

# All about the View

BY ELLA RUE

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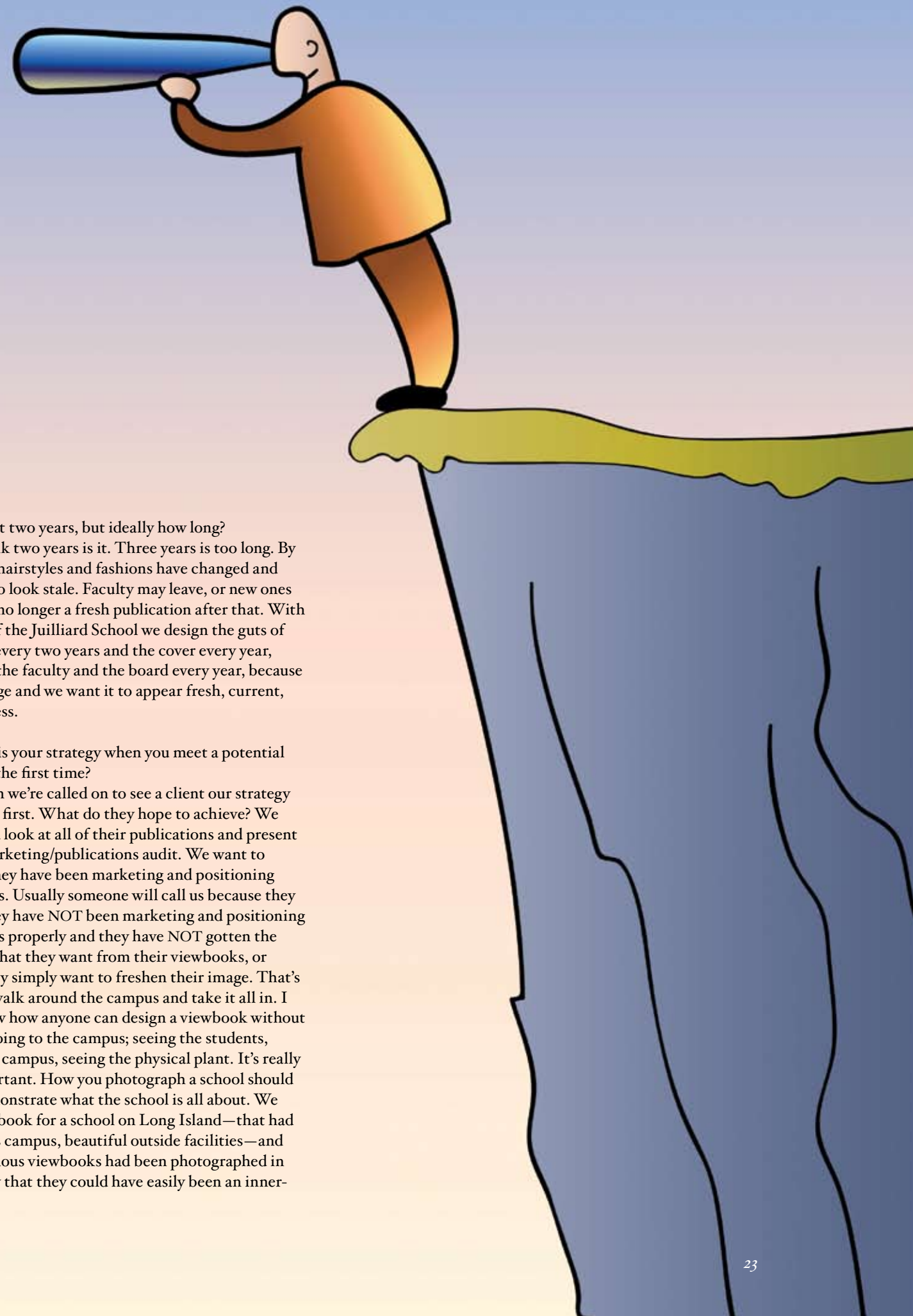
Jessica Weber and her firm have designed and produced the Juilliard School viewbook for more than the last 15 years. Here Weber shares some of the strategies behind successful publications. The firm has also created admission pieces for Baruch College, City College of New York, Adelphi University, and numerous private schools. Recently we sat down to discuss JWD's unique niche and approach to creating viewbooks.

