Digital advances

New courses, collaborations and equipment help students achieve greater technological fluency
In an increasingly digital workplace, College of Design graduates must be fluent in technologies that complement and enhance the core skills they acquire in their disciplines. To help students grasp technological developments quickly and learn to apply them critically, Design faculty continually incorporate new capabilities into their classes.

And across the college, staff and faculty are working to make the latest technological advances accessible to the greatest number of students; maximize opportunities for collaboration within the university; and translate the results for use by schools, communities and businesses throughout Iowa.

**Rapid prototyping**
The industrial design department has sought to “democratize” rapid prototyping in its Armory studios through the recent purchase of five MakerBot desktop 3D printers.

In 3D printing, students create a digital model, which is then “sliced” into cross-sections for the machine to fabricate objects in sequential layers. This process allows students to visualize foreseeable successes or failures and test working pieces in a prototype.

Graduate student Mitchell Hinrichsen, Ames, was among the first to “break in” the printers for a project requiring 3D-printed parts. He then helped demonstrate the Makerbots’ capabilities for other students.

“A prototype that would typically take two or three days to complete can be finished in just a few hours and with less waste,” Hinrichsen said. “The key is understanding the technology well enough to determine how and when to use it.”

The machines are available to both undergraduate and graduate students during the day upon request, but due to increasing demand, the department plans to install them in a secure, common space to provide 24-hour access.

**File to Fabrication**
Since its genesis in 2009, architecture associate professor Mikesch Muecke has adapted his “File to Fabrication” course to incorporate laser cutters, 3D printers, CNC (computer numeric-controlled) routers and vacuum formers.

In the course, architecture and industrial design students explore the design process through three primary projects: a ring, a stool and a lighting fixture. The emphasis is on creating functional objects that allow student designers to observe how a consumer would interact with the product, Muecke said.

“There is something unique in the fact that students can physically build something, take it home and use it every day,” Muecke said. “And to be able to go through the whole process, from digital to print ideation to a manufacturing sequence, is a set of skills [our graduates] will need when they enter the design professions.”

**Equipment and training**
System support specialist Jennifer Nieland (BFA 1996 / MA 1999 Art & Design) ensures that students both have access to the latest technology and can use it safely. College of Design faculty have written several successful proposals for funding from
the university’s Computation Advisory Committee, which have permitted the purchase of laser cutters, a 3D printer, a 3D scanner, a vacuum former and a motion capture suit for the college’s output center. In addition to managing that facility and four computer labs, Nieland also developed an online laser-cutter training course when demand outpaced her ability to offer one-on-one and class-based training.

In fall 2013 alone, 226 Iowa State students, faculty and staff enrolled in the online course, and nearly 600 people are authorized to use the laser cutters on campus, including students in most College of Design programs as well as aerospace and mechanical engineering, and even in the College of Human Sciences’ apparel, merchandising and design program.

Nieland also helps computer animation and architecture classes using the motion capture suit and provides training for the 3D scanner.

Undergraduate Resource Hub
A $170,000 3D object printer, purchased jointly by the College of Design and the aerospace engineering department and installed in Howe Hall, was the first step in a partnership between the Colleges of Design and Engineering called the Undergraduate Resource Hub.

“We both needed this type of printer—which can print a lot of different materials at a higher resolution and transition from one material to another within the same object—and they had space to house it and people to run it,” Nieland explained. “It started us thinking about ways to pool resources more efficiently so more students across the university have access to a wider range of technology.

“We want to create a complete list of equipment available on campus, what training is needed to operate it, where it’s located, hours of operation, how you gain access and how you pay for it,” Nieland said. “We’ll post this information online so students can easily find what they’re looking for.”

The group received a three-year, $125,000 Engineering Dean’s Initiative Grant to purchase equipment, hire student technology mentors and provide updated safety training. Funding is expected to continue beyond the initial grant and eventually may be “hardened” into the budget, Nieland said.

