

Research

Practice

AI in Design

FACULTY DEVELOPMENT LEAVE REPORT • Fall 2025

Bridging the Classroom and the Creative Industry

Nancy Miller

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Department of Art & Design, SAMC

nancy miller



About Me

Program Coordinator | Associate Professor

Communication Design Program

Award-winning program development | instructor of branding, advertising, UI/UX, copywriting, packaging, emerging technologies

Freelance Creative | nmillercreative.com

Creative Solutions for advertising, branding, and digital

Creative Director | MDR Advertising

Multi-media advertising, design, and digital solutions for local, regional, and national clients

Category Production Artist | Nike, Inc.

Socks | Team Sports Equipment

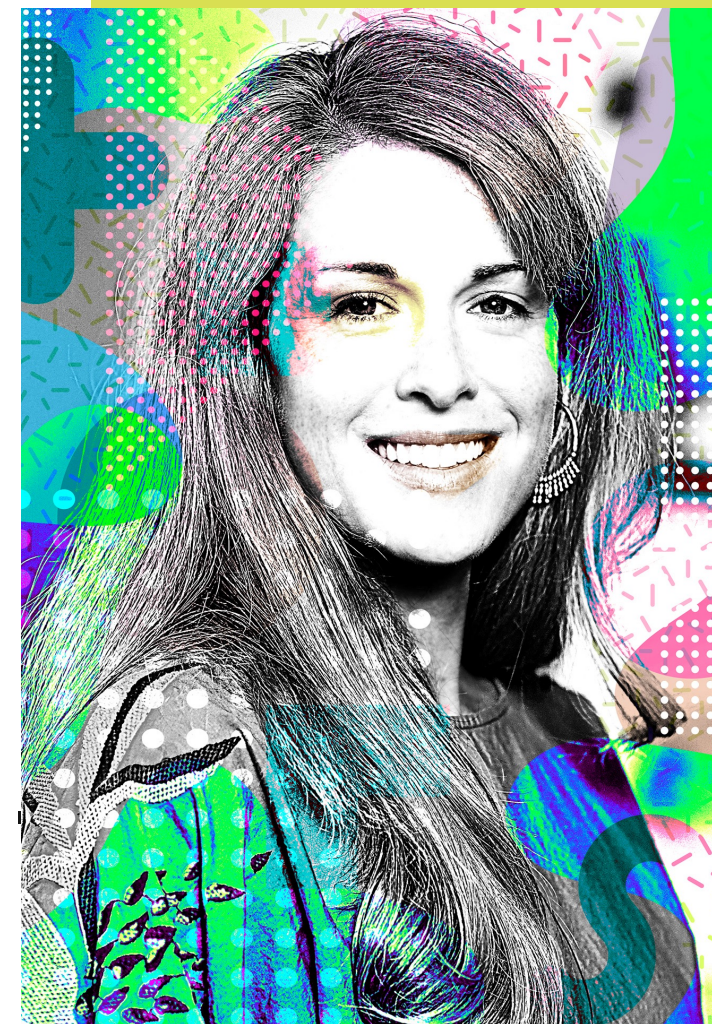
Product packaging, internal and external presentation materials, color exploration, tech packs, mechanicals, visual line plans, and catalog design

Contract Packaging Designer | Aquent

Nike | Burton Snowboards | Home Depot

Graphic Design | Hollywood Video Corporation

Production and design of internal materials, in-store point-of-purchase collateral, and promotional displays

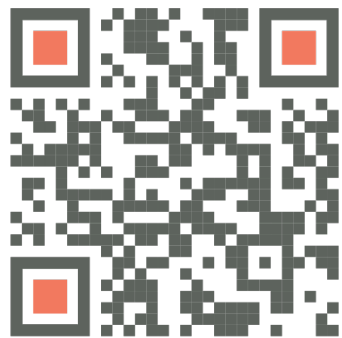


Master of Fine Arts | Media Design
Full Sail University | Winter Park, Florida

Bachelor of Fine Arts | Graphic Design
Texas Christian University | Fort Worth, Texas

