instructors. The college does not employ dedicated personnel, nor does it maintain a placement office for design internships or jobs. Internships are recommended, but not required, as part of the curriculum.

¹ Accreditation bodies include: National Association of Schools of Art and Design (NASAD), Council for Interior Design Accreditation (CIDA), Industrial Design Society of America (ISDA),



Figure 1. Degrees offered at the Michael Graves College, Kean University.

According to faculty's firsthand observations, most MGC students pursuing a degree are at the same time employed in non-design jobs to support themselves and/or their families. Faculty encourage students in their junior year to seek paid internships and to substitute a design job for their non-design job. While this may affect a student's livelihood (if the design job is non-paid or pays less), it is important that students acquire the professional experience essential for contextualizing the skills and technology they learn in class and applying them to their work in the design industry. Students who take this step tend to return from their professional work experience with an enhanced sense of purpose, with more focus on acquiring the skills they may lack, and with a clearer understanding of the requirements, rigor, and expectations they will encounter in the design field. Further, students are better positioned to identify potential design jobs, the industry segment on which to focus their search, and the job titles and experience they aspire to achieve. Overall, external work experiences help students acquire critical skills required by employers, as well as develop a strong sense of professionalism. Such work experiences also help students develop and articulate their value proposition within the design industry.

There are several third-party software options², including Symplicity, Handshake, and GradLeaders, available to colleges and universities to facilitate this type of engagement, which connect students to professionals for internships, jobs, and other career-related activities. However, high acquisition and ongoing subscription costs often serve as a deterrent to adoption, especially for public institutions and/or smaller design programs

² Third-party software vendors include: Symplicity (<https://www.symplicity.com/>), Handshake (<https://www.joinhandshake.com/>), and GradLeaders (<https://www.gradleaders.com/>).

that lack financial and personnel resources critical to adopting and supporting such platforms.

While similar to the above-referenced resources, the MGC Sync tool is unique in its ability to support a student-centered approach and effectively serve the needs of all interested stakeholders—students, faculty, and professional practitioners—in the following ways:

1. The tool’s interface design and user functionality has been developed specifically for design majors, allowing students to create an easy-to-manage repository of portfolio work that requires little technical maintenance.
2. The tool offers creative recruiters, alumni, companies with existing Kean/MGC/RBSD relationships (“professionals”), and other organizations familiar with the rigor of the school’s design program direct and ongoing access to an up-to-date pool of fresh and available design talent.
3. The tool enables design faculty to evaluate the quality of student projects and support individual career objectives. It assists faculty in identifying program strengths and weaknesses in order to improve curriculum development and positive student career outcomes.
4. The tool allows Kean, MGC, and the RBSD to build sustainable partnerships with local employers to facilitate and support ongoing feedback regarding student portfolios.
5. Going forward, the tool will serve to attract prospective students to the program, based on the administration’s enhanced ability to track over time and report on the quantity and quality of student job placements to internal and external stakeholders.

Opportunity

While little empirical research exists to provide insight on the career outcomes of graphic design graduates in the United States, a seminal, longitudinal study conducted between 2014-2016 identifies key factors that contribute to the ability of graphic design graduates to secure permanent employment following graduation. Through a total of five surveys conducted over a two-year period with a cohort of 37 graduates, Professor Kathryn Weinstein of Queens College, City University of New York (CUNY), followed one graduating class from a graphic design undergraduate degree program within a large, public New York college, in an effort to identify the

specific factors that influence their ability to secure employment as graphic designers.

According to Weinstein’s report, *From College to Careers: Tracking The First Two Years For Graphic Design Graduates*, the majority (65 percent) of the cohort worked in design-related jobs two years after graduation. Of the factors that the study assessed, “participation in a design internship while in college” was the only statistically significant factor correlated to employment levels for the cohort. (Weinstein, 2017). Weinstein further found that the respondents who did not participate in an internship while in college yet ultimately secured design employment reported that they participated in internships *after* graduation and ultimately secured design-related employment a year or more after graduation. (Weinstein, p. 10). She went on to posit that those students who gain job-related experience while in school find work at a faster rate, and at higher levels, than their peers who do not. (Weinstein, p. 14). The National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) further found that a paid internship with a for-profit employer boosts a graduate’s chances of getting a job offer and a higher starting salary when compared to the class overall. (“The Class of 2016 Student Survey Report”, 2016).