They now are writing an external grant proposal for a water jet cutter, which will allow users to cut thicker materials—including metals—and provide more economical options for work that currently must be sent to a third-party company to complete.

Augmented and virtual reality
Pete Evans (BArch 1995 Architecture), lecturer in architecture, design and industrial design, is excited by the increasing opportunities for shared resources and works to ensure his students enjoy the broadest possible range of experiences.

In an experimental design studies course on digital prototyping last spring, Evans collaborated with mechanical engineering faculty to expose students to augmented and virtual reality and digital presentation concepts using the METAL (Multimodal Experience Testbed and Laboratory), a partially immersive virtual environment located in the Black Engineering building.

“Students did iterative 3D design work in the studio, and then we’d go over to METAL and have group reviews in virtual reality. It was beyond awesome; we were the inaugural College of Design class using those facilities,” Evans said.

Although the work was all digital, “it was full-scale design with the understanding that everything could be physically produced. We may also do 3D printing as that becomes more available,” he said.

The ultimate goal is to help students across disciplines to achieve a level of technological fluency and adaptability—not hardware- or software-specific knowledge, which is always evolving, but rather the ability to work between ideas and ways of making, thinking and doing, Evans said.

Mobile Learning Lab
The next step is to harness the expanding collaborative networks and technological capabilities of the College of Design and Iowa State University and share them statewide.

Evans is working with colleagues in Design and Engineering on the ISU Mobile Learning Lab, a semi-trailer equipped as a mobile classroom for digital visualization and fabrication, working with K-12 schools, community colleges, communities and industries throughout Iowa.

His group has established relationships with the Marshalltown Community School District; the Heartland Area Education Agency, which will provide the trailer; and local businesses, including Howgan SCC, an innovative grain management company that would supply progressive STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics)-based coursework and partner drivers from area grain cooperatives for the mobile lab.

They have applied for funding through an ISU Vice President for Extension and Outreach Strategic Initiatives grant to run a pilot program along the Highway 30 corridor in central Iowa.

“It’s an opportunity to enhance the outreach initiatives already in place through the college, university and extension, with the most advanced tools and capabilities available,” he said.

Design for a CNC-routed topographical bench by architecture student Meredith Phillips, West Des Moines.
This unlikely duo fell for each other in Italy, married in Iowa and moved to New York to pursue their creative dreams—all thanks to a shared major in the College of Design.

It's the classic love story—only there's nothing classic about it at all.

Jillian (Stevens) Likens, a 2008 Iowa State alumna, double majored in graphic design and advertising. The Kappa Kappa Gamma sorority member was an honors student who graduated magna cum laude.

“I was all about getting good grades and getting projects done on time,” she said. “I was a total planner.”

John Likens, on the other hand, was “more of the creative type,” Jillian said. “I spent a lot of late nights in the College of Design,” said John (BFA 2008 Graphic Design). “I hung out with classmates in the studios or computer labs. When I wasn’t at school, I was playing music with like-minded friends.”

John and Jillian were cordial in class, but neither of them could predict their acquaintance would one day result in marriage.

“Honestly, I always thought she was way out of my league,” John said. “She was this beautiful girl and I never really had the courage to do anything more than be friendly when I saw her in class.”

One trait John and Jillian did share? A passion for adventure. Both knew they wanted to pursue the graphic design program at Iowa State, specifically because it offered the opportunity to study abroad in Rome their senior year. It was while in Italy in fall 2007 that the pair grew close.

“When you study abroad, you go from being surrounded by hundreds of people you know to knowing only a few people in an entire country,” Jillian said. “Our whole group became friends within a matter of days.”

When in Rome
As John and Jillian got to know each other, they found “we both had this love of life and a desire to experience new things,” Jillian said. That desire led to a somewhat spontaneous trip to Sicily together late in the semester, before heading home to the States.

