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Associate Professor Karen Cheng received her Master's Degree from the University of Cincinnati College of Design, Art, Architecture and Planning. Prior to joining the faculty at the University of Washington in 1997, she worked in Brand Management at the Procter and Gamble Company and studied Chemical Engineering at Penn State University. Her work has been published by Communication Arts, the American Center for Design, Critique, the Society for Publication Designers, the University + College Designers Association, How Magazine and PIE Tokyo. She is active in the Seattle chapter of the AIGA, where she has been a board member and chair of the education committee. Her book, *Designing Type*, was published by Yale University Press in Spring 2006. She is currently Chair of the Visual Communication Design program, and Chair of the Division of Design.

Information Design for Analysis and Advocacy

Abstract:

Economic and social issues are at the forefront of concerns in the United States today. The U.S. is facing its worst financial crisis in over 70 years. Unemployment has swelled to 10.3 million, the highest in 25 years. Over 46 million Americans are without health insurance. Students in Asian countries continue to greatly outperform the U.S. in science and math (subjects critical to future economic competitiveness). Additionally, while crime is down (violent crime has fallen by 25% over the past 20 years), incarceration is up. In 2008, for the first time in the U.S. history, more than one in 100 American adults is behind bars.

At the University of Washington in Seattle, students in the Visual Communication Design program examined these and other public and social issues through the research, design and development of information graphics. Students designed graphics for both analysis (to better understand the subject matter) as well as advocacy (to create a persuasive narrative). In doing so, students confronted key issues central to the design of any data graphic, including:

- How can graphical displays clarify and illuminate complex sets of data?
- What kind of information is best communicated with data graphics?
- What makes one kind of data graphic superior to another?
- What is the optimal level of complexity in a data graphic?
- What is the role of visual innovation/novelty in communicating information?

This presentation will show the process of creating information graphics on social issues, and will demonstrate how changes in organization, structure and form can impact understanding and communication — for better and for worse. The potential and limitations of data graphics as a persuasive tool that can impact public perception of specific issues and/or decision-making strategies will also be discussed.