Level of Employment (24 Months) and Participation in Internship in College

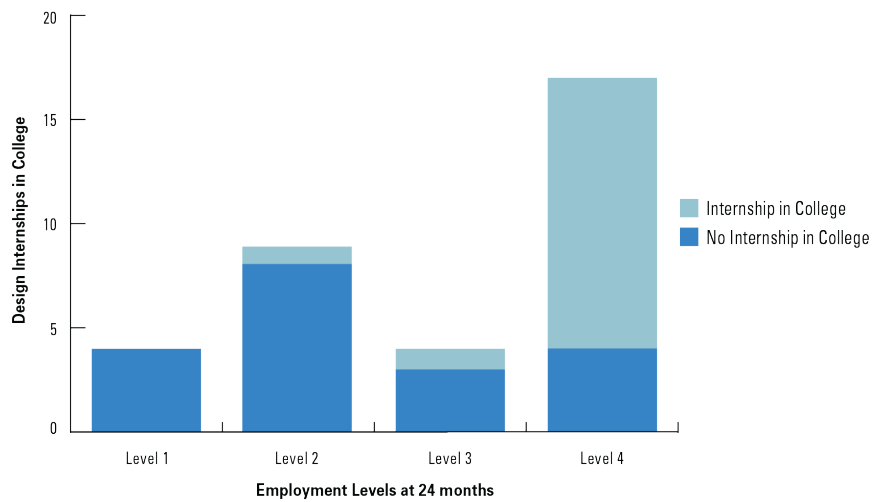


Figure 2. Respondents who reported participation in a design internship while in college have secured permanent design-related employment (Levels Three and Four) at the study's conclusion. (Source: Weinstein 2017, p. 11)

In addition to the Weinstein and NACE studies, other reported studies highlight the importance of connecting college students and industry professionals. According to a 2014 report published by Hanover Research, for example, universities that manage student transition from college to career must, in order to be effective, define clear strategies for students' personal and career development, and for employer engagement. Specifically, employer engagement and professional development strategies should draw on strong stakeholder networks that will support and inform students throughout the career preparation process. (Hanover, 2014).

Statistics also show that students want to be better prepared for career success. According to a 2017 report prepared for McGraw-Hill Education, 63 percent of currently enrolled undergraduate, master's or doctoral program students believe that additional internships and professional experience would have made them feel more confident about their preparedness for work-life. In addition, students indicate that additional access to career preparation tools would make them feel better prepared for post-graduation jobs. (McGraw Hill, 2017).

Anderson's research findings are consistent with established evidence that shows students who gain job-related experience in the form of freelancing or internships (either during school or after graduation) is a key factor to securing a design-related job. In aggregate, these conclusions serve as the basis for the development and implementation of MGC Sync, because the tool connects industry professionals with design students who want to gain design-related experience and/or design internship opportunities. In creating the MGC Sync tool, Anderson supports a growing opinion that employers do not have to be perceived only as a placement resource, but also as a resource for professional development. (Hanover, 2014).

Alumni and industry partners generally hire from Kean's RBSD because they have had past success in doing so, and are confident that the design program and curriculum prepares graduates well for the industry. After receiving the portfolio website URLs from Fall 2016 graduates, Jonathan Stamp, vice president and director of Design and Imaging at McCann Torre Lazur, addressed a note to RBSD Assistant Professor Denise Anderson: "I sometimes come across recent design graduates who make me think, 'How

could a school take this kid's money for four years without ever counseling them out of their major?" he wrote. "But not one from this class. You're doing something very right at your school. Quality work from beginning to end."

How RBSD Students Currently Connect to Industry Professionals

As part of Anderson and her team's preliminary research to identify the potential value of a technology solution to students, educators, and design professionals, team members explored how design students currently connect to jobs and industry professionals. The team sought to determine which strategies had the most impact, and whether existing tools could be utilized to support and empower MGC Sync.

Alumni and industry partners

One invaluable asset of the RBSD is a dedicated group of alumni and industry partners who actively seek out students for shadowing, internships, and employment. Their potential is virtually untapped. Local and loyal, these supporters of the program serve as trusted partners in employing students.

The RBSD Graphic Design program hosts a private Facebook group where alumni and faculty can post internship and job opportunities. While this "job board" does connect students to professionals, the posting of job opportunities tends to fall to faculty. Unfortunately, job boards are often unmonitored, making it difficult to determine if a position has been filled.

Design-sponsored events

Companies that seek to hire new design talent often participate in trade organization-sponsored portfolio reviews, job fairs, and industry events, such as those hosted for graphic designers by local chapters of the American Institute of Graphic Arts (AIGA) and The One Club. Timely dissemination of information about upcoming events relies heavily on faculty alerting their roster of students via email or posting to the private Graphic Design Facebook group, where design majors may or may not go to look. A direct connection from these organizations to students has the potential to increase attendance and participation, especially if organizations host events on campus or co-sponsor events at their locations.