“We had no idea what we were doing, but we decided to go, just the two of us,” Jillian recalled. “We were just a couple of poor students trying to navigate a foreign city, and it was such an adventure.”

By the time John and Jillian returned to Ames, they’d decided to date. Both wanted to relocate to New York City soon after graduation, but their plans were put on hold while Jillian completed an extra semester to finish her double major.

“That and I had minus $50 in my bank account,” John laughed. “I couldn’t afford to move yet—we literally counted coins from Jillian’s change jar to get me back to zero. She saved me in that moment.”

While Jillian was finishing school, John took a design position at Innova, a small digital agency in Ames. Though he had his sights set on New York, he said working at that firm was a blessing.

“It was an amazing learning experience,” John said. “They taught me how to code and build websites from scratch. I took a
lot away from that job, skills I still use today.”

In December 2008, John proposed to Jillian at a small Italian restaurant on vacation in New York, and in May 2010, the pair married in Des Moines. Shortly following their wedding, they packed up and moved east.

“We shoved everything we could into a U-Haul and just left,” Jillian said. “Neither of us had a plan, but we knew New York was where we wanted to be.”

A new adventure
Both John and Jillian worked various freelance jobs for the first few months in New York—John at several animation studios throughout the city and Jillian at Tommy Hilfiger and Nautica.

Jillian knew she didn’t want to pursue traditional graphic design— ”People like John are so good at what they do. Why not let them be the best at it?”—so when she was offered a production internship at Firstborn, a multi-platform digital agency, she was ecstatic.

“It was like a light clicked on,” she said. “I read the job description and thought, ‘That’s exactly what I want to do! It allowed me to use my background and skill set to excel at something more ’me.’”

After her internship, Jillian was hired on full time and is now a studio producer, working on web, video and other digital content. “I’m always doing something new, but it’s with the same group of people, which is nice,” she said. “I like the sense of community.”

John, on the other hand, continues to freelance, building an impressive motion design portfolio filled with work for clients like Marvel, MTV, Sony and Red Bull. “I really love being free to choose which projects I’m going to pursue,” he said. “I’m constantly meeting new people and learning new things.”

Last summer, John spent four months in Los Angeles working on visual effects for Iron Man 3, the top-grossing movie of 2013, before returning to New York to pursue TV and commercial design work. Today, he’s back in LA, designing his first video game. He’s become quite the jetsetter, but hasn’t decided it’s time to move out west—not yet, anyway.

“It is a lot of back and forth,” John admitted. “And it’s hard being away from Jill, but we make it work. We’re both so in love with New York and don’t want to leave yet. We’re surrounded by people who are so good at what they do, and it rubs off on us, makes us want to try harder.”

Jillian agreed. “New York moves so quickly, literally and figuratively,” she said. “There’s so much here at our fingertips. The city keeps us creative both inside and outside of work.”

Shared understanding
When John and Jillian aren’t on the job, they’re making the most of living in the city that never sleeps. The two attend concerts, visit art exhibits and see independent or foreign films that are often exclusive to New York. In his little free time, John plays drums in a band that performs throughout the city.

“We both work a lot,” Jillian said, “so we like to make the most of our time off together. There’s a lot of dining out and going to shows.” The couple also travels when they have time off, citing destinations like Iceland, Paris and Montreal in the past couple of years.

Exhausting as the creative industry can be, John and Jillian are happy to have a spouse in the same field.

“We both understand the logistics of working in the creative world,” Jillian said. “We know it takes time to produce quality work. I can’t imagine one of us working until midnight while the other waits at home.”

John feels the same way. “Nobody’s saying, ‘You’re never home!’ because we understand the nature of this business. And we can support each other when our schedules get tough.”

If anything, the couple says, working apart has brought them together.

“It’s a challenge being apart so much,” John said. “But it makes us value the time we do get to spend with each other even more.”
On the way to her ground-floor printmaking studio, April Katz used to pass the shop housing the College of Design’s CNC (computer numeric-controlled) router and marvel at the “amazing trash” left from projects produced on the machine.

