



***Diversity and Inclusion  
in the U.S. Graphic  
Communication Industry***

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# Diversity and Inclusion in the U.S. Graphic Communication Industry

Twyla J. Cummings, Ph.D. • Rochester Institute of Technology

What is diversity and inclusion and how diverse and inclusive is the U.S. graphic communication industry? Does the ethnic diversity of this industry align with that of the U.S. population? The U.S. population is becoming more ethnically diverse, and it is predicted that by the year 2020 at least 36% of the population will be non-white, and by 2060 this percentage will increase to 48% ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).

It is important for employers in the graphic communication industry to understand the answer to these questions for several reasons, but a key one is that graphic communication companies with diverse workforces are known to be more innovative, strategic and profitable (Kerby and Burns, 2012).

## Diversity and Inclusion

Diversity is defined as *the individual differences (e.g., personality, learning styles, and life experiences) and group/social differences (e.g., race/ethnicity, class, gender, country of origin, religion) that can be engaged in the service of learning and working together* ([www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org)).

The term diversity is often associated with race and/or gender, but it is clear from the above definition that diversity goes far beyond these two characteristics.

A diverse workforce can afford a company numerous benefits such as:

- more creative and innovative employees
- reduced employee turnover costs
- increased adaptability to new approaches and changes
- a variety of viewpoints
- a broader range of products and services
- more competitive economy in a globalized world (Kerby and Burns, 2012).

Inclusion can be defined as *the active, intentional, and ongoing engagement with diversity—in people, curriculum, and communities (intellectual, social, cultural, geographical) in which individuals might connect* ([www.aacu.org](http://www.aacu.org)).

It is important to note that diversity and inclusion should complement one another. The full benefit of a diverse workforce cannot be realized without inclusiveness. Thus, diversity and inclusion should be a strategic goal for all businesses and industries. Further individuals would benefit by being introduced to these important concepts early in life or in the early stages of their careers through personal, academic or professional experiences.

## Overview of the Graphic Communication Industry

The graphic communication industry is multi-faceted in that it consists of many types of businesses that employ a large number of individuals. The graphic communication industry is defined as:

*The people and processes that create, develop, produce, and disseminate media using words, illustrations, or images to communicate information, ideas, and feelings. Included are content creators and service providers that apply printing, publishing, packaging, and electronic imaging technologies for production, marketing, and information distribution. (Romano, 2015)*

A significant portion of the businesses in the industry are market service providers or printing companies. It is difficult to determine an exact number of employees that make up the entire industry, but the National Association for Printing Leadership (now Idealliance + Epicomm) estimated in its 2013 *State of the Industry Report* that there were approximately 40,000 of these companies that employ more than 1 million people (Hall, 2013).

Romano's definition of the graphic communication industry indicates that it is quite diverse relative to the processes used and the products and services offered. However, the question that remains is how diverse is the graphic communication industry workforce?

According to the 2014 Bureau of Labor Statistics *Printing and Related Support Activities* report, gender diversity for this sector of the graphic communication industry is 63% male and 37% female. Further, it is noted in this report that ethnic diversity is 70% Caucasian with Hispanic/Latino being the next largest ethnic group at 16.8%, followed by 7.5% African American and 5.7% Asian. These percentages, based on approximately 528,000 employees, seem to be in line with U.S. projections on ethnicity ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)) which indicates that in 2012 the U.S. population was 78% Caucasian and 17% Hispanic/Latino.

As the U. S. graphic communication industry continues its structural and technical transformation, and the search for key personnel becomes more competitive, it is imperative that graphic communication businesses embrace and celebrate diversity and inclusion (Cummings, 2014).

## Methodology

Data for this qualitative exploratory research study was obtained with an internet survey questionnaire and was analyzed using descriptive statistics, proportion and independence testing.

The questionnaire focused on three primary areas: 1) demographics, 2) the status of diversity and inclusion in graphic communication and 3) recommendations or comments the participants chose to share relative to the industry's state of diversity and inclusion.

The research sample consisted of members of the Print Production Professionals LinkedIn Group and a sample group of alumni from the Rochester Institute of Technology's School of Media Sciences. Both of these groups consist of print producers, buyers, art directors, designers and individuals in various areas of management.

