

This year's eclectic Back to Campus line of Barnes & Noble merchandise was designed by students at Pratt Institute and the Savannah College of Art and Design.



Learning Experience

A new set of back-to-school products for Barnes & Noble connects design students with the marketplace.

By **STEPHEN ZACKS**

THIRTY-NINE-YEAR-OLD designer Kelley Gargiulo went back to school last year for a graduate degree at Savannah College of Art and Design (SCAD). After many years of producing corporate communications as a designer of human-resources benefits packages, she found herself struggling to shift from a work mind-set to the open-ended process of the academic studio. For instance, she felt at a loss when a professor told her she could do anything she liked. To help push past this mental block, she tried to visually represent the flow of ideas fighting to pass through her self-imposed criticisms, drawing birds to represent the ideas, and string to stand in for mental barriers. That self-initiated creative exercise is now the cover of a notebook: "Flight pf Ideas," based on those bird-on-a-wire images, is one of about a dozen student designs that Barnes & Noble launched in July as part of its Back to Campus line of merchandise for the upcoming school year.

This year marks the third iteration of the bookstore giant's collaboration with SCAD, and Barnes & Noble has expanded the program to include communications design graduate students from Brooklyn's Pratt Institute for the first time. "We began by identifying schools where the students and professors are accustomed to the demands of timelines and the needs of a business," says Bill Miller, vice president of merchandising. "Savannah and Pratt have a long track record of working with industry." Students from both schools contributed thoughtfully conceived new products such as totes, messenger bags, pouches, and pencil sets.

The process of collaboration between the bookstore and the schools works this way: Miller and Jeanne Allen, director of product development at Barnes & Noble, present a design brief describing its customer profile and the sizes, colors, and other elements that have succeeded in the past. Then the ten or so interns at SCAD's Working Class Studio, along with six Pratt students chosen by communications design professor Kevin Gatta, participate in charrettes to hash out ideas. Afterward, the students create proposals, which the product development team reviews.

A few rounds of edits later, the students pitch their final designs directly to the

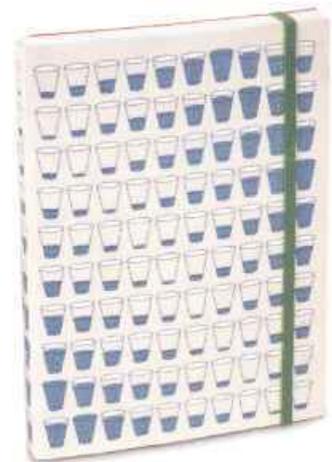
Barnes & Noble managers, who decide whether to put them into production. "It's a very back-and-forth process," Miller says. "We give a lot of feedback to the students, which is very helpful for them to understand what sells and what works."

For many of the students, the Back to Campus program represents the first chance to get professional experience and design for clients other than professors and fellow students. Stephanie Breed, a graduate of Pratt's communications design master's program, produced a series of notebooks and pencil cases using a rough drawing of the word "sketch" to capture the way students often doodle on covers. "It definitely was a unique experience," she says. "We got to go in there and pitch our ideas, which was a first for me. In terms of thinking about real-world stuff that doesn't come up in the classroom very much—although it should in a design education—that was valuable."

The final step, though, is the most rewarding for everyone: moving from design to production and seeing how processes like spot varnishes and embossing make their ideas pop. "You can't create that with Photoshop and your ink-jet printer," Breed says. "It's this wow moment. I was giddy when I got to see the pieces in their complete state."

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TOP: The "Explore!" journal by Pooja Bhagat, a graduate communications design student at Pratt, captures the collegiate experience of being introduced to books in different disciplines.

MIDDLE: The "Sketch" series of pouches and notebooks by Pratt stu-

dent Stephanie Breed is inspired by the way students doodle on their class materials.

BOTTOM: The design for the "water glass" journal, by Han Na Jung, an M.F.A. candidate at the Savannah College of Art & Design, was based on the phases of the moon.