

CTU class gives students real world experience

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Usually when students say they are addicted to something, it's a bad thing.

But that's how Colorado Technical University students in the Eagle Design Studio describe their dedication. On many nights, security guards must kick the students out of the building long after class has ended.

Sometimes taking a class isn't just about the credit, students said, it's about gaining experience and helping the community — key elements in John Chlebus' studio.

By designing marketing, advertising and public relations projects for nonprofits, which do not pay for the professional-grade work, the students learn critical lessons.

"It's like a real studio," said James White, 28, who is working on his bachelor's degree. "Every time you're stressed ... he (Chlebus) will come by and whisper 'welcome to advertising.'"

Chlebus, CTU adjunct professor and creative director of the Eagle Design Studio, created the class so students could strengthen their skills while working with clients.

"I wanted to create a class that went above and beyond the curriculum," he said.

Many students enroll for more than one term, and others simply give their time and experience.

Myka Alley, a recent CTU graduate who is working on her master's degree, has worked in the design studio for seven semesters.

"He picks the ones that might not shine and he makes them shine," said Alley, 30, adding that Chlebus won't let someone join the team who isn't ready to handle the pressure.

Barry Farley, 31, who is working on his bachelor's degree, said working with clients teaches students about the give and take in business, and hones communication skills. Students lean on each other, taking advantage of different opinions and ideas. It's a reality check without the fear of losing a job, he said.

"It shows what you're good at and what you need to work on," Farley said.

The fact their work helps nonprofits is icing on the cake.

"The outcome outweighs the fact that you're not being paid," he said of boosting his own skills while helping nonprofits.

Alley said the best part is watching clients' faces when final designs are presented.

"It's quality for free," she said.

Eagle Design Studio was launched in fall 2008. Its first client was the local American Cancer Society.

Since then, Eagle Design has donated roughly \$230,000 in services — such as the design of pamphlets, posters and newsletters — to organizations including Colorado Springs Pioneers Museum, PILLAR, FutureSelf, Cheyenne Village, Leopold Foundation, Silver Key and Harbor House Collaborative.

"It gives nonprofits a chance to get marketing materials and collateral pieces without having a huge budget," said Rhonda Wootton, Pioneers Museum public programs coordinator. That leaves more funding for the nonprofits to boost programs, she said.

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