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21 April 2010

## The Roosevelt Institute Identity

I'm creating a visual identity for The Roosevelt Institute, a progressive campus student group focused on the non-partisan research of public policy. The project's intent is to differentiate an ideologically complex organization from scores of other student groups on campus.

The resulting identity is condensed into a design standards publication. This guide outlines the look chosen for the organization, typography, a website, color schemes and a series of print advertisements for use by the group on student bulletin boards.

The identity is 'flexible,' so it can accommodate a variety of conditions in which it will appear, such as flyers, posters and the web. This also makes the identity adaptable to other chapters of the organization around the country.

### **THE ORGANIZATION**

The Frank and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute, a non-profit organization in control of the Franklin Delano Roosevelt Presidential Library, formed The Roosevelt Institute in 2006. They did so with the intent of giving students a space to research an issue, write a policy, and attempt to get it implemented through governmental and non-governmental channels. The Roosevelt Institute labels itself as 'progressive,' defined not by conformity to specific political ideology, but an attachment to well-reasoned ideas that garner bipartisan support.

In this way, The Roosevelt Institute offers a unique experience that stands in contrast to other campus organizations, such as College Democrats, whose political creativity is often limited by adherence to a national platform.

**FIG. 1**  
*Organization of the  
 Roosevelt Institute*



The organization is composed of individual policy centers that focus on specific issues (e.g., health care, international relations, human rights). A director's board helps to administrate the centers and coordinate events.

The hope for this group is to engage students in an environment that promotes dialogue and research, allowing them to write a progressive policy and help put it into action.

Despite its unique position, The Roosevelt Institute's lack of visual identity has made it difficult to distinguish the organization from the multitude of other student groups on campus.

#### **INFLUENCE**

My personal interest in this project began nearly two years ago. As a transfer student from Michigan State University who studied political theory and constitutional democracy, I joined The Roosevelt Institute's center on international relations as a writer. As time passed and my coursework intensified, I found myself unable to write for the group, but a friend would periodically ask me to make posters for events.

In the spring of 2008, The Roosevelt Institute and fellow student group Human Rights Through Education held an event on war crimes tribunals that featured a speaker from the International Court of Justice.

I worked closely with group members to develop a poster that reflected the gravity of the topic, but distinguished itself from other flyers on campus with a larger format and more vibrant colors. The result was a run of 50 13" × 19" posters strategically placed to target students in buildings like the Ford School of Public Policy.

The event had over 100 attendees, and its success piqued my interest in design as a method to raise a student group's visibility and distinguish it from other organizations.

#### **PRECEDENT**

As I began to work on my Integrative Project, my first major influence was that of University of Michigan School of Art & Design graduate Mollie Bates and her work *The Michigan Independent's Guide to Blue Activism*.

FIG. 2  
Cover of Mollie  
Bates's *The Michigan  
Independent's Guide to  
Blue Activism*



In 2006, Mollie Bates created a campaign across the University encouraging students to vote no on Proposal 2 that fall—an amendment to the state constitution that would ban affirmative action. She created a logo, a series of posters and ephemera that appeared on everything from bulletin boards to Diag boards, and even the backpacks of students (Bates 11). By raising awareness, she helped to mobilize a large network of student voters.

FIG. 3  
Poster from Mollie  
Bates's work stressing  
the importance of  
diversity



Though Michigan voters passed the ballot initiative in November of 2006, the premise of her work was an inspiring attempt to engage students in a way not used before: design.

Similarly, I became immediately involved with The Roosevelt Institute and worked with them to raise their visibility, bringing consistency to their flyers, posters and publications. I quickly created a working logo, a flyer for a small event, a poster for their regional event, and a mock-up for a t-shirt.

However, I found myself confined to the timeline of The Roosevelt Institute and working without the benefit of creative criticism. I was unable to get the feedback necessary to produce a visual system that fit the organization.

In FIG. 4, the 'R' may embody the risky and bold nature of the Roosevelt Institute in the 1930s and '40s by virtue of its robust shape, but the form was trapped inside a stagnant circle, rigid, unmoving and resistant to change—ideas that oppose progressivism. Meanwhile, the poster in FIG. 4 advertises a specific event, not the group as a whole, limiting the poster to a single use.

