

Humanities

UP IS THE #1 DESIGN EDUCATION INSTITUTION IN AFRICA

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The University of Pretoria is now ranked the number-one education institution in design by the Loeries.

We interviewed Kyle Rath, lecturer in the Department of Information Design in the School of the Arts, who reflects on what this win means for him and his students, design as a career path, and the importance of design during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Q: A lot of people don't know about the Loeries, and you've alluded to it being like winning an Oscar. Why should people care about the Loeries, and what does this say about the BA (Information Design) programme?

It's perhaps not so much about why we should care about the Loeries, but why we should care about design specifically, and rewarding design achievement. Take a second to look around you. Everything you see has, to some degree, been designed. Design is not about creating exciting graphics (although that is the fun bit). It is, at its core, a fundamental understanding of human behaviour; how to engage each other and promote better communication. In a nutshell, in whatever form, design is a process of problem-solving, not only for brands, but for our communities, both local and abroad. It is a tool for commenting

politically, bringing awareness and compassion to social concerns and evoking empathy.

Q: Given that the world went completely virtual in 2020 (even just for a brief moment), how has COVID-19 amplified information design and its importance?

In short, it evaluated our ability to problem-solve. This is the central skill of a competent designer. We've had to communicate over virtual interfaces (Zoom, for example), which are in fact designed mechanisms. Without design, most communication tools wouldn't exist. It is not just about how the app is coded; it's how users interface with it personally and meaningfully.

Design is also able to capture data and express it in intelligible ways. Think back to a graph or graphic concerning COVID-19 that startled you, interested you or gave you a different understanding of a particular aspect of the pandemic. Design is at play here.

Q: Please comment on the role of the Internet in making education accessible during the lockdowns.

First off, we've had to be quite resourceful in continuing a practice-based degree online. We had to introduce several new ways of teaching that are not merely 'conveying

information' but that stimulate participation, practice-based learning, group thinking and many of the other touch points that we've refined over years through our in-person-based, one-on-one design curricula. In short, we had to change a lot in a minimal amount of time. We excelled; design is about problem-solving. Moreover, we are quite proud of how we've managed to share our work digitally to the public.

The division has the following social media pages:

-  [Information Design](#)
-  [@upinfodesign](#)
-  [Visual Arts Department](#)

During COVID-19, we managed to stream our yearly exhibition on Instagram (@upinfodesign) and Behance (tinyurl.com/idgallery) at no fee—enjoy!

Moreover, this year, we aim to start an Information Design podcast where you'll be able to engage with topics surrounding design thinking, design trends, popular culture, design discourse and so on, featuring a range of guests, from students to academics and industry leaders.