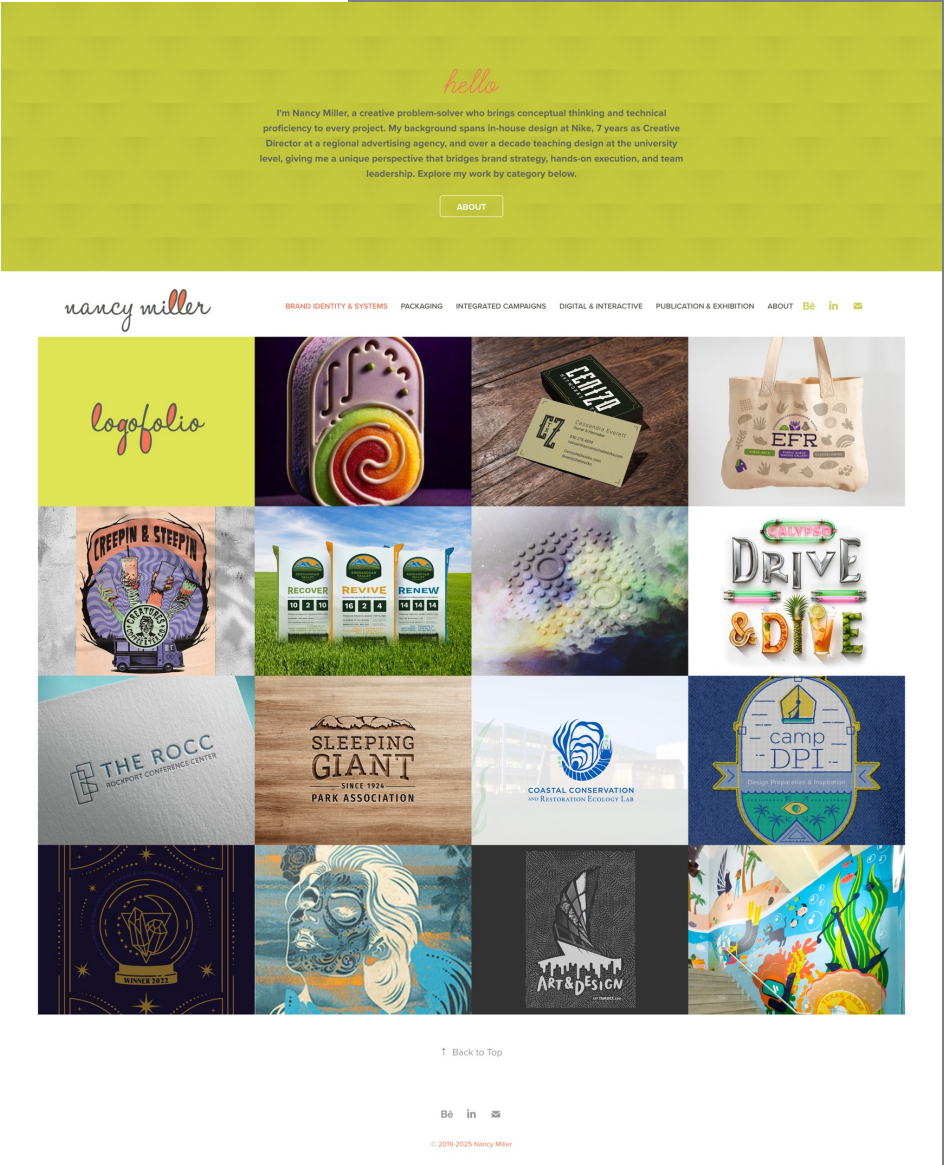
Branding Packaging Advertising Print Design Digital & Web Design

My work



Portfolio Website
www.nmillercreative.com

n.miller.creative



My FDL: Two Objectives

OBJECTIVE ONE — ACADEMIC JOURNAL PUBLICATION

Camp DPI: Access & Diversity in Design Education

A three-year, \$90,000-plus donor-funded research and outreach project, co-led with Associate Professor Alexandria Canchola. Camp DPI is a no-cost, two-week residency for high school juniors from under-served backgrounds, built to introduce them to graphic design as a course of study and a career. This leave objective disseminates that work: presenting findings at an international conference and publishing a peer-reviewed article analyzing the camp's impact on participants' design skills, confidence, and interest in the field.



OBJECTIVE TWO — PROFESSIONAL PRACTICE

Hahn Agency: AI-Integrated Creative Workflows

A return to full-time agency practice as Consulting Creative Director at Hahn Agency in Austin, roughly 20 hours a week alongside live client work. Building on prior experience as a Creative Director, this objective is a firsthand investigation of how AI tools are reshaping creative production, client service, and the working designer's role, so those findings can be brought directly back into the classroom.



Retained Program Coordinator duties, budget, curriculum, advising, throughout the leave to keep the program running without disruption.



Camp DPI: Design Preparation & Inspiration

A two-week, residency-style summer camp for high school juniors, co-created and co-led with Associate Professor Alexandria Canchola. Funded largely through gift donations, it introduced under-served students, those without access to formal design training, to graphic design as a field of study and a viable career path.

\$90K+

raised in gift and
grant funding

3

summers: 2022–24

11–14

campers per summer

2 wks

no-cost residency



Goal: introduce diverse, under-served students to graphic design and address the industry's underrepresentation of diverse designers.