Rather than choosing an entirely new direction for my project, I decided

FIG. 4  
Left, initial logo. Right,  
event poster



to reframe it, allowing myself more time for visual exploration and implementation. I would continue to work with the group to become more familiar with their needs, but I'd create an identity proposal separate from this work, on my own time frame, wherein I could be more explorative.

#### RESEARCH

Moving forward, I needed to further investigate how student groups looked on campus, the kind of students were part of The Roosevelt Institute, and what could be learned from other successful visual identities, such as IBM.

I began by photographing the work of other student groups and collecting examples of their logos. From this, I saw many student groups utilized maize and blue, the colors of the University of Michigan. Politically oriented groups used imagery in line with a national platform.

The chapter of Amnesty International at the University of Michigan simply used the international organization's logo. College Democrats partially used this strategy by taking the top half of a donkey, its national symbol, and the block M, a local symbol of the University, and combining them.

FIG. 5  
Left, College  
Democrats. Right,  
Amnesty International



The Roosevelt Institute didn't have this luxury; it had no national symbols to look to. Further, an adaptation of an existing logo primes the audience

for what the organization is about. For example, if they used symbols from the Bull Moose Party of 1912—a progressive movement started by Theodore Roosevelt—historically inclined audiences may think the organization is about corporate monopolies, while others could confuse a moose illustration for hunting rights. In order to differentiate itself, The Roosevelt Institute needed to break free of such constraints.

The frequency advertisements appeared also became apparent. Students only promote themselves at events like ‘Diag Day,’ when all student groups come on a single day to gain new members. The only other times groups advertise was for a specific event.

FIG. 6  
Student flyers in the  
Duderstadt Library



Each group also marketed itself in a similar fashion. They relied on inundating people with small leaflets, Facebook invitations, or free food. These invitations were generally small, in black and white, and had little visual or typographic hierarchy. Larger posters better distinguish student groups, as there is a large jump of visibility from  $8.5'' \times 11''$  to  $11'' \times 17''$ .

Further, I investigated the type of students that were part of The Roosevelt Institute. I created an online survey of thirty questions that was filled out by 67% of the group (Fink 29). From this, I learned most members were older, typically upperclassmen, which lived off campus and 92% of them were also involved in other student groups.

I also wanted to better understand how visual identities were created. Much was gleaned from looking at the design standards publications of Nynex, Westinghouse, FedEx and IBM. These brands are representative of the ‘static’ corporate identity championed by modernist designers of the 1960s and ‘70s.

FIG. 7  
IBM logo designed by  
Paul Rand



For example, take IBM, whose identity was created by Paul Rand. When Rand created the logo, he created strict guidelines about how small it could appear, what color the logo could be, what colors the logo could appear on,

how the logo works with other text, its placement on the page and a variety of other obligations to which IBM would adhere to for decades.

Yet, this method stands in stark contrast to how modern identities are developed. In the book *Designing Brand Identity*, its author Alina Wheeler suggests a 'kit of parts' now better represents contemporary corporate identities (Wheeler 15). If old designs were inert, new identities, like that of Hofstede Design, the New York Public Library, or The Pew Center designed by the firm Johnson-Banks, are more like pieces of a larger puzzle.

FIG. 8  
Identity for The Pew Center designed by British firm Johnson-Banks



There are consistent elements, such as case the square for The Pew Center for Arts & Heritage in Philadelphia, but their position, color and content can change and adapt to a variety of different situations and materials. Better yet, they need not require restrictive design guidelines, merely an effective designer to implement the ideology behind the identity.

FIG. 9  
Wall installation for The Pew Center



#### LOGO & KEYWORDS

The most pressing issue faced in the creative stage of my project was the development of keywords to focus the tone of the visual system I hoped to create. After much consternation, I began to create visual forms based on the notions of connection and overlap. These words seemed to best express the actions of The Roosevelt Institute, where people of different ideologies could come



together and formulate something new. I decided to focus on the logo first, which according to Milton Glaser is the “...point of entry to a brand” (qtd. in Wheeler 25). It is the first thing you see, the basis for the entire brand.