**Q:** What is the first step in creating a viewbook?

**A:** Creating a viewbook is translating an agreed upon marketing strategy into something tangible. When we first meet a client we conduct an audit of all of their admission materials. We interview the president, director of communications, and the director of admissions. It is our job to translate their goals into something dynamic that will help market their institution. How a viewbook is created is based on what the institution's goals are. Do they want to increase diversity, do they want to send a new message, do they want to stress new areas of competency? Do they want to highlight new faculty? We help them clearly identify what the new goals are, what their corporate culture is and basically what is it they want parents and students to see.

**Q:** So when you do a viewbook you don't just do a viewbook, you do a lot more...?

**A:** Absolutely. Well, at least we do. There are companies that JUST do viewbooks... nothing more. We try to get much more in depth into the reason for the viewbook, which is why, in our estimation, the viewbook has three audiences: certainly the parents of the potential students, and certainly the potential students themselves, but also the development office as well. Our viewbooks are designed with this intent and offer so much impact that the development departments often use it as a fundraising tool with both alumni and foundations. What we try to do is showcase as many different aspects of the school as possible. This way it can be used for a variety of outreach purposes, because we believe when the university uses their valuable resources, time, talent, and money to print something, it should have multiple applications. We also recommend to colleges that we design a document that will have a shelf life of at least two years, because it's too expensive to reinvent the wheel every year.



**Q:** At least two years, but ideally how long?

**A:** I think two years is it. Three years is too long. By that time hairstyles and fashions have changed and it begins to look stale. Faculty may leave, or new ones hired, it's no longer a fresh publication after that. With the case of the Juilliard School we design the guts of the book every two years and the cover every year, changing the faculty and the board every year, because they change and we want it to appear fresh, current, and timeless.

**Q:** What is your strategy when you meet a potential client for the first time?

**A:** When we're called on to see a client our strategy is to listen first. What do they hope to achieve? We also take a look at all of their publications and present a basic marketing/publications audit. We want to see how they have been marketing and positioning themselves. Usually someone will call us because they realize they have NOT been marketing and positioning themselves properly and they have NOT gotten the response that they want from their viewbooks, or maybe they simply want to freshen their image. That's when we walk around the campus and take it all in. I don't know how anyone can design a viewbook without actually going to the campus; seeing the students, seeing the campus, seeing the physical plant. It's really very important. How you photograph a school should really demonstrate what the school is all about. We did a viewbook for a school on Long Island—that had a gorgeous campus, beautiful outside facilities—and their previous viewbooks had been photographed in such a way that they could have easily been an inner-

city institution! You never saw views out the windows. It looked like it was a city school. They completely lost the emphasis that they had a campus to show off. Often designers, if they haven't been there, don't know how to play up the characteristics that are valuable. Maybe the school just got a new Olympic stadium. You have to know what questions to ask. You have to ask the client "What's new? What do you want people to see and understand? Do you have a big sports program? Do you want to emphasize this? What are you proud of?" Really the viewbook is a marketing strategy. It's designed for those three audiences: the students have to look at the book and see someone who reminds them of themselves. The parents have to look at the book and say, "Yes, it has a great campus, and it is SAFE for my child." Is it a protected environment? More than ever, especially since 9/11, and especially in the east, we play up the campus safety. Campus safety and student life are paramount to parents—the parents need to know that their child is going to be studying in a safe environment. That's critically important. And thirdly, as I mentioned earlier, this is a document that a development director should be able to take to a potential donor: "In addition to our other pieces, we want to show you what our school is all about."

What I believe our firm also does very successfully is to showcase stories about the students that go there, coupled with stories about the faculty. As far as we're concerned the strength of a school lies in its faculty, otherwise it's really just real estate. We have created with the Juilliard School what we call "Fricks and Fracks": the student talking and then the teacher talking, back to back with half sheets, so it's a rather uniquely designed book.