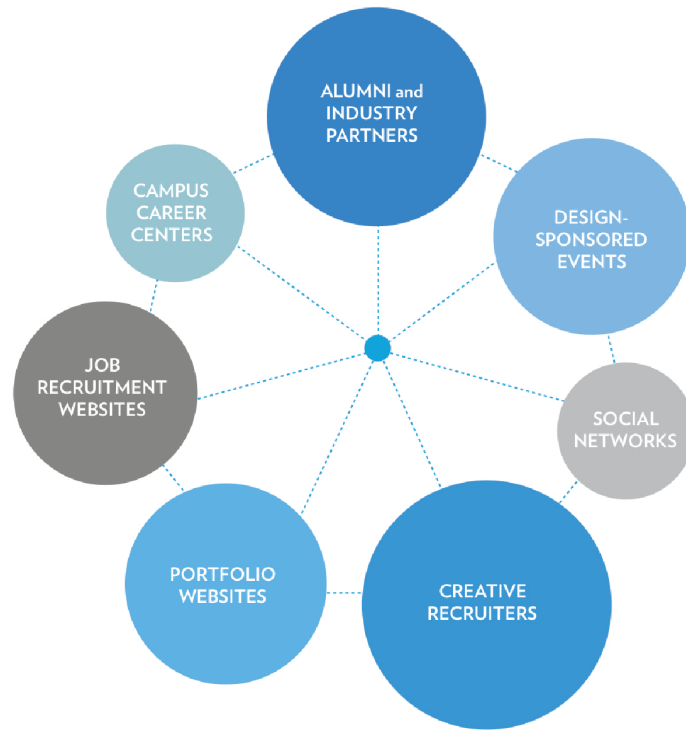


Figure 3. Strategies RBSD students are using to connect to industry professionals.

Social networks

Many students use social media platforms such as Twitter, Instagram, and LinkedIn to identify and connect to professionals with whom they would like to work. Faculty promote this approach because social media is generally free, with some exceptions, such as a LinkedIn “Premium” monthly membership, which may not be practical for students. Distinguished Professor and Coordinator of the Robert Busch School of Design (RBSD) Interactive Advertising program Robin Landa says, “When you follow companies, agencies, studios, and individual professionals on social media, you will routinely see notices of job openings, industry news, and new administrative hires. To demonstrate expertise, value, and passion, join industry conversations on social media as well.” (Landa, 2018).

Creative recruiters

Many recruiters have their own company websites where candidates can search for design jobs. The RBSD currently cultivates connections with recruiters at The Creative Group, The Boss Group, and FCBHealth, but many companies recruit designers for full-time and per-diem work, and relatively few fill internship positions or promote opportunities for freelancing. This category is untapped, because many recruiters who actively seek to hire MGC/RBSD graduates do not currently have a streamlined connection to promote their available jobs and freelancing opportunities.

Portfolio websites

A limited number of free websites, such as Behance, Coroflot, and Dribbble, specifically offer opportunities for design students to showcase their work. While these platforms have global reach, their massive scale does not facilitate making a streamlined connection to professionals and alumni who are local, loyal, and support the RBSD design program. Nevertheless, the school's faculty continue to recommend that students, as a part of their overall marketing strategy, create a profile and post projects on these platforms.

Job recruitment websites

Online websites such as Monster, Indeed, Glassdoor, and CareerBuilder are not specifically targeted to people seeking design jobs, and while they do post some opportunities in creative fields, it is unlikely that candidates using these sites are making the best use of their time. According to Statistic Brain Research Institute, the average percentage of online applicants vying for a single position who actually get an interview is only seven percent. ("Online Employment Job Posting Website Statistics", 2017).

Campus career centers

Most educational institutions maintain career development offices and job search websites, which are visited by over 86 percent of job seeking students, according to NACE. ("The Class of 2016 Student Survey Report", 2016). This means that 3,612 of the 4,200 graduating seniors surveyed visited their career center—at either its physical location or online—at least once in their final academic year. Kean University, however, has fallen below that national average. While the school maintains a dedicated career

center and has offered student access to a third-party online job database, CollegeCentral.com, since 1997, officials at Kean estimate that approximately 10 percent of students and alumni access the database. Low adoption rates are attributed to both lack of awareness of the resource, and for designers, to poor interface design and functionality.

Solution

Informed by existing research, a history of positive feedback from those who employ RBSD design students, her own observations and experience, and the ongoing competition for scarce resources that dominates most public institutions, Anderson and her team of student researchers began their work on a forward-thinking solution to strengthen and expand the RBSD's solid reputation among members of the professional design community. To provide an exclusive platform where established, as well as potential new, partners can connect with RBSD students, Anderson led the team in a collaborative effort to develop digital technology to meet the following objectives:

Provide students with a platform for marketing their design projects, talents, skills, and other relevant information that communicates the value they can offer to an employer.