## Limitations of the Study

The key limitations of this research study include:

- Sample size – While a random sampling selection method was used, there were 160 respondents, which is a very small sample of the approximately 87,000 members in the Print Production Professionals LinkedIn group plus the 500 alumni from the School of Media Sciences.
- The number of research study respondents was less than 160 as some respondents started the survey, but only answered the first two questions. As a result, they were not included in the total number (n) of respondents.
- Although definitions for the terms "diversity" and "inclusion" were provided on the questionnaire, combining these terms in the related questions may have prevented respondents from accurately giving a clear perspective on both the status of diversity and the status of inclusion.

## Results

This section provides a summary of the data from the survey responses. As previously stated, the survey focused on three areas: 1) demographics, 2) current status/issues related to diversity and inclusion and 3) comments and recommendations relative to diversity and inclusion.

## Demographics

The response pattern in table 1 shows that the participation from female respondents was 44.0% and the response from male participants was 56.0%.

Respondents were asked to identify their ethnic group (Table 2). Approximately 72% of those who answered this optional question were Caucasian, while 10.0% reported their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino American or African American.

A proportion test was done, using a 95% confidence level, to compare the gender data from this research study to that of the Printing and Related Support Activities report from the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS). It can be observed from the data in tables 3a and 3b that the gender percentages from this research study are in proportion with the BLS data, but the ethnicity data shows that the percentage of respondents that identified their ethnicity as Hispanic/Latino was significantly different from those reported by the BLS.

When asked about their age (Table 4) the majority (35.8%) of those who responded to this optional question were in the age range of 51–60 years. This was followed by 22.8% who indicated an age range of 41–50 years. Approximately 64% of the respondents who chose to answer this question were over the age of 40.

It can be observed from the data in table 5 that the largest percentages (49.6%) of respondents have worked in the graphic communication industry for 20 years or longer.

Gender	% Response n=141
Female	44.0
Male	56.0
Total %	100.0

Ethnic Group	% Response n=120
Asian	4.2
African American	10.0
Caucasian	71.6
Hispanic or Latino American	10.0
American Indian or Alaska Native	1.7
Other	2.5
Total %	100.0

Gender	Research Study % Response	Bureau of Labor Statistics % Response
Male	56.0	63.1
Female	44.0	36.9
Total %	100.0	100.0

Ethnicity	Research Study % Response	Bureau of Labor Statistics % Response
African American/Black	8.5	7.5
Asian	3.5	5.7
Hispanic/Latino	8.5	16.8
Caucasian + Other Non Hispanic/Latino	71.6	70.0
Other	7.9	0.0
Total %	100.0	100.0

Age Range	% Response n=123
<21	2.4
21-30	16.2
31-40	17.9
41-50	22.8
51-60	35.8
60+	4.9
Total %	100.0

Length of Years in Industry	% Response n=141
1–5	14.2
6–10	11.5
11–15	12.0
16–20	12.7
20+	49.6
Total %	100.0

An independence test of the data, using a 95% confidence level (Table 6) shows that there is statistical significance between the respondent's length of years working in the industry and gender for the females working in the graphic communication industry between 1–5 years.

When asked about their current job titles/responsibilities (Table 7) the majority (44.1%) of the respondents indicated that they worked in a management role or were business owners. Other areas where a significant percentage of the respondents worked were sales/marketing (18.9%) and production (14.7%).

### Industry Status

It can be observed from table 8 that 36.9 % of the respondents work for companies with 50 or less employees. The second highest response (29.1%) was from respondents working at companies with over 500 employees. Approximately 16% of respondents worked for companies that employed between 50 and 100 people.

Length of Years in Industry	Female % Response n= 62	Male % Response n=79
1–5	24.2	6.3
6–10	14.5	8.9
11–15	8.1	15.2
16–20	6.4	17.7
20+	46.8	51.9
Total %	100.0	100.0

Job Title/Responsibility	% Response n=143
Management/Business Owner	44.1
Sales/Marketing	18.9
Production	14.7
Design	7.7
Customer Service	5.6
Other	9.0
Total %	100.0

A question was posed regarding the level of diversity and inclusion at respondents' companies. To ensure clarity, a definition for diversity and inclusion was provided on the questionnaire. Respondents reported almost equally (41.1% and 41.8%) that the environment at their current place of employment was either somewhat diverse and inclusive or very diverse and inclusive (Table 9).