These discarded bits of fiberboard and plywood are sent to the ISU Power Plant to be burned, but Katz, an internationally known printmaker and professor of integrated studio arts, thought they would make interesting prints. And when some of her relief printmaking students used the router to create large print blocks for their steamroller printmaking project a couple of years ago, Katz decided to learn how to make her own.

Katz, who has long been interested in blending digital and traditional processes in printmaking, expanded the scope of her inquiry with a 2012-2013 Miller Faculty Fellowship grant from the university.

She and four colleagues—ISA department chair and professor Ingrid Lilligren, associate professor Chris Martin (BFA 1990 Craft Design) and lecturer Emma Powell, and graphic design associate professor Paula Curran—spent several months experimenting with the college’s laser cutters, CNC router and related software in combination with traditional hand processes to produce new work and develop new teaching materials.

“We sought ways to integrate digital technologies across the studio arts curriculum to enhance creative opportunities for students and faculty,” Katz said.

Technology speeds learning
To begin her project, Katz considered the visual qualities, source materials and surfaces she could manipulate, then worked with students and staff in the college to run tests using the laser cutters and router.

Katz and retired senior lecturer JoAnn Boehmer, her partner in the artist collaborative known as BOKA, developed a series of woodcut prints combined with digital images. Their Cosmological Fusion began with a Photoshop collage digitally printed on one side of rice paper and an Illustrator-designed image digitally printed on the back.

An Illustrator-designed, CNC-routed block also was printed on both sides to play with transparencies, Katz said.

Katz also introduced laser-cutter technology in her spring 2013 intaglio monotype course.

“Once they had an initial line drawing in Illustrator, the students could make multiple identical plates that were registered to each other and use each one as a foundation to experiment with traditional intaglio techniques,” she said.

“The technology permitted a lot more exploration of printing processes than they could have done using only traditional processes, and helped them understand more complex types of printing that normally wouldn’t have happened so early in the semester.”

The new serves the old
While developing her own work, Katz collaborated with Powell on ways to use the laser cutter for photography.

Powell works primarily with the wet plate collodion process—a pre-film, in-camera process on glass or iron. For her series An Elegy for the Honeybee, she first experimented with laser-engraving images on rectangular acrylic plates, which Katz’s...
students inked and printed, then returned to Powell to use like a film negative.

Powell also tried a photographic emulsion over the engraved image, but the uneven surface caused peeling. So she decided to use the laser cutter to create the shape of the surface rather than manipulate the surface itself, she said.

To mimic a honeycomb, Powell cut hexagonal plates in different sizes, and also cut a special acrylic holder for each plate so she could insert it directly into her 19th-century wooden camera.

“Normally, I’m limited to the size and shape of the 19th-century plate holder, so the laser cutter enabled me to make these inserts for these specific plates,” she said. “The emulsion sticks well to the smooth surface, and the inserts wash off easily. It has really opened up new avenues for experimenting with this process.”

Powell is using the laser cutter with graduate students in her mixed-media class this semester.

Faculty become students
For the past decade, Lilligren, a renowned sculptor, has used Braille—represented by pegs inserted in holes or the holes themselves—in her ceramic work as a symbolic language to talk about cultural, political and social blindness.

For the Miller grant project, she sought to create a raised surface on clay that could actually be read with the hands like traditional Braille. She used a laser cutter to create several wood plates with holes that became raised Braille letters when clay was pressed into them.

“I’m pretty excited about the capability of taking the text and turning it into plates, and about the plates themselves. I think they’re really beautiful,” Lilligren said.

“One of the things I love about teaching is watching students learn and grow in their work,” she said. “With this project I was delighted to be a student myself. It allowed me to feel young in my craft again.”

