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News Release

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IU Kokomo graphic design students expand digital skills, increase marketability

KOKOMO, Ind. — When Brandon Smith graduates with a degree focusing on graphic design, he will have the necessary digital media skills to help him land the job of his dreams.

The School of Humanities and Social Sciences at Indiana University Kokomo introduced the Wacom Bamboo Create tablets this semester, and Smith learned to use them in a digital illustration class.

“Having this technology available to us expands what we are doing, and gives us new experiences,” said Smith, a Greentown resident. “This is one more professional skill I have available when I look for a job.”

Digital artists use the tablets with programs such as Photoshop and Illustrator, in place of a mouse. The tablet lays flat on the table, and artists use a stylus pen to draw, paint, mix colors, erase, and perform other functions on its screen, with their work displayed on the computer monitor.

In this particular class, students explore ways they can use it in Photoshop, coloring in a line drawing displayed by Guin Thompson, visiting assistant professor of new media.

Smith uses the stylus pen to click and drag the color palette he wants onto his workspace, where he mixes colors to create just the right shade. Then he can use the pen to color in the drawing, or click on a paintbrush tool to use it to create a brushstroke effect. If he makes a mistake, he clicks the eraser tool and then cleans it up with the pen.

“This is the best part,” he said. “Your work is not as set in stone as it is with paint. You can make corrections or changes quickly and easily, and then go on with your project.”

That kind of efficiency is critical to people such as graphic artists or illustrators, who usually create their work on deadline, Thompson said.

“These tablets are the industry standard,” she said. “A lot of graphic artists and illustrators are using this tool. You can do more with the tablet and stylus than you can with the mouse, and it’s better ergonomically, too.”

She is pleased with the work her students have created since they started using the tablets.

“They are doing some advanced work very quickly,” she said. “A lot of the students have used similar tools with their phones, so this is not technology that is foreign to them, and it’s pretty intuitive.”

Bethany Hemrick enjoys exploring Photoshop with the tablet, and likes it better than using pen and paper. As a graphic arts major, she expects to use those skills in her future employment.

“This class introduced me to some new techniques that will help me in the future,” the Peru resident said.

Fine arts and new media major Theresa Stewart, Russiaville, has wanted to try a pen tablet for a long time, so she was happy for the opportunity to use it in class.

“It’s so much more controlled than using a mouse,” she said. “You can put a lot more detail into your work. I’m really enjoying learning all the techniques in this class, to create better work.”

Indiana University Kokomo serves north central Indiana.

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