Roger De Muth chuckles as he flips through a book of postcards produced by graduating illustration majors and other art-inspired students. “It’s fun going through these,” says De Muth, a professor of illustration in the College of Visual and Performing Arts. “The students really tell a story about themselves and the kind of work they’d like to do after graduation. These cards can help them accomplish that goal.”

For the past eight years, De Muth has worked with students in his two-semester Advanced Illustration course to produce postcards of their artwork. The cards reflect the diverse range of the students’ styles and interests—there are portraits, caricatures, cartoons, collages, and landscapes done in watercolors, oils, and other media. Some are solemn, subtle, and graceful; others are boisterous, playful, and thought-provoking. In essence, the postcards are promotional calling cards that the students send to art directors in hopes of landing freelance assignments or jobs. “From one image, you can often tell a student has a great design sense and a wonderful style of illustration,” De Muth says. “It’s also an eye-opener for the students to be involved in the printing process and see how it works.”

The students’ artwork is scanned into a computer, and then modified with graphic-design software to improve color and resolution and add typography. Images are stored as digital files and shipped to a printer. The students check press proofs and often go to the press runs. “Really, in a roundabout way, the process is more important than the finished product,” De Muth says. “Students learn how to get their artwork reproduced in a digital environment; I’ve found that to be the greatest benefit.”

With 600 printed copies, the students create 200 postcard books, working in assembly-line fashion collating and binding. All the students get a book, as well as 400 individual postcards of their work. Each spring, the visual communication department hosts a two-day portfolio show at Lubin House in New York City for art directors—including many alumni—who view student portfolios and receive the postcard books.

Through the project, Danielle Deschenes ’00 learned the importance of self-promotion. “I probably spent too much time fussing with my postcard, but considering it’s the first impression someone has of my work, it was well worth the time spent,” says Deschenes, who recently had an illustration published in The New York Times Book Review. “Even when you’re well-established in the illustration field, it’s necessary to continue putting your work in everybody’s face. And these postcards are one of the best ways to do that.”

The postcards also serve as a record of past students and as a recruiting tool. “Potential students see what our students have done, their level of accomplishment and quality of work,” De Muth says. “When we’re doing it right, each student is creating something completely different. It’s important that they find their personal voices.”

—JAY COX