Discovery and fulfillment
Martin, too, found himself invigorated by the opportunity to experiment. A contemporary fine art furniture maker who teaches wood design, Martin—who with his wife, Tammi, served as a Peace Corps volunteer for two years in Ghana—is developing a series of contemporary stools based on the iconic chieftains’ stools of Ghana’s traditional culture.

Martin used a laser cutter in the college to make models, then worked with PowerFilm Technologies in Ames to cut industrial felt and galvanized steel for two stools with the company’s water jet cutter.

He’d had some experience using the CNC router to produce chair seats, but this was his first time designing on the computer and running a laser cutter, Martin said.

“Students need to know how to use design software and equipment as a complement to hand skills,” he said. “It gives them another important tool to work with, and in a very pragmatic sense, it makes them more marketable.”

Martin is requiring his classes to use Illustrator and the laser cutters for their projects this spring.

New explorations
Katz, Lilligren, Martin, Powell and Curran—who as a graphic designer was adept at Illustrator but used the laser cutter to simplify the process of hand-cutting segments of her artist boxes—shared the results of their Miller grant-funded efforts in Expanding the Digital Matrix: From Virtual Monitor to the Material Realm of the Studio Arts, an exhibition in the college’s Gallery 181 last fall.

When the project began, Katz planned to develop a 20-page guidebook for other arts faculty who want to integrate digital technologies into their studio courses. She is now seeking a publisher for the nearly 130-page book she wrote instead.

“Existing books on laser cutting, for example, are very engineering oriented; this seems to be the first that would cover how to use the technology from an artist’s perspective,” she said.

“These digital tools have applications across a broad range of media areas, and it was fascinating to see the initial concept of sharing technology among the studio arts result in such different kinds of work. I’m hoping it spurs both faculty and students on to new explorations.”
Every three to five years since the early 1990s, the Des Moines Neighborhood Development Division has held a competitive round of selection for its neighborhood planning process. In a city with nearly 60 recognized neighborhoods and just four neighborhood planners on its staff, the division has developed 28 plans to date. Now, some of the first neighborhoods to complete the process face new challenges and wish to update their plans before others have been through the initial process.

Enter Iowa State’s community and regional planning department. When she joined the CRP faculty in 2010, assistant professor Jane Rongerude sought real, hands-on experience for her graduate students. She connected with Des Moines neighborhood planner Amber Lynch (MCRP 2009 Community & Regional Planning), who proposed that ISU classes help the city update some of the existing neighborhood plans.

“While I was at Iowa State we did a downtown plan for the city of Waukee, and that opportunity to work on a real project was an invaluable part of my experience,” Lynch said. “I’ve always felt strongly about creating those opportunities for students if I can.”

Students bring a unique perspective to the planning process as they have the time and ability to research best practices and discover innovative solutions, Lynch said.

“They’re plugged into the most contemporary thinking, so they bring ideas that neighborhood planners may not be looking at,” Rongerude said.

In fall 2011, Rongerude’s graduate community planning studio helped evaluate the city’s Neighborhood Based Service Delivery program, which assigns police officers to work with members of other city departments to improve services for designated neighborhoods. The fall 2012 studio worked with the Woodland Heights and Beaverdale neighborhoods to update their plans.

This past fall, students tackled their greatest challenge to date: helping two of the city’s oldest and most diverse neighborhoods—Capitol East and Capitol Park—plan for their next two decades of change.

**Common concerns**

These neighborhoods share rapidly shifting demographics—more than 40 percent of Capitol Park’s population and more than 30 percent of Capitol East’s is now Latino. In both neighborhoods more than a third of residents are younger than 18, and average household incomes are less than half of those for Des Moines as a whole. Both also face issues of aging infrastructure, affordable housing, crime and population decline.

Two groups of seven students helped the Capitol East and Capitol Park neighborhood associations identify what they had achieved with their prior plans, their current concerns and goals for the new plans.

