Written Interview Questionnaire

*Please review and answer the following questions and **return via email attachment to jveeder@sfsu.edu** by Wednesday 2/14 at Noon. If you answered any of these questions explicitly in your application, please just write "statement" or "CV" or "letter" after the question.* ***Please keep your answers concise.***

Candidate Name : PINO TROGU

1. **San Francisco State University and the Design and Industry Department in particular has a culturally and ethnically diverse student population with varying skills, skill levels, and career objectives. How would you describe your ability or past experience in working with such a student body?**

I am myself a part of that cultural and ethnical diversity that shapes the United States which, as Jean Baudrillard said, is "a concept, not just a country." I first came to the US from Sardinia speaking zero English, but quickly adapted to the new environment by keeping an open mind and a flexible outlook towards the new people around me. In my university teaching I have worked with students at all levels of skills and I have proved through my class assignments and the resulting completed projects, that almost all students in a class can be brought to a high level of competency in a specific design domain.

I have offered classes that cover a wide range of applied and theoretical subjects, including exhibit design, web design, publication design, as well as color theory, criticism, and design fundamentals.

All students, no matter what their career objectives, will be enriched by the broadness of my teaching topics and the specificity of my practical knowledge.

2. **As a tenure-track Assistant Professor, you will be required to teach a three-course load, conduct student advising, participate in department committees, as well as coordinate a facility. How do you see yourself managing and succeeding in these tasks?**

I consider teaching an ongoing learning experience, and view every new class as an opportunity for personal growth. For this reason, and to satisfy my appetite for fresh and challenging material, I customize each class based on the variables and needs at hand. My classes will not be cookie-cutter templates to be repeated year in and year out in order to minimize "load".
As a father of two young children, having taught before, and also having worked for many years both in my own and other design firms, I can transmit to my students the values of my design experience.

As in any design project that requires team work, running an academic department is a multi-person endeavor. As a member of that effort I will contribute my opinions and work towards a common vision for the school.

I take great care and pride in keeping a functional environment around me. I can also inspire others to maintain a working facility where tools and machinery are an organic extension of our senses. If something is broken, I always fix it.

3. In addition to the responsibilities mentioned in the last question, you will be expected to pursue ongoing creative professional development that can take a variety of forms from personal creative work to involvement in professional societies. How do you see yourself balancing and/or integrating the two sets of activities?

There is some truth to the apparent dichotomy between school work and "real world" work. Most students feel this distinction even more than I. I feel that creativity and professionalism are indispensable ingredients in both school work and outside-of-school work. As an educator, I am interested in pursuing research projects that bridge the high visual-education needs of post-industrial societies with the basic visual needs of developing societies, using the tools and research infrastructure that a university can offer. As a first interpreter and messenger of verbal and visual content, I view the aims of my classroom work as being not much different from the aims of my "real world" work. Both strive to achieve a sound "morality of visual communication."

4. Characterize each of the undergraduate, graduate, and post-graduate (if applicable) educational programs you attended and identify what you obtained from each.

4a.
Istituto Statale d'Arte (ISDA). Oristano, Sardinia, Italy. 1979

Originally established as a trade school to provide formal training in the local established crafts, woodworking and ceramics, it evolved into a multi-faceted design school inspired by the Bauhaus. This was my public high school education which included five years of rigorous training in the fundamentals of drawing, both still-life and architectural. It included in-depth history of art and design, and finally industrial design: drawing, design, model-making. Many related subjects were explored, which would be valuable to me in later years: symmetry groups, topology, bionics. See: trogu.com – keyword: Oristano.

4b.
Istituto Superiore Industrie Artistiche (ISIA). Urbino, Italy. 1983

This is where my undergraduate education took place, one of only four such design schools in Italy. The Istituto offered the benefits of a low enrollment (100 students) as well as free tuition. The four years I spent in Urbino were characterized by rigorous and practical training in the fundamentals of typography and graphic design. I was also immersed in and benefited from a long tradition of aesthetic principles going back to the Renaissance, in particular to the humanistic traditions of the printed book.

The culture of graphic design as a product of that long tradition was coupled with strict practical knowledge of the related aspects of design. If a book were put in our hands, we learned to calculate the exact cost of its production. If we were given a photograph, we learned to create a

similar one in the darkroom and know the formulas of the chemicals used. Craftsmanship and humanism, qualities that once lived together in the persona of the "printer", were transmitted to this new professional called "Graphic Designer". See: trogu.com – keyword: Urbino.