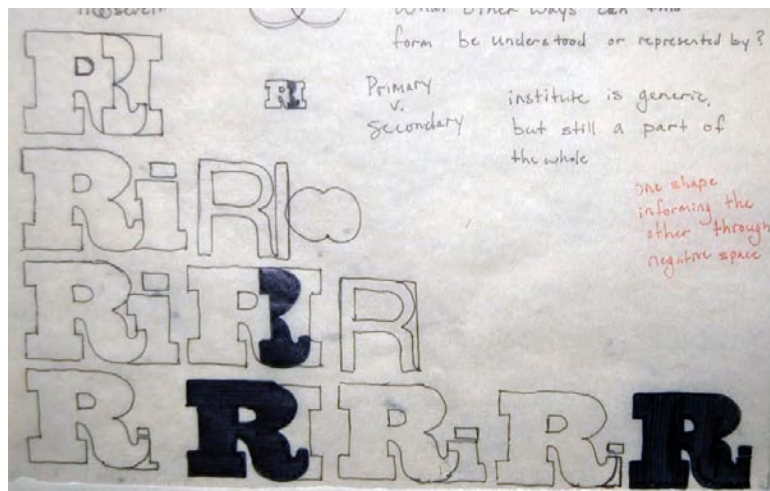
These forms were initially typographically based, playing with the same ‘R’ that I had used in my first iteration, FIG. 4. From there, I was influenced by the shape and line of Russian Suprematism’s founder, Kasimir Malevich (Malevich 130). Malevich and his contemporaries tried to make shape expressive of emotion, which stood in stark contrast to the Impressionists’ use of semi-realistic imagery. As a designer, I was struck by the emotive capabilities of such simple compositions and how tension or ease could be expressed by an object’s proximity to the edge of the canvas.

FIG. 10  
Paintings by  
Kasimir Malevich



This method of visual investigation yielded some interesting solutions, where different shapes of different color overlapped. However, these explorations were more helpful in understanding the variety of ways these keywords could take shape. Nearing the end of the semester and my faculty review, I decided to take one form and refine it as much as possible.

FIG. 11  
Sketches exploring  
typographic overlap



The logo in FIG. 13 was intended to take the notions of connectivity and combine them with typographic forms I’d worked with earlier. Yet, it became evident that though this form expressed connectivity by virtue of the shared dot between the ‘R’ and ‘I,’ the space that connects them is square, rigid and confined.

FIG. 12  
 Sketches exploring  
 geometric overlap

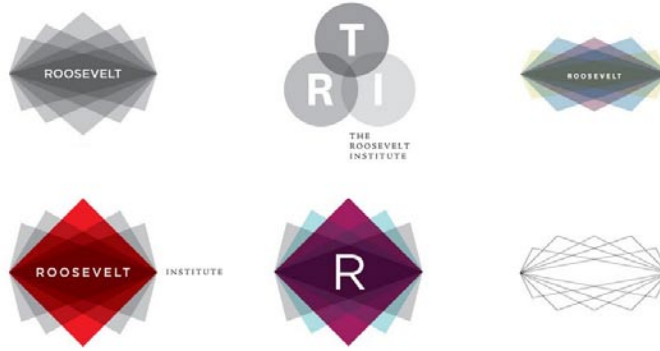


FIG. 13  
 Form refined for the  
 faculty review at the  
 end of the semester



**TOP DOWN APPROACH**

Given the array of visual dead-ends encountered during the logo iteration process, I approached the problem from a different direction after the New Year. The more I thought about what Milton Glaser said, the logo as the “... point of entry to a brand,” the more I felt he was wrong.

In principle, the same logic drove Rand’s creation of IBM’s logo. Refinement after refinement achieved a single image that best expressed the company. However, companies now are more multifaceted, their roles more complex. Even The Roosevelt Institute, a small student group, has become more complex. Just six years ago, Mollie Bates’s student organization revolved around the single issue of affirmative action. The Roosevelt Institute has policy centers on issues from education to international relations, and even within these policy centers students discuss a wide range of issues.

The visual expression of an organization should be just as expansive and adaptable as the thoughts within. When looking at more flexible identities, you come to understand that the logo is simply the aftermath of a larger advertising decision.

