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**Dear Steve Quinn and the Visual
Communication Search Committee:**

Northern Illinois University's visual communication program is quite close to my heart, having attended from 2005–2009. My experiences in the program have greatly shaped who I am as a designer today. Going to Italy, Switzerland, and Spain opened my eyes to a whole new world of design and culture. Participating in the inaugural *Moving Design* program led by Thirst was a unique and edifying opportunity only available to students at NIU. Deeper than the mountain-top moments of studying abroad or experimental classroom atmospheres, as an educator, I am daily influenced by the instructional models of my former NIU professors. The different teaching styles and course curriculums have greatly influenced who I am as a professor. I have brought the lessons I learned at NIU into my classroom.

The school's focus on building students' critical and analytical skills fosters a sense of social responsibility while distilling a strong aesthetic foundation. Such an environment is a breath of fresh air in higher design education. Design has the responsibility to reach audiences where they are at, and a strong education with deep cultural roots offers infinite possibilities for students to connect with people. My professional work with exhibition design, interactive media and research in design after loss offers my students a perspective that insists design plays the essential roles of informing, inspiring, and connecting with individuals—an extremely relevant viewpoint in our highly personalized culture.

A resolve for design to impact the individual and my experience at NIU following the shooting on February 14, 2008, was the driving force behind my graduate thesis research on design after loss. The design of a memorial has the grave task to aid in the healing of a community or nation as well as establish a consistent public memory; it decides what story is going to be told and what is to be forgotten. I investigated means by which to connect the cathartic effects of vernacular ephemeral memorials with the preservation of public memory achieved through permanent official memorials.

In the piece I designed in remembrance of the school shooting at NIU, I explore how interactive digital media can be used in the development of public memory through community-generated content. Individuals are asked to contribute their story from the day of the tragedy to an ever-growing narrative landscape, letting the public memory of the event emerge from the stories of the people it is bound to define. This collective began to take a readable form, creating not only a public record, but a pulpit—shining light on greater issues

of gun violence and control through the lens of human experience. I am currently applying for grants to expand the project to be a memorial of gun violence survivor stories. It will bring together survivors in a collective act of cross-tragedy catharsis and serve to develop the public memory of this type of tragedy.

This philosophy for the design of public memory is critical to my work in exhibition design. A single story does not have to be the only one we tell. My work as exhibition designer at the Jane Addams Hull-House Museum sought to broaden visitors ideas of history to include previously unheard voices. The exhibits use the site for interpretation and a continuation of the settlement house history by linking research, education, and social engagement into an interactive design experience.

Design creates experiences, facilitates in critical understanding, and can bring hope to hurting people. The same commitment of connecting with individuals that inspires my research and professional work also propels my work in the classroom. In an effort to foster each student's personal curiosity, I favor classroom dynamics that promote dialogue and encourage input. By asking students to interpret and discuss theory as it relates to practice, they are motivated to be thinkers as well as visualizers—designing culture as much as materials. As a faculty member at NIU, I would challenge my students to contribute to the discipline and culture at large through the creation of aesthetically strong work that is conceptually relevant.

Research, active design practice, and higher education work together to further the design field. Your reputation as a school where students and faculty engage with the cultural environment as they are growing in the area of design makes the NIU Visual Communication department a faculty community I would be honored to be a part of.

I appreciate your taking the time to review my application. I have included my curriculum vitae, three professional references, teaching philosophy, a statement of research and practice, examples of my personal and students' work, as well as a sample syllabus with curriculum outline. I will gladly provide any other supporting materials upon request. Thank you for your consideration in your search for a candidate who shares NIU's vision and can contribute to the furtherance of the Visual Communication department. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Lauren A. Meranda