4c.
Rhode Island School of Design (RISD). Providence. 1985

After nine years of design education and formal training I wanted to devote my energies to more theoretical work. RISD has a long and strong tradition in the crafts, but offered at the same time a fertile ground for the more specialized work that I was seeking. The aim of my study there was to search for some applicable "rules" to the practice of design, loosely framed under the topic of "design criticism". My final thesis on this topic took the unusual form of a documentary film, produced with the collaboration of RISD teachers and of Brown University, where I took my filmmaking classes. See: trogu.com – keyword: Providence.

5. Describe your activities in conjunction with professional societies and/or not-for-profit organizations related to your field.

I am a past member of the Graphic Artists Guild, and helped in the redesign of the local chapter's website.

I am on the advisory board of the Center for Typographic Research. Founded by the printer Jack Stauffacher, the center will focus on issues related to the philosophy of typography and the tradition of the book.

6. What is your experience with grant writing and proposals for funding support?

I am a past recipient of an American Field Service (AFS) scholarship which covered a full year of study in an American high school.

I am also a past recipient of a Fulbright scholarship to the US, which allowed me to complete my graduate studies in graphic design.

7. Please give a brief example of an information design project that you have taught. Additionally, you may wish to provide existing or proposed syllabi and project assignment sheets that relate.

I am currently teaching an intermediate graphic design class whose first component is a concept map on the theme of nutrition and health. In such classes I introduce students to design concepts like charts, diagrams, networks, trees, open and closed chains, topology, and to the complex classifications of visual components in Jacques Bertin's *Semiology of Graphics*. I discuss at length the pros and cons of concept mapping. I discourage students from simply arranging text snippets into look-alike printed electronic circuits, or other iconic presentations of verbal components into visually intriguing "designs" that often bear very little resemblance to the actual subject matter at hand – unless such designs are directly appropriate.

I have taught graduate seminars (VCU, 1999-2001) on color systems and semiotics. Both

courses required an elaborate initial presentation of the material, introduced in a lecture format. Students were required to conduct an initial research phase, after which they used the collected data to develop individual research projects. For the color seminar, my presentation included the major color systems and their typical applications. Students' final projects included explorations of color systems as they related to music, to signal systems, and to animals. For the semiotics seminar, I explained the basic concepts of semiotics using an interdisciplinary analysis of a sign system, the example being Kevin Lynch's concept of "imageability" as put forward in his book *The Image of the City*. Students were asked to base their initial data collection and classification on visual semiotic matrices. Their final projects explored information systems related to the urban environment. See attached PDFs: Color Seminar. See: trogu.com – keyword: butterfly, matrix.

8. a. Describe your abilities to teach interdisciplinary design courses that incorporate both tangible and virtual applications of information design. b. How do you differentiate the two? c. How do you bridge the two?

8a.
I have extensive training and professional experience in the fundamental principles of 2-D, 3-D and multimedia design that are necessary for successfully completing applied projects in information design. I have extensive knowledge of exhibition design, of package design, topology, bionics, geometry; of representation systems, color theory, model-making, industrial design, environmental graphics, woodworking, pre-press, and digital printing. These trainings enable me to solve problems of "tangible" information design such as exhibits, maps, and signage. Moreover, my knowledge and training in: web design, HTML, sound, film, video, animation, storyboarding, principles of TCP/IP, database design, enable me to solve problems of "virtual" information design such as websites, films, and multimedia presentations.

8b.
There are distinct differences between the physically "tangible" and the computer-screen "virtual." The biggest pitfall is to assign automatically and a priori a higher communicative value to the virtual, because of the supposedly higher effectiveness of "interactivity". But a website is not necessarily more interactive than a book. One mode is not necessarily more valid than the other. They are simply different; their "code" is different. But to assign to one mode the conventions of the other is an exercise in confusion. Language, in its aversion to change, is sometimes an accomplice to this confusion, and so we say web "pages" and "bookmarks" as we borrow freely from the world of print. But a website is not a book. Pop-up pages jump at us but a book does not shed its pages so liberally.