FIG. 14  
 The Pew Center  
 identity developed by  
 Johnson-Banks





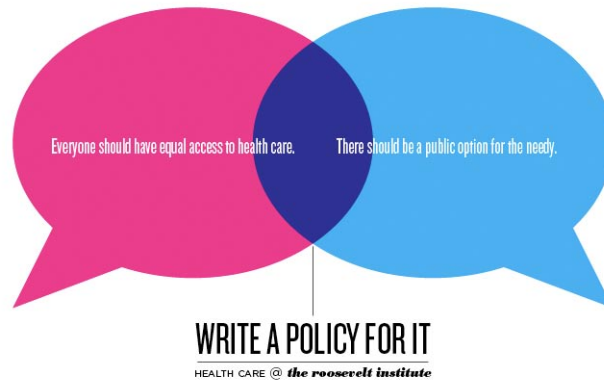
To again use the example of the identity developed by Johnson-Banks for The Pew Center, the logo is not where that identity began. Rather, Johnson-Banks saw an organization with many facets and devised a system of squares that could identify each part individually, but come together to create the larger whole.

**VENN DIAGRAM**

Understanding my approach to the logo was flawed, I focused less on a logo and created advertisements—hoping the visuals would produce a logo for me. I again evaluated my keywords: Progressive, open, connected and dialogue.

I previously worked with the idea of overlap and the Venn diagram, so I applied the same thought process to word bubbles.

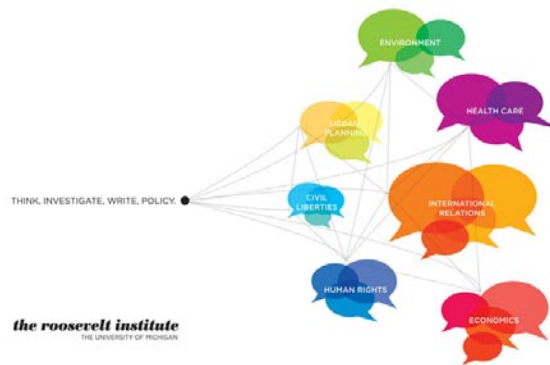
**FIG. 15**  
*First health care policy center advertisement*



This advertisement was meant for the health care policy center. It uses two statements on the issue of health care with the tagline “Write a policy for it.” The downfall is easy to identify: the bubbles read as opposing ideas, by virtue of their physical opposition and color disparity—not quite a dialogue.

Yet, valuable information was learned in failure. Though not executed properly, the word bubbles did get at the idea of conversation. Equally important was the use of a descriptive tagline like “Write a policy for it,” which could help overcome some of the visual limitations I encountered by literally describing what The Roosevelt Institute does.

**FIG. 16**  
*Lines were brought in to create a network*



With these subsequent iterations, I tried to create a network of thought interacting, with the similarity of color in each policy center (e.g., the word bubbles

in health care are all a shade of purple) reducing the feel of opposing thought seen in FIG. 15.

FIG. 17  
Each policy center began to overlap with another to create conversation



FIG. 18  
Consolidation of speech bubbles



This idea was then honed, trying to consolidate the word bubbles and create a form larger than their individual shapes. Simplifying the number of speech bubbles and adjusting the tagline further refined this advertisement.

FIG. 19  
Refinement of speech bubbles



Now surrounding the tagline in a screen of gray is a list of the policy centers. When an individual policy center is advertised, not only did the speech bubbles appear in varying hues of the same color, but the policy centers name was also highlighted with its corresponding color (FIG. 20).

FIG. 20  
*Health care policy center advertisement using a hue of one color*



**THE FINAL IDENTITY**

From my investigations, I created two kinds of advertisements: a general one used to identify the organization as a whole and another for individual policy centers.

FIG. 21  
*Horizontal general advertisement from the final identity*



FIG. 22  
*Vertical general advertisement from the final identity*



The playful gesture of the word bubbles and their colorful variety creates an open dialogue where ideas intersect and form new thoughts. The tagline THINK, TALK, WRITE POLICY describes the three primary functions of The Roosevelt Institute. There are seven word bubbles and seven colors, each one corresponding to an individual policy center. Ads for just the policy center use its corresponding color while highlighting it in the gray list by the tagline.

FIG. 23  
Health care policy  
center advertisement



FIG. 24  
Environment policy  
center advertisement



Further, in each policy center ad the word bubbles have comments in them, in the areas they overlap, a comment exists that join the two separate statements into a new idea (FIG. 25).