The portfolio is a design student's single most important vehicle for demonstrating design competence. The tool will serve as a repository, organized by design specialty, that is digitally accessible through any device. The objective of MGC Sync is to empower students to reach out to a network of engaged design professionals for support, feedback, and work.

Cultivate a network of recruiters, alumni, and other industry professionals to connect—via an “invitation-only” network—to students during Senior Portfolio Review for the purpose of evaluating portfolio work and identifying potential talent to hire.

According to the *2013 National Survey of Business and Nonprofit Leaders* conducted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities and Hart Research Associates, “Business and non-profit leaders are highly interested in partnering with colleges and universities to provide more hands-on learning opportunities and to help college students successfully make the transition from college into the workplace.” The survey also indicated that four in five employers say an electronic portfolio

(i.e., a designer's portfolio website) would be useful to them in ensuring that job applicants have the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their company or organization. ("It Takes More than a Major: Employer Priorities for College Learning and Student Success", 2013).

Create an evaluation and reporting tool that allows design faculty and potential employers to provide direct feedback to students about their work.

Relying on their own observations and narrow feedback, design educators can make assumptions about the best way to prepare students for the professional world, but continuous feedback and insights from those who assess, hire, and eventually promote students can vastly improve the success of design programs and the students who advance through them. Industry requirements are evolving rapidly, mainly due to technological advances; therefore students must be prepared to meet these challenges. An automated professional-to-educator feedback channel will help the school improve its program and give students who seek professional opportunities a competitive edge.

Methodology

Phase I: MGC Sync Research, Design and Launch

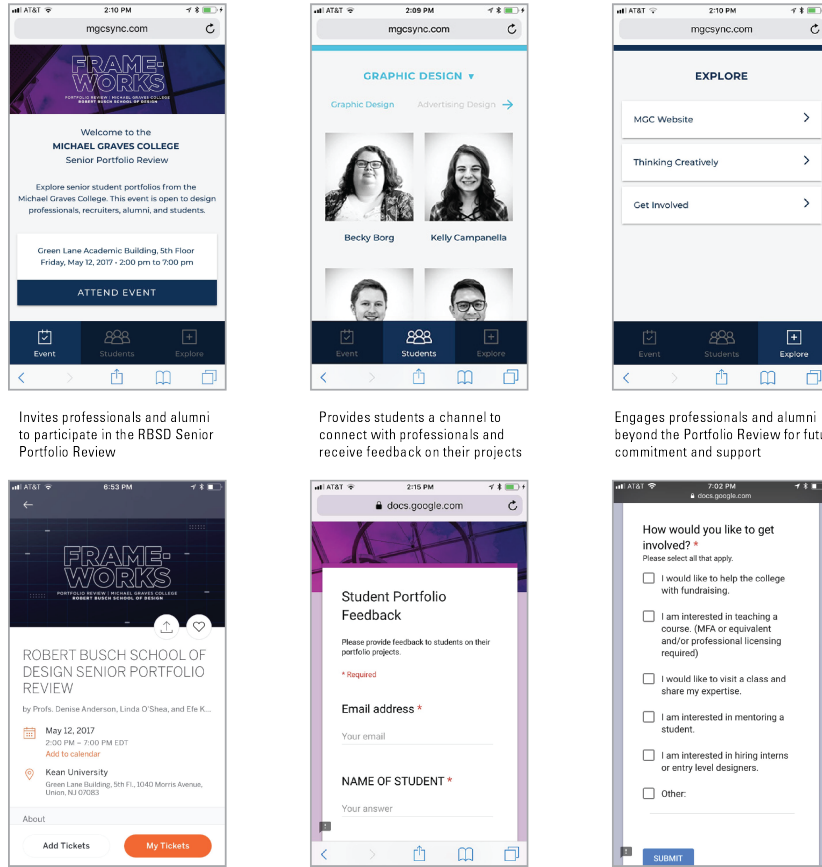
In May 2017, Anderson and her student research team launched Phase I of MGC Sync (<http://www.mgcsync.com/>), a mobile website that connects students directly to a local and loyal support group of creative recruiters, industry professionals, and alumni for the purpose of identifying employment, internship, and freelance opportunities. According to a 2017 Statista study, the number of mobile phone internet users in the U.S. is estimated to jump from 225 million in 2016 to 270.5 million by 2020. In line with these figures, the number of online users who access the internet exclusively via mobile devices is also expected to increase in the coming years.³ To increase the likelihood of student adoption and user rates, Anderson and her team made mobile optimization a priority.