In virtual applications, metaphors, models and human physiology get often mixed up in the interactivity blender. An interesting case study was Sony's attempt, some years ago, to apply a "zooming interface" to the online version of the *New York Times*. The zooming interface (Google Earth-like) promised, and I paraphrase here, to "render the metaphor of the page obsolete" by "transforming the 2-D experience of the printed paper into the 3-D experience of 'zooming in' on the news". Never mind that our eye cannot zoom because it has a fixed focal length. Scanning and focus shifting would have been a better description. Never mind that the video screen is much like a painting with its fixed single point of view (unless VR goggles are used), and is more akin to a monocular, flat vision. But when we read a newspaper we feel and

see its three-dimensional qualities by virtue of our binocular, stereoscopic vision. Let's also forget the metaphor of the page, which, just like the metaphor of "desktop", is actually a simpler model than the real object is. Both in print and on screen, the important thing is to know "where one is" with respect to the whole.

8c.
The tools we now use to create tangible and virtual objects alike are almost always digital tools. On the other hand, the user experiences both types of objects in the only possible way available to him or her: the continuous, analog mode of the senses. At the user end of digital objects we should break the mechanical barriers of mouse, screen and scale. The user interface in the virtual should be no more complex than a piece of paper and a pencil on a plane surface. The table is the computer (Nadin).

9. Where do you see information design going over the next decade and what opportunities will that present to designers?

Because of the speed requirements of our society, verbal communication and verbal information are increasingly being adapted into quick visual, iconic information and communication. However, the simplistic arrangement of text into neatly arranged lists cannot, by itself, be a substitute for the communicative value of traditional verbal written information. Ten years ago the fancy term "information architect" was very popular. Although not much used anymore, we could still speak of "building blocks" and "scaffolding structures" when dealing with complex sets of data and their reduction into smaller and more manageable information elements.

No matter its direction, information design will not solve all kinds of visual problems in a simple "one-fits-all" kind of way. The increasing sophistication of the tools needed to visualize and analyze complex data will require increased collaboration between designers, scientists, physicians, economists, sociologists. One role of the information designer will be to harness the power of those tools for the benefit and the education of those highly specialized professions.

Of course, everyone can benefit from information design, but the designer must set in advance the proper parameters and expectations for the treatment of the data. While it's perfectly reasonable to expect a successful response from the general public to a display of "Map of voting results in the last US presidential election, by county," it would be unreasonable to expect the same response to a concept map of "Einstein's theory of relativity, explained". Such a map, besides being difficult to fit into a single page, would require a disproportionate amount of outside knowledge in order to be understood.

The best "maps", like road maps, intrinsically contain much of the information needed in order to be understood. The worst content maps try to duplicate the spatial arrangement of a road map by simply putting topics into boxes. The designer has an opportunity to remove the blur from the complex layers of information. At the same time, the designer must not fall for the presumed universality of graphic systems that are culturally constituted. Most written and pictorial systems do not constitute universal givens, but are dependent on the language in use (written) and the accepted cultural conventions (pictorial). The best solutions to problems of information design will necessarily include as many intrinsic elements as possible, that is, elements inside the

presentation that function communicatively by virtue of their interaction with the other given elements.

Because complex verbal information can often be re-presented visually in a structural, spatial way, information designers will be great mediators and bridge different fields more effectively. On a political and social level, and thanks to the internet, information design has the potential to serve the needs of and educate persons who are not visually literate.

Information design is often called upon to treat visually complex databases, and to design the human-machine interface that gives access to that database. Especially in web design, this interface is often too complex, too digital. Lists are too long, the colors are too many, drop-down menus branch out too many times. A good website should aspire to the simple complexity of a road map, with its layers and layers of information that still manage to stay in focus at all times. In a map, as in a book, the spot marked "you are here" is always clearly visible. One can still make infinite connections from this spot; the text on the page is still "hypertext". On the screen we are often forced to backtrack using the thin thread of the back button. The challenge for the designer is to provide a physical ease with the screen, to find a better way through the labyrinth of information.

10. Here is a list of the current information design-focused course topics for this position. These course topics are interdisciplinary and so would enroll both product design and visual communication design students.

Package Design
Exhibits
Information Design
Graduate Design Seminar or Studio

Please respond briefly to these questions:

a. How do these topics relate to your teaching experience?

I have past experience in these topics, either through my teaching, or my professional work, or both.

