



Module 3 – Faculty Interview

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For this project, I interviewed Rebecca Tegtmeyer, who is an assistant professor of graphic design here at Michigan State University. Though her career has been primarily focused in the field of design, getting her MGD in design from North Carolina State and working as a long-time art director at Hallmark Cards, she is also heavily involved in the digital humanities scene here at MSU and across Michigan. This is how I became acquainted with Rebecca, taking her Digital Humanities course last semester as a part of my digital humanities specialization. As Rebecca is so involved within the digital humanities field, I felt as if she would be a perfect faculty member to interview, as she is aligned with my career path.

One main factor in which Rebecca stressed throughout our interview, and that I took to heart, is that digital platforms allow for a whole new medium and field for connections. This can range from person to person, but the availability to this technology can be useful in all fields. For example, I think that the Internet and new media are highly crucial in my field of study, marketing, as I view digital media marketing to be a hugely expanding field. These new technologies also provide us the ability to do things such as create online portfolios. From here Rebecca and I dug into her personal portfolio, rltdesign.net, and discussed what she believed to be essential do's and don'ts in the process of creation and implementation of digital portfolios.

When asked if online portfolios should be essential to all college students, Rebecca simply replied, "Yes." She later went on to stress that these portfolios need to set you apart, that they can't be "Average" or "Just good enough." For her personal portfolio she uses a CMS theme based around indexhibit. She likes this format because it allows for a lot of CSS editing and customization. Initially Rebecca did use the assistance of web designers to create her web portfolio, but due to indexhibit's easy backend developing, she is able to edit and maintain the site herself. This is a point in which she stresses. A key factor in an effective portfolio, Rebecca claims, is updating it on a regular basis. This shows your progress as an artist, marketer, writer, or whatever profession you assume. By updating your site on a frequent basis, you are able to grow with your site and use it to display your wide variety of talents and skills. It also shows consistency, dedication, and passion for your work.

Another important thought when creating your portfolio, Rebecca states, is picking the pieces in which you display wisely. You want to display your best pieces, but also ones that display your wide array of talents and skills. You don't want to limit yourself to just a certain type of job or a certain types of opportunity. Additionally, it's all about the context of your work. When creating a portfolio, make sure that you post a quick summary of what each piece you are displaying is. Without the context of a piece's background, a possible employer would have no idea what he or she is looking at. Also, keep it professional. Don't post too many personal details; keep that information for social media. Portfolios are supposed to display your work and professional abilities, not necessarily your sense of humor or your favorite movies.

Overall, if Rebecca emphasized one thing to share with the rest of our WRA 210 class, it would just be to put some serious time into your work and portfolio. It has to stand apart from its competitors. Explain your work and design your site to emphasize your strengths. Have fun with your site, but not too much. Portfolios are key in all aspects of work, and I am personally excited to begin creating my own.

Full Interview:

1. Firstly, could you introduce yourself for our audience? (Name, Position at MSU, Career background)

Rebecca Tegtmeier, Assistant Professor of Graphic Design in the Department of Art, Art History and Design here at MSU. Prior to MSU I obtained my MGD at NC State in Raleigh, NC in May 2009. Before graduate school I worked in Kansas City, MO at Hallmark Cards Inc. as an art director and designer for 7 years. I received my BFA from The University of Kansas in 1999.

2. How do you believe your career path is directly connected to the digital world and digital humanities?

My undergrad education happened at a time when the internet wasn't accessible by the public. The "World Wide Web" wasn't well known and those that knew about it thought of it as a military project. I didn't have an email address until I was working professionally. As a designer, I was primarily involved in print formats. It was my graduate school experience that opened up new opportunities and ways about thinking how people interact and use technology as a means to connect with others. Having worked at a greeting card company that is all about "enriching lives through connections" I was intrigued by this new approach to making meaningful connections and how to design for those situations.

3. Do you have an portfolio online? If so, what is its URL?

Yes, <http://www.rltdesign.net/>

4. Do you believe that a portfolio is essential for all college students pursuing a career in the digital realm?

Yes!

5. What platform and technologies did you use to create your portfolio?

I use a CMS specifically designed with portfolios in mind. It is indexhibit which was created by graphic designers. The CMS template allows for a lot of CSS control, meaning it is very raw and basic upon install. The interface of the backend is easy to use too.

6. What was your thought process when creating your portfolio?

I created it in 2009 because I was entering the academic job search phase. I needed a space to showcase my work. It was very daunting as I had a lot of work to put on there. I am a very organized person so it was a nice challenge to work on. At the time I was finishing up my thesis work and had documented my entire graduate experience on a blog (which is still up here <http://www.rltdesignncsu.blogspot.com/>) and the blog proved to be the most helpful resource when curating my portfolio.

7. Was it difficult to pick which pieces to display in your portfolio? What criteria did you have for picking these pieces?

I didn't have that difficult time, it was more difficult to figure out how to categorize and talk about my work. I had over 8 years of professional work and 2 years of graduate work. I needed my portfolio site to show my range of skills as well as a focused body of work. Luckily, a web portfolio enables you to craft many viewing experiences.

8. Do you continue to update your portfolio as you create more relevant work and pieces?

Always! I have had my site for 5 years now and it serves as an archive of my work. I update it at the end of every semester to keep it current. I also reorganize it to reflect my current tenure-track status.

9. What was the overall critique and response of others to your portfolio?

Positive. I refer a lot of people there to see examples of design, not so much to show off my own work. I do this because I have a wide range of pieces represented there. I have design colleagues and peers that often express their jealousy of my site because they know the time and effort it takes to keep it current and not everyone is able to keep up with their own!

10. Is there any one tip that you would give to a college student in regards to portfolio design?

Write about your work and show/talk about the context. Work shown out of context is read in a different way. As for the design, keep it simple and easy to navigate. Consider organizing and giving titles based on skill set rather than a title no one will know what you are talking about.

11. Do you add any personal details to your portfolio, or do you keep it solely professional?

Very professional. I have a portfolio website to archive and show my work, it's not there to make friends (I use social media for that).

12. Are there any last comments or suggestions that you would like to leave for the rest of my WRA 210 Web Authoring class? This could be in terms of work ethic, portfolios, or simply design.

Oh boy, I do have a lot I could share but that would be many more pages ;) I lecture/present to my students the details about online/physical portfolios. If you want to suggest me to your prof. I would be more than happy to make a presentation to your class. I am actually giving the lecture to a senior seminar class this coming Monday...just a suggestion!

I do have a word of advice about work ethic, etc. I always tell my students that "just enough" won't do, they need to be better than the person sitting next to them. It's a competitive market out there!