They also brought together leaders of nonprofit and other organizations in the Des Moines area with city staff members to address specific issues identified.

**Neighborhood engagement**

The class devoted an average of 200 hours per week in each neighborhood to conduct personal interviews with residents and business owners, infrastructure and visual preference...
surveys, youth events, and outreach to the Latino community and African and Southeast Asian refugees.

They talked with people outside local convenience stores, in churches and schools, at sporting events and door to door. And they interacted with ESL (English as a Second Language) and sociology classes at East High School and conducted outreach programs on Spanish-language radio.

“I’m really proud that our approach has been so qualitative, which doesn’t often happen in the planning field because it’s incredibly labor intensive,” said second-year graduate student Jon Wolseth, Aurora, Colo. “On the other hand, how are you going to give life to some of the statistics you collect if you don’t animate them with human experience?”

Students in the class spoke Arabic, Chinese, Spanish and French—“a real benefit in reaching out to people who traditionally have not been a part of the planning process,” said Wolseth, the Capitol Park neighborhood engagement team leader who also led outreach efforts for youth and Latino businesses.

“We were able to show that many residents have common concerns regardless of age or ethnicity and to identify particular needs and opportunities for different demographic groups,” he said.

**Themes and strategies**

The students analyzed field notes from these interactions together with demographic, housing, crime and traffic data collected from city and county offices and the Iowa Department of Transportation, which were then entered into GIS applications and mapped spatially to highlight where problems lie. The groups then used this information to establish three focus themes for each neighborhood.

One of Capitol East’s chief concerns was infrastructure, while crime and safety was a key issue for Capitol Park. And both emphasized housing and youth programming. Underlying all of these was a desire to embrace the neighborhoods’ diversity and enhance opportunities for all residents to participate fully in the life of the community.

“Once we had extracted themes and generated strategies to solve some of the problems, we took these ideas to the steering committee meetings with people who have the power to make changes,” said Capitol East steering committee team leader Julie Whitson, St. Louis, Mo., a third-year CRP graduate student pursuing a double degree in sustainable agriculture.

“We contacted nonprofit leaders, city personnel and people who knew about different resources and got them all in the room to discuss specific steps that we could actually implement,” she said.

Although programs already exist to address some neighborhood concerns, the students’ research showed that many residents were unaware of or unable to access them. Cultural and linguistic barriers sometimes prevented participation. Many recommendations focused on community building and development of networks like a youth volunteer corps and a local business association; strengthening partnerships with city, county and nonprofit agency resources; and physical improvements to homes, sidewalks and streets.

“When you get the right organizations together with proposed solutions, you begin to get some buy-in and commitment,” Whitson said.

“We’ve identified strategies to connect different actors with each other. Success will depend on realizing these connections and building bonds that are fortified over time,” Wolseth said.

**Planning in practice**

Both groups of students made their final presentations to the neighborhood associations in mid-December. Following the associations’ approval, the plans next go to the Neighborhood Revitalization Board, a citizen advisory body appointed by the city council; then to the plan and zoning commission, city council and county board of supervisors.

“The plans will be adopted and become amendments to our comprehensive plan,” Lynch, the neighborhood planner, said. “It’s been a very valuable partnership for us, and I think it has been for the students as well. This is the type of class they can put on a resume and show what their role has been in a real planning process.”
Iowa State’s alumni magazine, VISIONS, often features stories about ISU faculty, students or graduates, but seldom—if ever—stories contributed by them.

Late last spring, VISIONS editor Carole Gieseke was inspired to try something new for the Winter 2014 issue. Through English professor Debra Marquart, Gieseke solicited written submissions about nature, the land and life in the Midwest from students and recent graduates of the master of fine arts program in creative writing and environment.