³ <https://www-statista-com.kean.idm.oclc.org/topics/3124/mobile-internet-usage-in-the-united-states/>

The functional and design features of MGC Sync included:

- A home screen graphic promoting the annual RBSD Senior Portfolio Review, which links to an Eventbrite page where professionals can register to review student portfolios and where faculty track professionals who attend;
- Personal profile pages of graduating students, segmented by major, which feature thumbnails of their design projects, links to their portfolio website and resume, and a personal statement. At the bottom of each profile is a “feedback” button that prompts reviewers to critique the student’s work; and
- A section designated for professionals that links to the MGC (<https://michaelgravescollege.kean.edu/>) and the college’s annual *Thinking Creatively Conference* (<http://thinking-creatively.org/>) websites, and which includes a Google form soliciting participation such as adjunct teaching, mentoring, or lecturing.

As a design educator, faculty member, student mentor, Graphic Design Portfolio professor, and author, Anderson views MGC Sync as a logical continuation of the process set forth in her book, *Stand Out: Design your personal brand, Build a killer portfolio, and Find a great design job*, which outlines a step-by-step process for designing a personal brand, developing a compelling portfolio, and finding the right job. “MGC Sync is a technology-driven solution that empowers students to launch and manage their design careers by connecting directly to hiring agents and other industry professionals,” Anderson says.



Invites professionals and alumni to participate in the RBSD Senior Portfolio Review

Provides students a channel to connect with professionals and receive feedback on their projects

Engages professionals and alumni beyond the Portfolio Review for future commitment and support

Figure 4. Screenshots and website URL of MGC Sync—Phase I: <http://www.mgcsync.com/>.

Based on their research findings, Anderson directed her team to focus on building a user-friendly platform that would foster a robust connection between students and the alumni, industry partners, and design professionals who want to hire students from MGC. To support the functional and design features, Anderson identified three main technology objectives for the MGC Sync tool in Phase I:

1. Create a viable, low-tech, and low-cost digital solution.

After accepting the project as an Independent Study in Spring 2016, student researcher Mitch DeCastro worked closely with RBSD Professor Edward Johnston, a nationally recognized expert in digital design. The focus of DeCastro’s initial design research was to “identify a low-cost way to build a mobile website using free open source code and Google tools, a platform already utilized by the University.” DeCastro chose to create a mobile website because it was a practical and viable solution, which did not require expensive iOS and Android mobile application programming costs. He took the following steps to create the tool:

- Hosting through GitHub Pages—a free and reliable service;
- Naming the tool “MGC Sync”—to capture and reflect the harmonious relationship between students and professionals;
- Securing the domain name through Name Cheap—a nominal fee was required;
- Embedding forms via Google Forms, allowing visitors to submit information or sign up to participate in a given event and enabling faculty to easily retain information submitted by visitors; and
- Establishing ongoing and future maintenance of MGC Sync, which can be accomplished by manually updating the website’s code.

2. Brand the site within the MGC and RBSD identity standards, and design the tool’s user experience/user interface (UX/UI) to be user-friendly.

In Spring 2017, Anderson instructed student researchers Marc Rosario and Perry Capelakos to develop MGC Sync’s user interface because they had designed and produced a new brand identity for the recently-formed MGC, which integrated beautifully with the RBSD identity. Rosario and Capelakos took the following steps in developing the project:

- Designed a user interface for MGC Sync with a distinctive personality that remained visually consistent with the MGC and RBSD identity standards; and
- Designed promotional graphics, such as videos, short animations, posters, social media postings, and Snapchat filters to use at the Review.

3. Engage the students in the development of mobile site content.

DeCastro developed a specifications sheet that outlined how participating students should format and send files for the programming of student profiles. He also provided layout options, allowing students to

customize their MGC Sync profile pages to match their personal brand identities. Rosario and Capelakos conducted photo shoots of the students and converted the files into black-and-white images. Once content was collected from the graduating students, DeCastro programmed the mobile website according to the layout and user interface design created by Rosario and Capelakos. The assets collected from students included:

- Four to six images of portfolio projects;
- A one- to two-sentence personal brand statement, with a list of three top design skills, specialties, or areas of interest;
- A URL link to a portfolio website; and
- A resume saved as a PDF file.

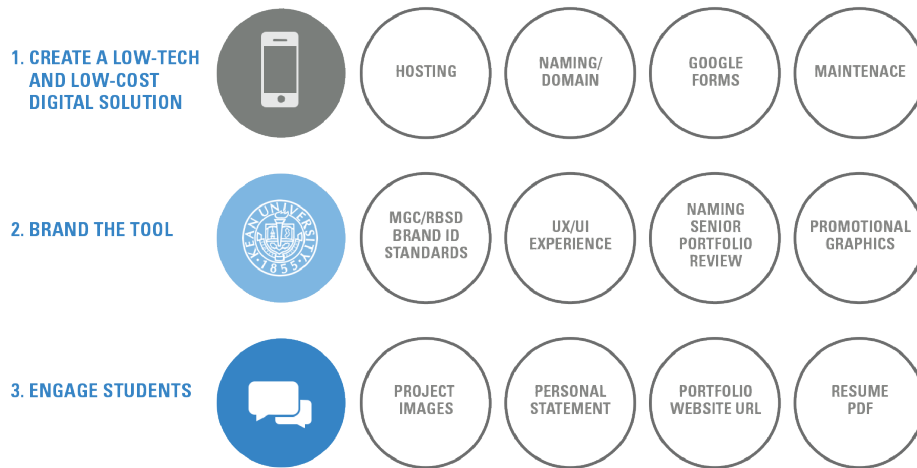


Figure 5. Methodology for the design of MGC Sync—Phase I.