Number of Employees at Company	% Response n=141
Less than 50	36.9
50–100	15.6
101–200	9.9
201–500	8.5
>500	29.1
Total %	100.0

Level of Diversity and Inclusion	% Response n=141
Very Diverse/Inclusive	41.1
Somewhat Diverse/Inclusive	41.8
Not Diverse/Inclusive	17.1
Total %	100.0

Number of Employees at Company	Very Diverse/Inclusive % Response n=58	Somewhat Diverse/Inclusive % Response n=59	Not Diverse/Inclusive % Response n=24
Less than 50	36.2	33.9	45.8
51–100	15.5	18.6	8.3
101–200	5.2	11.9	16.7
201–500	6.9	8.5	12.5
>500	36.2	27.1	16.7
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 9b: Level of Diversity and Inclusion Comparison to Age Range**

Age Range	Very Diverse/ Inclusive % Response n=51	Somewhat Diverse/ Inclusive % Response n=49	Not Diverse/ Inclusive % Response n=23
<30	15.7	26.6	8.7
31 – 50	37.2	36.7	56.5
50+	47.1	36.7	34.8
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 9c: Level of Diversity and Inclusion Comparison to Ethnicity**

Ethnicity	Very Diverse/ Inclusive % Response n=50	Somewhat Diverse/ Inclusive % Response n=47	Not Diverse/ Inclusive % Response n=23
Asian	2.0	6.4	4.3
African American	0.0	10.6	30.4
Caucasian	78.0	72.3	56.5
Hispanic/ Latino	14.0	8.5	4.4
American Indian/ Alaskan Indian	4.0	0.0	0.0
Other	2.0	2.2	4.4
Total %	100.0	100.0	100.0

**Table 10: Areas of Diversity and Inclusion**

Areas of Diversity and Inclusion	% Response n=106
Gender	79.8
Professional Experience	66.4
Age	66.3
Ethnicity	60.6
Educational	55.8
International/Cultural	51.0
Other	10.6

An independence test of diversity and inclusion level to number of employees, age range, and ethnicity (at a 95% confidence level) revealed no statistically significant differences within the observed sample size for number of employees or age range (Table 9a and 9b). However, the test for ethnicity to diversity and inclusion level showed a significant difference in the response from African American study participants (Table 9c) as compared to the other study ethnic groups.

The respondents were asked to provide information on the areas where they observed diversity and inclusion in their current place of employment (Table 10). This question allowed for multiple answers, therefore the total percentage exceeds 100. Gender, age and ethnicity were the major areas of diversity and inclusion that were indicated.

**Comments**

The final section of the survey allowed the respondents to share any comments, suggestions or recommendations on the status of diversity and inclusion in the industry. These comments (Table 11) covered a wide range of topics, but of the 130 comments given, the majority could be grouped into specific themes such as recognition of advances in diversity, minimal diversity and inclusion and the need to attract younger workers, women and people of color.

**Discussion**

The research question at the core of this study is what is the perception of employees in the U.S. graphic communication industry regarding the type and level of diversity and inclusion?

**Table 11: Voluntary Comments on Diversity and Inclusion in Graphic Communication**

Comment Themes	Frequency n=130
Recognition of advances in diversity	28
Minimal diversity and inclusion	41
Need to attract younger workers, women and people of color	22
Diversity not an issue in the industry	6
Other	31

As mentioned previously, it is difficult to determine the exact number of employees that work in the U.S. graphic communication industry. Sources suggest that the number exceeds 500,000 (Bureau of Labor Statistics) and based on the types of businesses included, it may be over 1 million (Hall, 2013). Although the sample size of those who responded to this survey was very small when compared to the potential number of people employed in the industry, those who participated in this research study are employees in this industry who shared their own unique perspectives on the status of diversity and inclusion. Therefore, the conclusions drawn are largely based on these perspectives.

The significant findings that emerged from the respondents of this research study were as follows:

- The industry appears to be largely comprised of an aging workforce. The majority of the respondents indicated that their age range was 50 years or older and have worked in the industry more than 20 years.
- The industry seems to attract few young professionals/workers. Less than 17% of the respondents were under the age of 30. One respondent commented: "I believe the biggest need in the industry is to get more age diversity. We need younger people to come into the industry and shake things up a bit with their perspectives and thoughts."
- Even though women have a presence in the industry, there is still limited ethnic and gender diversity in management and leadership positions. The following comment from one of the respondents clearly articulates this: "There is a lack of African American and female representation in creative leadership positions."
- None of the African American respondents cited their place of employment as being diverse or inclusive. The majority of African American respondents described their company as not diverse or inclusive.
- The majority of males who participated in this research have worked in the industry 20+ years, which seems to support the perception that this is still a male dominated industry. The following

comment supports this perception: "It's gotten better for women, but there is still a lot of the 'ole boy's club' prevalent."