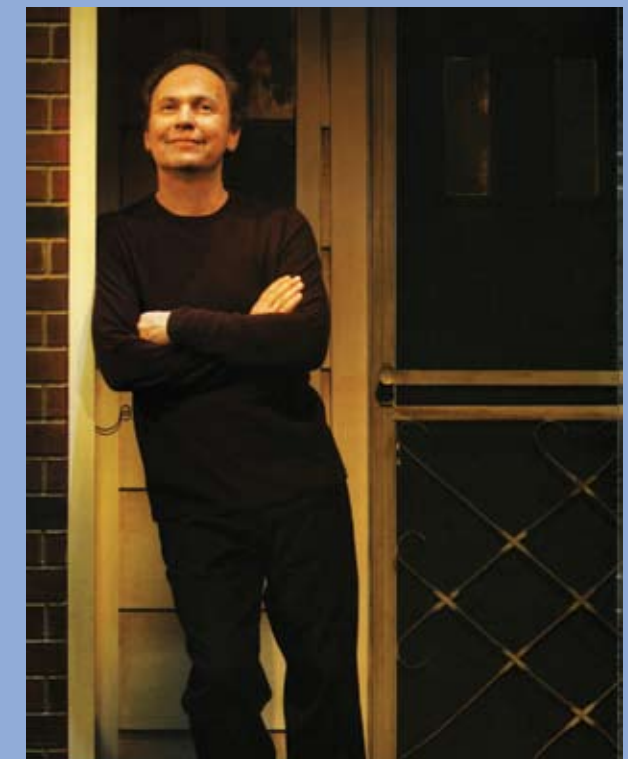
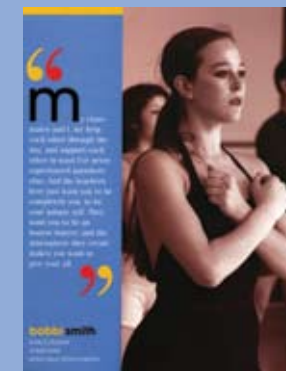
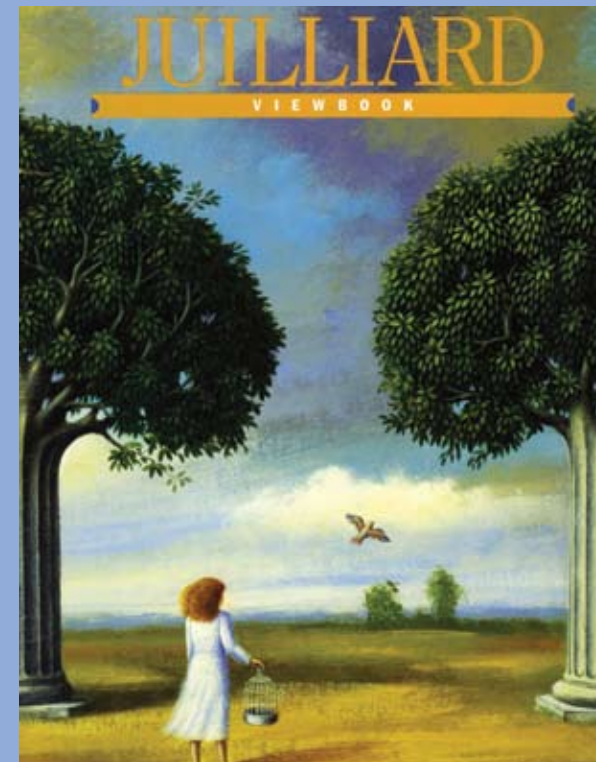
**Q:** Who chooses the faculty that will be featured?  
**A:** We ask our client to do that. Usually they'll be faculty members representing different disciplines, so that what you're doing is giving the audience a tremendous diverse 'look' to the institution. Then you photograph accordingly; if they have a fabulous lab, you photograph in the lab; the art department, if they have state-of-the-art facilities, you photograph there. You want to play up the technology. It's actually very difficult to do this in a 32-page book. Some viewbooks can be fairly large. The last viewbook we created for Juilliard was 60 pages. Keep in mind that this is ultimately the document that must "sell" the school.

**Q:** Who handles the photography?  
**A:** We do. Most schools have budgets. So we ask

them, "Do you have existing photography?" And then we go through what they have, and occasionally we find some really amazing shots. We look there first. But when we do the photography for what we call "talking heads" we assign it. We will hire a photographer who will photograph them either in their studio or on campus. But it always depends on their budgets as to what they can afford. We always take into account what their budget is. We ALWAYS find out, up front, what their aspirations are, because there is no use designing something they simply cannot afford to produce. In other words, if they have a finite budget, which most schools do, we are very good at working backwards to ensure they get the best viewbook for their budget. We discuss our creative fee, then add that to printing fees and photography and writing. It's really a fairly easy formula. And if a university has aspirations that are unaffordable then it's up to us to create something smaller and equally effective. I don't think there's any set number of pages a view book should be, nor does it have to be full color. Basically, a view book is a view book. It should not be weighted down with too much copy. The heavy copy should be in the handbook. A lot of colleges make the big mistake of trying to cram as much copy as they can into their viewbook.

