An Introduction to Graphic Design

In the intro to their documentary The Universal Arts of Graphic Design,  
(see Figure 1) PBS Digital Studios describes graphic design thusly:  
“Though often overlooked, Graphic Design surrounds us: it is the  
signs we read, the products we buy, and the rooms we inhabit.  
Graphic designers find beauty within limitations, working towards  
the ultimate goal of visually communicating a message. Utilizing a  
language of type and imagery, graphic designers try to make every  
aspect of our lives defined and beautiful.”  
  
While this is a good “nutshell” description of graphic design, in  
contemporary society, design has grown beyond only being a  
means to organize a visually cluttered environment, or to persuade,  
inform, and organize an audience to meet the needs of business and  
industry. Design has become, as Richard Grefé, former Executive  
Director of AIGA, defined it, “the intermediary between information  
and understanding.” Properly applied, effective design—design  
which solves specific problems—can influence individual and group  
behavior, political policy, and even society.  
  
While traditionally the term “graphic design” has referred to two-dimensional  
surface design—the arrangement of text, images, and  
color to express a message—the discipline has evolved to incorporate  
three-dimensional objects and spaces, and time-based audio/  
visual experiences. As graphic designers now find work in every  
field from publishing to entertainment, the sciences to finance, and  
are incorporating traditional media such as print and television with  
new and emerging technologies such as smart phones and virtual  
reality, now more than ever, design education is a lifelong endeavor.  
By focusing on the visual communicative fundamentals of art and  
design, in combination with creative thinking and problem solving  
as opposed to technology, this curriculum aims to prepare students  
to be lifelong learners able to thrive as the methods of information  
communication and consumption continue to change.  
  
In addition to design studios and advertising agencies, graphic  
designers also work as in-house talent for companies, for  
traditional and for new media content creators and publishers,  
and even as individual entrepreneurs. The practice of design is  
highly collaborative, and designers frequently work with writers,  
illustrators, photographers, printers, advertisers, marketers and  
other professionals.  
  
A brief list of careers in graphic design includes:  
⋅⋅ advertising (promotional) design  
⋅⋅ book design  
⋅⋅ book jacket design  
⋅⋅ brand and identity design  
⋅⋅ corporate communication design  
⋅⋅ editorial design  
⋅⋅ environmental design  
⋅⋅ interactive (experience) design  
⋅⋅ illustration  
⋅⋅ information design  
⋅⋅ motion design  
⋅⋅ package design  
⋅⋅ publication design  
⋅⋅ retail design  
⋅⋅ wayfinding design  
  
Beyond these more traditional roles, designers are finding their  
creative problem solving and communication skills in demand in a  
growing list of industries, including government and public policy, insurance, health care, architecture, environmental services, and engineering. Graphic design is a competitive and ever-evolving  
profession that offers an expanding and rewarding number of career  
paths to the curious, determined, and hard working.