Four entries were selected: The Blackbird Problem, an essay about an über-territorial bird on campus by Melissa Sevigny; Fireworks and Tortillas, a poem about the environmental impact of corn production and the culture of consumption by Megan White; Grotto of the Redemption, a poem about the world-renowned grotto in West Bend, Iowa, by Sarah Burke; and When the Trees Came, a science fiction short story by Logan Adams.

Gieseke then approached associate professor C. Arthur Croyle, director of graduate education for the integrated visual arts program, to identify MFA students who could illustrate the chosen entries.

Croyle tapped four visual arts students—Nick Friess, Jefferson, Iowa; Rahele Jomepour, Mashhad, Iran; Lyndsay Nissen, Ames, and Elita Pan, Guiyang, China—who “have a history of telling stories visually with their work and also share an interest with the writers related to social commentary,” he said.

The artists’ vision

Because of the project’s timing and the fact that all four writers graduated from Iowa State in May 2013, the artists and authors never met. This is common in the publishing industry, Croyle said.

He and the student illustrators met with Gieseke and VISIONS designer Scott Thornton several times between the end of August and the end of September to share rough sketches and work in progress and to present the final artwork.

“We approached them like professional freelance illustrators,” Gieseke said. “We had input into the final product, but for the most part it was the artists’ vision.”

Pan, who illustrated The Blackbird Problem, said she read the essay several times, researched blackbirds online and walked around campus examining trees (the titular character surveys his domain from the branches of a sycamore) before embarking on the project.

“It is really challenging to capture the essence of another’s work,” she said. “In most of my artwork, I leave the audience a lot of space to interpret the painting by embodying values or meanings in symbols. In this case, the subject was more straightforward—the relationship between the bird and people.”

Jomepour, an established, prize-winning illustrator accustomed to working directly with writers, appreciated the opportunity to find her own inspiration in the writing.

“Usually the author tells me what to focus on,” she said. For Adams’ tale of a “treepocalypse,” however, “I had the freedom to choose the part of the story...
I was most attracted to and the style I wanted to use to illustrate it.”

**Personal meaning**

While *Grotto of the Redemption* focuses on the site, in his illustration Friess emphasized the builder, Father Paul Dobberstein. He chose three photographs—one of the priest as a young man, one nearer the end of his life, and one of a statue erected in his honor—to juxtapose with pictures of the grotto itself.

“I laid image on top of image, multiplied and blended images, lightened and darkened and moved things around until everything came together in a way that I hope conveys the layers of meaning in the grotto and the meanings we all find in our lives,” Friess said.

In her response to *Fireworks and Tortillas*, Nissen painted outlines of the five states bordered by the Mississippi River, surrounded by actual corn kernels collected from her family’s organic farm outside Ames. The eastern border of Iowa becomes the profile of a human face, with Missouri the belly and Louisiana the feet.

“[The poem references] rivers and water being polluted by runoff from farming. Since I was a kid, I’ve thought the Mississippi outlines a little man in the middle of the United States, and as I grew up I discovered how everything is connected”—i.e., what goes in at the mouth (headwaters) comes out the body (delta), Nissen said.

Space constraints meant White’s poem and Nissen’s artwork were moved from the printed magazine, which was mailed in late December, to an online extra posted to the ISU Alumni Association’s blog at http://isualumblog.wordpress.com/2013/12/20/visions-online-extra-fireworks-and-tortillas.

In retrospect, “the whole process was a wonderful experience,” Gieseke said. “I was very impressed with the artists’ professionalism. They were all so different in approach and personality, and for many it was a new experience working with a publication versus creating their own work for exhibition. I enjoyed them all, and the project turned out even better than I could have hoped.”

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**Student illustrators capture essence of written work**

*The Blackbird Problem* (oil with mixed media on canvas) by Elita Pan, Guiyang, China.

*Grotto of the Redemption* (Photoshop and GIF overlay) by Nick Friess, Jefferson, Iowa.

*Fireworks and Tortillas* (watercolor, acrylic medium, corn kernels) by Lyndsay Nissen, Ames.
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