**Q:** What is the basic copy that should be in a viewbook?

**A:** Usually, we start with a welcome/message from the head of the school. That message can be warm and fuzzy, or it can be formal. The manner in which the head of the school is photographed is also very important. It sets the tone for everything else. If the head of the school feels compelled to wear a suit and tie, a formal note accompanies it. We just recently photographed a head of school in shirt-sleeves, with his arms around students. An informal note accompanies a photograph like that. We don't design for the sake of designing we take direction from the tone the president sets. We look at the "corporate culture." But also look at it this way, if the head of school wants to CHANGE the image of the school from that of something formal, to something less formal, and much more "user-friendly" we will then suggest he or she dress and pose accordingly (without a tie, and with a jacket over the shoulder possibly, a much more relaxed pose). Pictures tell a thousand words, and how the school is photographed communicates what the school is like to the parents and the prospective students. Generally we collaborate with the president, the director of admissions, and the director of communications. We prefer to meet with all three because each one has a message they want to communicate.



General items to include are:

- A letter from the head of school
- A description of what the school is like—their ethos.
- What the experience of what going to the school is like. That can be gained from students, alumni, or faculty.
- With Juilliard we always start the book with “The Juilliard Experience.” Sometimes this has been a photo essay of a day of the life in the school.
- And then we get into the specifics of each department and what they do.
- You want to clearly illustrate the value of the education. Whether it’s a state school for \$4,000 a year or a private school for \$40,000 a year, parents want to know their money is well spent.

Q: Do you highlight student work?

A: In an art department, most definitely we do. As well as the music department. We like to have photographs of students learning, in the learning setting. If there are performances we highlight them as well. Parents want to see the students “in action.”

Q: In this tight economy, how are you able to keep within tight budgets?

A: Basically, the most important thing is to do the most you can, with as little as you can—a simple formula, that’s always a lot easier said than done. Always, it’s important to make the viewbook as genuine as possible. I have been suggesting to some of my clients that we not work in full color. We’ve been scaling back to three and sometimes even two-color books. For some schools full color sends a mixed message... for a school like Juilliard, full color is absolutely vital. When we are approached to create a viewbook for the school, one of the first things we do is collect their competition, because we want to see what our client is up against. It’s very important. If a parent is calling your school for a viewbook, you can be sure they are calling similar schools in the area and I want to see what’s being offered. Basically, it’s like advertising, you want to see what your competition is up to.

Q: Can you describe a basic timeline for a viewbook?

A: Often when we work with a university they sometimes don’t realize how critically important it is for the photography to be taken at the right time. They will call us in October and say they need the viewbook for the summer. They don’t realize we will have missed

the opportunity to photograph in the springtime. The best time to photograph is in autumn and spring when it’s beautiful outside. Our preference is to work on view books at LEAST nine months in advance so that the photography can be done during the best seasons. Often clients are forgetting that we want to show their campus to the best possible advantage, and that means students in the fall as freshmen, and students in the spring at commencement.

Q: Do you use focus groups?

A: We think it’s important that the president, the director of communications, and the director of admissions be the ultimate focus group.

Q: How do you know if a book is successful?

A: From the institutional side, are there more inquiries? Are there more applicants? Are the applicants excellent? Is enrollment up? For us, we know it’s successful when the school calls us and engages us to create another viewbook.

*For over two decades, Jessica Weber Design, Inc., has been dedicated to promoting the visions and missions of their exclusively not-for-profit clients through graphic design, development strategies, and marketing support. Clients include cultural, educational, medical and religious institutions, foundations, and scientific and research organizations. As president and CEO, Weber oversees the conception of print and web materials for branding programs, viewbooks, annual reports, capital campaigns, logo development, and development materials. (www.jwdnyc.com)*

*Ms. Weber is vice president of the board of the Mercantile Library Center for Fiction in New York, and serves on the advisory boards of Aid for Aids, the Fales Rare Book Library of New York University, the Medill School of Journalism’s Publication Program at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, the Department of Illustration at the Fashion Institute of Technology in New York City, and the Japan Creators Association. She is an adjunct professor at Parsons School of Design, a visiting critic at Marywood University, and is a former member of the faculty of the School of Visual Arts. Ms. Weber also serves as a graphic advisor to The Martina Arroyo Foundation and she conducts numerous audits of admissions materials annually. To contact Ms. Weber for further information, please call 212.627.2280 or email at [jwd@jwdnyc.com](mailto:jwd@jwdnyc.com).*