Camp DPI: Outcomes

CONFERENCE • SPRING 2025

19th International Conference on Design Principles & Practices

Peer-reviewed showcase presentation, Singapore (virtual).
Co-presented with Alexandria Canchola, prior to the start of the leave.

PUBLICATION • SPRING 2026

International Journal of Education Through Art, 22(2)

Manuscript written and submitted during the Fall 2025 leave.
Published June 2026
Double-blind peer-reviewed, <18% acceptance rate.

Findings: campers showed measurable gains in software proficiency, conceptual understanding, and self-assessed creative ability, supporting early-intervention programs as a strategy to diversify the field.



Professional Practice: Hahn Agency

Prior to academia, I was a Creative Director at the largest agency in South Texas, and I've continued commissioned client work ever since. This leave let me step back into a full agency rhythm, not as an outside contractor, but as part of the team, to understand today's workflow and the designer's role within it.

~20 hrs

per week,
Consulting Creative Director

CLIENTS

Beef Loving Texans
Oklahoma Natural Gas
City of Aderton
Lubbock Power & Light
El Paso Electric
Texas Mutual Insurance
Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board (THECB)
Texas REALTORS®

- + Applied research on integrating AI into agency workflows, alongside live client production.
- + Consulted with agency leadership on internal design workflows and advised on hiring decisions for design-adjacent roles.



Hahn®

AI-Enhanced Creative Work



PRINT

Beef Loving Texans

Farmers'-Market Tablecloth

Firefly-generated base graphics turned a “custom illustration only” ask into an AI-assisted design, finished with branding in Photoshop.



BRAND SYSTEM

Hahn Agency Rebrand

Canva Brand System

Built a Canva brand kit and templates so non-designer project managers could produce their own new-business collateral.



AD CAMPAIGN

THECB

My Texas Future Expansion

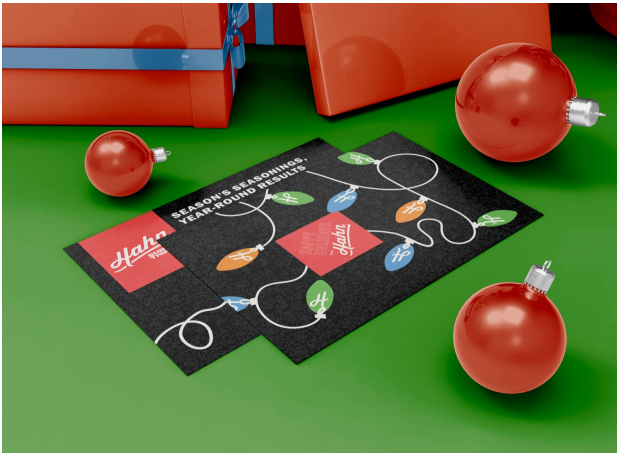
Expanded the state campaign assets inside of Canva, building templates for posters, ads, and flyers that could be easily duplicated with each ISD's own branding.

AI-Enhanced Creative Work, Continued

PACKAGING

Holiday Gift Packaging

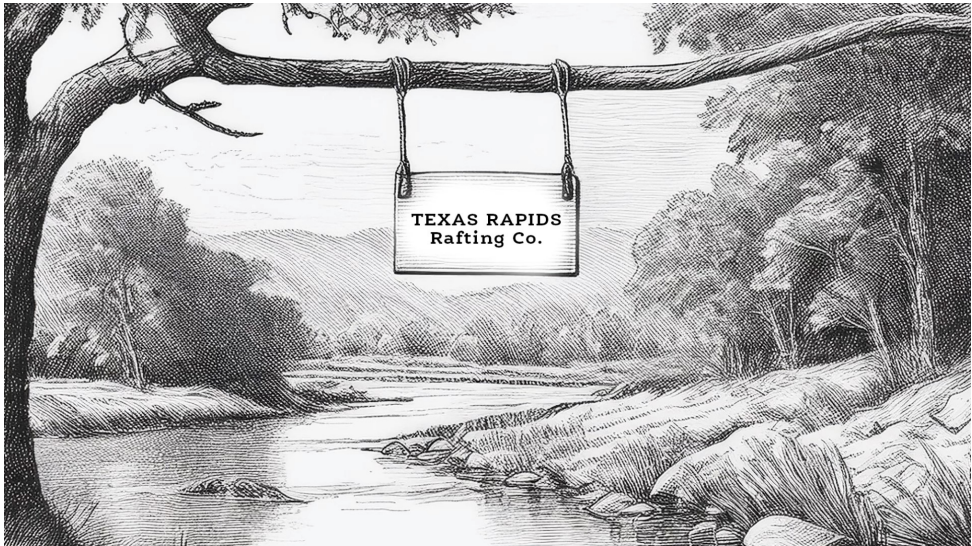
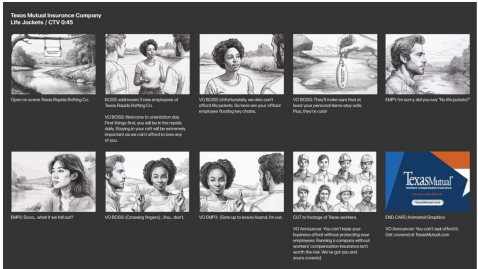
Designed agency branded spice-set packaging; used AI to generate layout options for buy-in before producing press-ready files.