Launch

Anderson and her team released Phase I of MGC Sync one week prior to the May 2017 RBSD Senior Portfolio Review. At the same time, they emailed a website link to faculty, students, and industry professionals to promote the event. To encourage registration and attendance by industry professionals, the team also provided work samples from prospective graduates scheduled to present at the Review.

Findings

Phase I of MGC Sync produced the following results:

Graduating students obtained a digital networking tool that connected them to alumni and to industry professionals who want to hire RBSD students.

Only 51 of the 61 graduates completed a full profile. Some students were unable to meet the content deliverable deadline for the student researcher to upload profiles. In Phase I, students are unable to load their profiles independently.

Professional designers and recruiters had immediate, on-demand access to RBSD talent through their smartphones and other devices, during and after the Portfolio Review.

Faculty and students promoted the tool via a notecard that included the site's URL and through word-of-mouth during the event, making reviewers aware that student portfolios could be accessed on their mobile devices for reviewing and providing feedback.

Google Forms statistics indicated low adoption.

One of approximately 75 reviewers provided feedback to four students via MGC Sync. No professionals completed the Google Form regarding future involvement with the school. Anderson and her team attributed the low response rate to the limited amount of time the team had to notify and educate the reviewers about the tool.

The RBSD had a new platform to demonstrate the creative and professional successes of their graduates.

Before MGC Sync, faculty had to search through and identify individual student websites for recruitment event presentations. With the implementation of MGC Sync, faculty gained invaluable one-stop access to an exclusive repository that highlights student work and achievements.

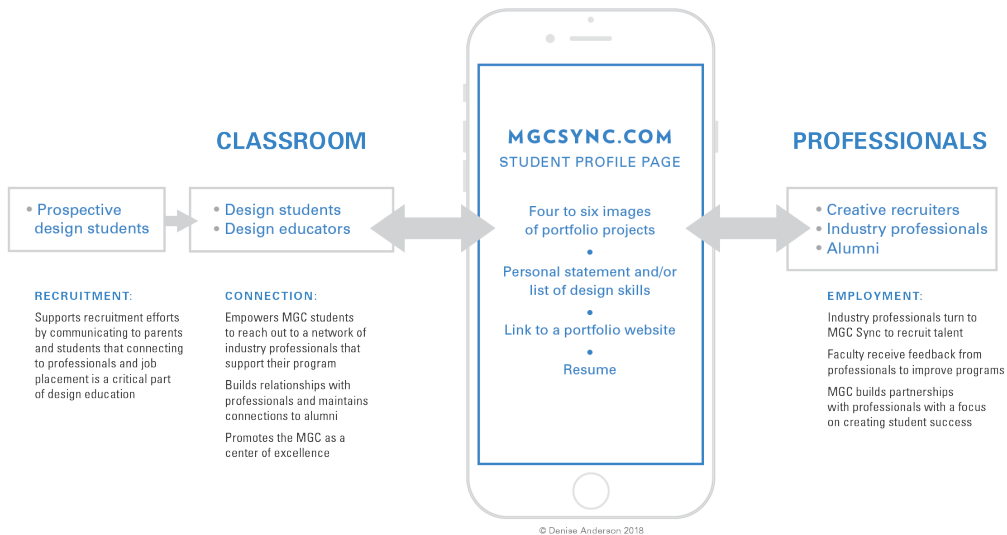


Figure 6. Stakeholders and benefits of MGC Sync.

Phase II: MGC Sync Improvements (In Progress)

In Phase I, Anderson and her team launched the MGC Sync tool in connection with the Spring 2017 Senior Portfolio Review. Based on the Phase I findings, the team identified multiple improvement opportunities for further development and measuring the tool’s success. Anderson used academic release time to work on the tool throughout 2017-18, and the Kean University Foundation provided funding for student stipends and certain travel expenses for conference presentations. Following the graduation of the Phase I student team, Anderson secured new student researchers, Daniella Almoneda and Daniel Goldstein, to work on UX/UI improvements. For the Phase II development of the MGC Sync project, Anderson identified five areas for improvement and development:

1. Develop additional MGC Sync features and improve site functionality.

To provide stakeholders— students, faculty, and professional practitioners—with a practical and functional tool they would be more likely to adopt, Anderson and her team designed additional features and improved the site’s functionality. Phase I of the tool did not include a

“professionals” section, limited its users’ ability to update profile content, and did not include a “search” function. Phase II upgrades include:

- A login page for users that protects the exclusivity of the network for RBSD stakeholders;
- A “search” function for organizing information and helping users find relevant content; and
- Additional and expanded sections:
 - *Designers*. Student projects and profiles now load randomly on the “designer” home page, rather than being static.
 - *Recruiters*. Includes profiles and contact information for professionals, alumni, and other hiring agents.
 - *Jobs*. Includes both abbreviated and full job descriptions.
 - *Events*. Connects to the MGC website, which highlights MGC’s robust lecture series and other professional events.
 - *Contact*. Lists the names, email addresses, and phone numbers of faculty leading the college’s specialty majors.

2. Enhance the user experience.

To create a more positive user experience and increase adoption rates, Anderson and her team relied on their branding expertise. To improve the tool’s user interface and user experience, the team:

- Created a navigation bar that links users to the new sections referenced above. In Phase I, site navigation was limited to three sections: “event,” “students,” and “explore;”
- Designed a new page layout grid and an enhanced color scheme that is more visually engaging, yet still consistent with RBSD’s identity standards; and
- Incorporated “recruiter” logos to highlight companies that post jobs.

3. Partner with Kean University Computer Science students to program the site.

To develop the more sophisticated features and functionality proposed for Phase II, Anderson secured a commitment from the Computer Science Department to identify students with coding expertise to assist with the MGC project. Programming areas include:

- “Front-end” coding—the area of the website with which the user interacts. Languages include HTML, CSS, and JavaScript;
- “Back-end” coding—including server, application, and database programming. Languages include Java, PHP, Ruby, Python and others; and

- Development of a reporting function—to generate statistics on users, jobs posted and filled, and feedback from recruiters.

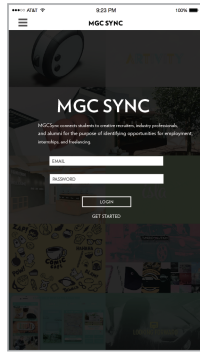
4. Develop processes, policies, and procedures for curating and posting projects to MGC Sync.

Quality content will be paramount to the ongoing success of MGC Sync. In Phase I, only students who were enrolled in their final Portfolio course in Spring 2017, presented at the 2017 Senior Portfolio Review, and were scheduled to graduate that same semester were permitted to create a profile and post a resume and portfolio projects to MGC Sync. Quality was controlled by the Portfolio instructors who mentored students in the creation of their final book of work and directed their personal brand identity assets, such as resumes and personal portfolio website.

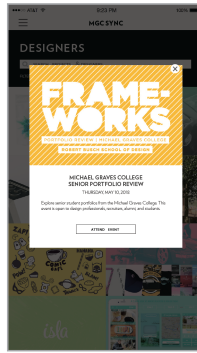
In Phase II, the strategy will expand the opportunity to post projects *all* MGC students—not just RBSD graduating seniors. Strict control standards will be implemented to ensure that only quality work is posted and that the reputation and brand of Kean, MGC, and the RBSD are maintained. Specifically, Anderson and her team will work with other faculty and college administrators to develop policies and procedures that outline the submission criteria, identify the courses in which work will be reviewed and curated, and constitute an MGC Sync Review Board to review and approve requests for profile submissions and project uploads. Anderson and her team are identifying ways of automating the approval process.

5. Create an end user adoption strategy.

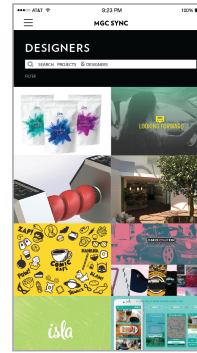
Inducing stakeholders to adopt the new technology will be pivotal to the success of MGC Sync. In Phase I, only graduating students were permitted to post content, and industry professionals were notified about the tool only one week in advance of the Senior Portfolio Review. In Phase II, Anderson and her team will structure a comprehensive communication campaign to inform all stakeholders about the benefits of adopting the tool for career development and talent recruitment.