- Twenty four percent of the women who responded to this survey have been in the industry 1 to 5 years. Approximately 47% have been in the industry 20+ years. This seems to suggest that younger women are entering the graphic communication workforce and there are women who were trailblazers who remain in the industry.
- Respondents who indicated that their companies were either somewhat or very diverse and inclusive cited gender, age, ethnicity or professional background as the major areas.
- Of the 130 comments that were provided, 21.5% noted advances in diversity during their time in the industry. However, 31.5% of the respondents who commented noted that the graphic communication industry is not very diverse or inclusive. To quote one respondent: "I think it is still a very tough field for women and people of color."

Although the majority of the respondents indicated that their companies were very or somewhat diverse and inclusive, the overall response from the research study participants suggests that there is significant work to do to ensure that the industry continues to work toward a balance of diversity and to provide an inclusive work environment.

## Conclusions and Recommendations

Based on the resultant data and voluntary comments, the status of diversity and inclusion in the U.S. graphic communication industry can be summarized as follows:

- The ethnicity of the industry seems to be keeping pace with the U.S. population, where it is predicted that by the year 2020 the U.S. will be 36% non-white. Approximately 29% of research study respondents were non-white. Additionally, the data from the 2014 BLS report showed that 30% of employees involved in printing and related support activities were non-white ([www.census.gov](http://www.census.gov)).
- The majority of employees in the industry are Caucasian and male (Tables 1 & 2).
- The majority of employees in the industry are over the age of 40 (Table 4)

- The level of diversity in the workplace is higher at only smaller (<50) and larger (>500) companies (table 9a).
- The level of inclusion experienced by respondents could not be adequately determined due to the structure of the associated question. However, comments shared by the respondents suggest that women and people of color were often excluded from management and higher-level positions.

The preceding summary is indicative that more focus from graphic communication business leadership is needed to address the shortcomings and promote the accomplishments relative to the diversity in their organizations. Along with these businesses, institutions of higher learning, as well as individuals can play a key role in ensuring that the workforce is diverse and that companies work to be inclusive.

### **Role of Graphic Communication Businesses**

Diversity and inclusion must be managed, thus leaders must create a culture of inclusion, not exclusion if they are to be successful in establishing a culture that values differences. Some key approaches include:

- Developing strategies for implementation, training, mentoring, retention and assessment. It should be noted that implementation of these strategies are not just a function for human resources, but must also be driven by management.
- Diversify the leadership team. To quote one respondent: "As a long term member in this industry I have seen little diversity in management. Most managers are white, male and English speaking."
- In order to address the issue of difficulty of attracting younger workers businesses should expand college recruitment efforts with a focus on not only recruiting, but also retention.

### **Role of Institutions of Higher Learning**

Institutions of higher learning must prepare the next generation of graphic communication employees to thrive in the industry both educationally and experientially. In addition to teaching the needed academic, technical and "soft" skills (e.g. communication, diversity training, etc.), educators need to inform students about

the value proposition of this cross-media industry by showing them its innovative, creative and progressive aspects. One respondent stated it best: "A broadly implemented education on the possibilities within the graphic communication field could greatly increase diversity within the industry."

### **Role of Individuals**

Individual contributors can play a significant role in promoting diversity and inclusion in the workplace and beyond. There are many things individuals can do to assist the graphic communication industry with advancing diversity and inclusion. Seasoned employees can act as mentors to younger or new employees. Another important contribution an individual can make is to reach out to their professional and personal contacts as a way to diversify industry job search candidate pools.

It is the opinion of this researcher that the inputs and perspectives of the respondents from this study are representative of the situations and occurrences associated with the status of diversity and inclusion in the U.S. graphic communication industry. It is hoped that the findings from this study will be a call-to-action that will help industry leaders, educators and individuals realize that diversity and inclusion is essential for future industry stability, growth and success.

### **Recommendations for Further Research**

A key objective for the researcher in this study was to make an important contribution to the literature by creating new knowledge on this very important subject.

Research studies always allow for new discovery and raise questions that were not answered in the current study. Thus, an agenda for future research includes the following:

- A follow-up study that focuses on retention of diverse employees.
- A repeat of this study with a smaller, targeted sample population, which may result in a higher response rate.
- For future studies in this area, the topic of diversity and inclusion should be separated into two distinct questions to ensure that there is a definitive response to inquiries about level of inclusivity.

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