STORYBOARDING

Texas Mutual Insurance

Firefly-generated storyboard scenes replaced hand illustration for two new commercial-spot pitches.



AI-Enhanced Creative Work, Continued

IMAGE EDITING

Oklahoma Natural Gas & Adelton Real Estate

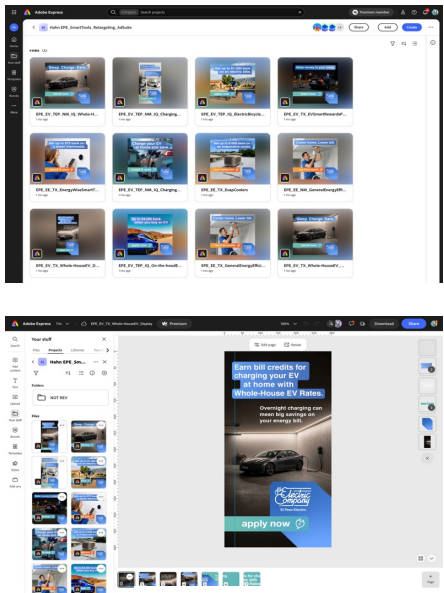
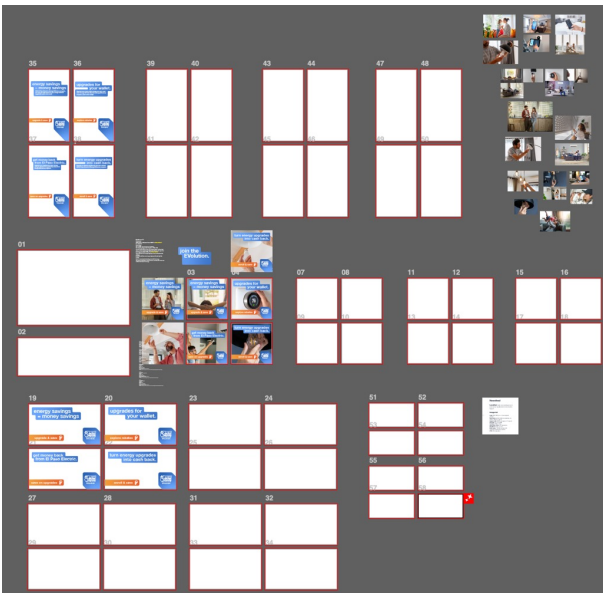
AI image editing revised extensive photoshoot deliverables (100+ images), avoiding costly reshoots.



WORKFLOW REDESIGN

El Paso Electric & Lubbock P&L

Replaced a two- to three-program workflow, Illustrator and Photoshop for static assets, After Effects for animation, with a single Adobe Express pipeline, cutting steps out of the 180+ file bilingual campaign process and reduced turnaround time to under 25%.



Bringing It Back to the Classroom



Design practice is evolving rapidly, particularly with AI, and students need to be ready to step into a workforce that looks different than it did even a few years ago.

1

Adobe Express pitch decks

Students now build and present final project pitches in Adobe Express, mirroring the collaborative workflow used in industry.

2

AI image generation & editing

Integrated into assignments across multiple courses.

3

Figma!

Figma is increasingly becoming the preferred application for numerous brands and agencies for the creation of various digital design assets. Integrated this tool into relevant courses.

4

Updated courses

Packaging Design, Interactive Design, Design in Advertising, and Senior Portfolio & Professional Practices.

5

New course, Spring 2027

Design for Non-Majors: foundational design principles combined with the creation of marketing materials through collaborative processes and tools.

Advice for Faculty Considering FDL

PAIR RESEARCH WITH PRACTICE

Where it fits your field, look for ways your leave can genuinely inform your teaching, not just your CV. Higher ed is under growing pressure to align with workforce demands, and firsthand immersion in your field is one of the most direct ways to teach to those expectations with current, credible knowledge.

DOCUMENT AS YOU GO

Save visuals, drafts, client files, and notes throughout the leave, not just at the end. Both the report and the presentation lean heavily on specific details, and reconstructing months of work from memory after the fact costs far more time than logging it as it happens.

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