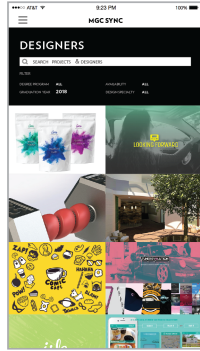
A login page for users to protect the exclusivity of the network



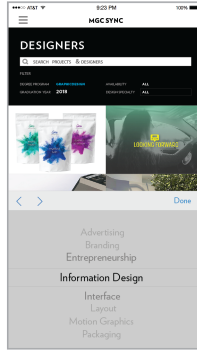
Pop-up messages to promote the Portfolio Review and other events



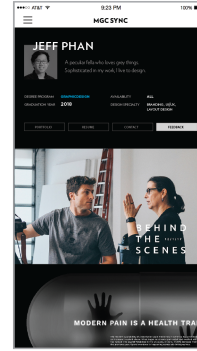
New page layout design and enhanced color scheme



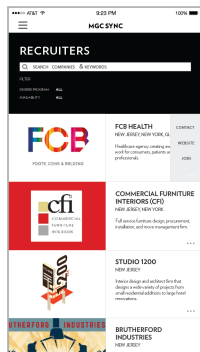
Projects and profiles load randomly rather than being static



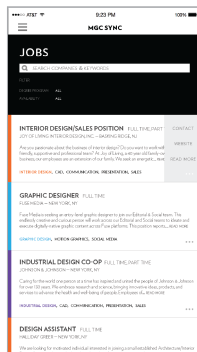
Search function for organizing information and finding content



Enhanced student profile page with larger images



Includes profiles for professionals and alumni



Job opportunities are color coded by degrees



Jobs include both abbreviated and full descriptions

Figure 7. Screenshots and prototype URL of MGCSync—Phase II:

<https://bit.ly/2MePF07>.

Expected Outcomes of Phase II

A greater percentage of graduating students will transition successfully into professional practice.

MGC Sync showcases and promotes the portfolios and accomplishments of students and graduates. Novice designers who use the tool will stand out in a highly competitive field, garnering the attention of individuals who can provide valuable feedback and potential employment opportunities. MGC Sync also will foster connections with alumni by providing networking support as students seek full-time employment and freelance opportunities.

Supporting a student's effective transition from the classroom to the professional world, the MGC Sync tool will provide a tangible symbol of an institution's commitment to student success by providing a core resource to meet their needs.

Curriculum development will be improved.

MGC Sync actively engages three stakeholders—students, faculty, and professional practitioners—in the process of curriculum improvement. The practical insights gained from each group will ensure that future programing meets the industry's evolving requirements.

MGC Sync's assessment and reporting components provide a mechanism for experienced professionals to share insights about student work, current hiring practices, trends, and industry needs. Equipped with timely and relevant feedback from students and employers, faculty can improve program offerings based on comprehensive and accurate information.

Student recruitment initiatives will be supported.

In today's increasingly competitive marketplace, students (and their parents) consider the ability to secure gainful employment in their chosen field of study to be a critical component of their decision about which college to attend. The ability to access to and engage with the professional community often plays a significant role in that decision-making process.

MGC Sync's ability to showcase student success and provide demonstrable evidence of student engagement with the professional design community, including potential hiring agents and other industry contacts, initially for internships and later in their studies for employment, will serve to attract new students and increase enrollment at MGC.

A proprietary network of dependable recruitment partners will be created.

Recruiters need ongoing access to a consistent pool of fresh and available design talent. Many companies or alumni hire from specific institutions because they are familiar with, and respect, how the students are educated and trained. Recruitment is a competitive activity, and if recruiters have a reliable go-to resource for talent, everyone—students, employers, and faculty—wins.

In addition to facilitating the introduction of talent for recruitment partners, the tool will also enable faculty and administrators to track, measure, and report on the success of the tool's overall objectives.

Conclusion

The MGC Sync tool, following Phase I, has made several meaningful contributions to interested stakeholders:

- Students can showcase their portfolio and skills to potential employers through a dynamic, digital networking tool that connects them with industry professionals who are committed to supporting them, Kean, MGC and the RBSD;
- Recruiters and professionals have immediate, on-demand access to a pool of qualified students with a demonstrated record of design success;
- Kean, MGC, and the RBSD have an emergent repository of student work that can be used for college recruitment, enrollment, and accreditation purposes.

After years of mastering design thinking, evolving technology, and the fundamentals of their craft, students often find themselves underprepared to move from the classroom into a professional work environment where they will thrive. Professional relationships and relevant work experience throughout their educational journey enhances their ability to create credible work, and gives them a sense of their own competence. When they are familiar and comfortable with the nuances of working on real client projects, when they know how to build metrics around the designs they create, and when they understand the interdependence of professional practice and design theory, students gain an invaluable edge in the increasingly complex, highly competitive field they plan to enter.

Academic institutions and faculty have a responsibility to provide students with these growth opportunities, regardless of the school's size, budget, or resources. Support, feedback, and employment opportunities provided by a local, loyal, and intimate network of engaged stakeholders via the MGC Sync mobile website can ensure access to these opportunities and connect students with industry professionals for initial and ongoing career success.

Anderson and her team look forward to completing Phase II and reporting on the results.

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