Package Design
I have extensive training in three-dimensional design, including 3-D fundamentals such as polyhedra sections, close-packing cells, paper folding and fold-out structures, bionic models and topology models, methods of representation (drawing systems) such as axonometric drawing, perspective and exploded views, cross-sections and details. This knowledge is both theoretical and practical: I can draw and execute 3-D models in paper, wood and other materials. I have taught principles of three-dimensional design. I have also been trained in furniture design and have experience in prototyping. I have done some packaging design for the wine industry. See: trogu.com – keyword: cube.

Exhibition Design

I have been trained and have worked extensively in exhibition design both in Italy and the US. As freelance, I have worked as senior graphic designer and coordinator on large exhibits. Completed projects include science museums and corporate centers: California Museum of Science and Industry, Washington State History Museum, Philips Electronics Competence Center. I have designed and built small-scale exhibits, designing and producing both 2-D and 3-D aspects of the projects. Clients include the United States Geological Survey: a traveling exhibits for the USGS outreach program included exhibit structure and graphic panels displaying complex geographical data; the San Francisco Mayor's office of Housing: a traveling exhibit on affordable housing; South San Francisco Scavenger Company: recycling exhibit for school children, a series of educational kiosks on plastic, aluminum, and glass recycling. The completed design included concept through execution and fabrication using handcrafted details of glass, steel, aluminum and plywood. I have conceived, designed and installed exhibits for non-profit organizations, including the Presidio Dance Theatre, using off-the-shelf materials: ladders, rope, shipping crates. See: trogu.com – office>exhibits.

Information Design

As part of large and small exhibition design projects, I have coordinated and managed large amounts of visual and verbal information, and assembled them into graphic panels containing text, photos, illustrations, artifacts, charts, diagrams, and maps. The history and science museum projects often included hundreds of exhibit panels each.

I have done environmental signage as part of exhibit projects and also as stand alone projects.

I have designed websites and worked with programmers on navigation, display, and back-end design. I have a working knowledge of database terminology and design and of Ethernet network design, web server management and TCP/IP configuration.

As part of various exhibits, I have designed complex multi-layered geographical maps.

Graduate Design Seminar or Studio

I have taught graduate seminars and studios at Virginia Commonwealth University. Specifically, I conducted classes on the topics of color systems, semiotics, and design criticism. These classes involved detailed preparation and delivery of the material in a lecture format, as well as one-on-one work with graduate students. I was also a thesis advisor to some students.

All the classes were multidisciplinary in their approach to the subject matter, bringing in diverse topics like music, anthropology, and art history. They were also interdisciplinary in that they were part of a simultaneous team-teaching effort by a group of three professors. While I was teaching semiotics, the other instructors might be teaching photography and metaphor. If I was teaching design criticism, the students might also be studying advanced typography and design history. The three topics were discussed in a studio setting and students were required to consult with all three instructors on all topics. Instructors advised students on all the topics at hand. See: trogu.com – school>seminars.

b. How do you think this topic selection should evolve over the next five years?

It should be integrated with a more humanistic framework that pays attention to historical precedents and connects past design experiences and possible future design developments.

An expanded topic list would include:

History of design
Visualization in the sciences
Drawing
Writing and editing
Photography
Special topic: digital/analog

The last topic includes many parallel categories:

Discrete – Continuous
  See trogu.com – school>CMYK
Invisible – Visible
Virtual – Tangible
Monocular – Binocular (stereoscopic vision)
Zoom – Tracking shot
Automatic – Manual
Elastic – Fixed (scale)
Mouse – Pencil

Although the earth is not the center of the universe, the humanistic values that go back to the Renaissance can still provide a framework for placing human beings, not machines, at the center of their environment.

The value of history and the value of human interaction (human to human) are at the center of a moral design program. We must put those values first and foremost when we seek the proper context for all communication interfaces: human to human, human to machine, and machine to machine.

11. Do you have any questions for us?

I have a few wishes.

a.
An archive of artifacts that can help make manifest the history of design, including cameras, computers, tape recorders, telephones, etc. As well as information storage devices and machines, including perforated punch cards, magnetic tape and floppy discs.

b.
A collection of the best printed samples of information design systems. A web archive of the best virtual examples of information design.

c.
Studios with large tables for each individual student, with adjustable inclined planes and adjustable height for writing, typing, drawing and working either seated or standing up.

P.T.

San Francisco
14 February 2007