FIG. 25  
Example area of  
overlap



The identity also avoids labeling the group as specific to the University of Michigan, so other chapters of the organization can use these materials to create a broader national identity. While not all advertisements look exactly alike, they conform to a hierarchy of visual recognition that the audience perceives in order:

1. The Roosevelt Institute and word bubbles
2. THINK, TALK, WRITE POLICY and the policy centers in gray
3. Supplementary information (e.g., website)

Advertisements can be made for any size or orientation; the preference is simply for full-color prints and a targeted placement of posters in areas where students are likely to be involved in public policy.

An important part of my solution was showing how the identity could exist beyond the print advertisements. For this, I created a similarly styled website whose primary function was to mimic the look of the printed materials, but provides more depth. Users can find more comprehensive information about the organization, topics the individual policy centers are discussing, meeting time and location, as well as e-mail contact information.

FIG. 26  
Homepage of the  
website



Further, though advertisements and a web presence are the crux of the organization's identity, recognizability is derived from consistency across a range of media such as letterhead, invitations, and t-shirts.

FIG. 27  
Envelopes



FIG. 27  
Letterhead

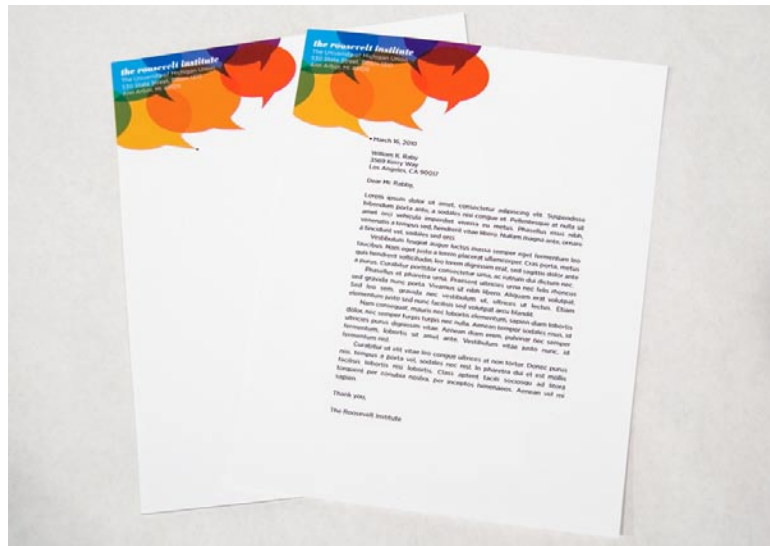


FIG. 27  
CDs





FIG. 28  
T-Shirts



#### PARTING THOUGHTS

In the final month of my project, I was in the position I hoped to be in January. At the beginning of the year, my intent was to create a visual system first semester, then implement and refine it second semester. However, by focusing narrowly on the logo, I spun my wheels—unable to decide how to visually express the organization. The luxury of hindsight confirmed dialogue and speech were crucial to my final iterations, yet it was only in late February that I specifically worked on these.

I also felt my project ended in-progress. Though pleased with the designs I presented in the Integrative Project show, I found more questions than answers. For lack of time, I latched onto the speech bubble visual, but an exploration of more disparate visual forms or even a wider variety of bubbles would have been useful. Similarly, the secondary text in each policy center advertisement would have benefited from greater exploration. I cannot help but think of a lecture given by Bruno Monguzzi, when asked what he saw in his own work, Monguzzi replied “All the missed opportunities.”

Despite these failures, missed opportunities gave rise to another component of the Integrative Project. Previous to this year, my artistic process was limited to a studio’s three-week project interval. Yet, this project gave me the rare opportunity to artistically explore a subject of my choice for an entire year. I better understand how I work through ideas from paper to computer, how I tend to focus on the micro as opposed to the macro, how to not become frustrated with a project and continue. I further understand how to be more self-sufficient as an artist, but also incorporate the criticism of others. This reflection and learning experience is what I most value.

**FIGURES**

1. Original work
2. From Bates, Mollie
3. Ibid.
4. Original work
5. College Democrats and Amnesty International
6. Original photograph
7. Logo, Paul Rand
8. From Johnson-Banks
9. Ibid.
10. From Malevich, Kazimir
11. Original work
12. Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. From Johnson-Banks
15. Original work
- 16–28. Ibid

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