

Final Project: Professional Reflection

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Reflecting on my capstone experience, overall, it has been quite positive. Going into my capstone, I believe I had realistic expectations of what would be required, which helped me in both planning and managing my time accordingly. To elaborate, acknowledging my capstone would incorporate my previous works to some capacity, I made a conscious effort early on in the course to choose ten of my previous works to start refining. This made work later in the course, such as the ready-for-print portfolio, less stressful, as I already had all my portfolio work files on hand and had already started making adjustments to them. With that being said, I did experience some struggles within my capstone. Of these, the most significant was the design of my portfolio website. While I had already created a rough portfolio website for a previous course at SNHU, I did not believe this website was up to my current design standards. This is what led me to completely recreate my portfolio website from the ground up, which took significant time. With that being said, I do think the time and effort put into this was worth it, as my new portfolio website more closely resembles my personal brand and aesthetic.

Considering the significance of the capstone in relation to my own experience at SNHU, I believe that the capstone, both as an assignment and as a final product, is an excellent culmination of what I learned throughout my time at SNHU. To elaborate, the capstone required me to use skills I learned throughout my entire tenure at SNHU and required me to work on a variety of different designs and programs. This makes sense as well, as a capstone is intended to be a culmination project for a specific degree or program (Smith). This made it essential for me to pull knowledge from all the graphic design courses I have taken, as all the works represented within my completed capstone required their own nuances in their design. What did stay the same throughout the creation of this capstone, however, is the importance of foundational graphic design principles, such as the elements and principles of design, gestalt principles, etc.

While my broad experience with this capstone project has been positive overall, there are more specific problems I encountered while completing this project. To explain further, file management was an issue I encountered within this project, as the longer I worked on a file, such as the ready-for-print portfolio, the more linked files and dependencies the document accrued. Although this isn't necessarily a bad thing, the juggling of the file locations of these linked files eventually became an issue. This was eventually solved, however, through the use of proper labeling and design version management. Another problem that I encountered when completing this project was the implementation of portfolio site features using the Bootstrap 5 CSS framework. The primary issue I faced here was that some of the ideas and features I wanted to add into my portfolio site using Bootstrap 5 weren't realistic. For example, I intended to implement an image carousel on the home page of my portfolio website and spent significant time trying to get this feature to work. What I eventually found, however, is that carousels, in addition to being unoptimized in Bootstrap 5, also don't work well with multiple images of various sizes (Bootstrap). While possible, for the sake of performance and aesthetic appeal, I made the decision to redesign the portfolio home page.

Acknowledging the problems I encountered while creating this project, there are various successes I am quite proud of. The ready-for-print portfolio, for example, is an excellent representation of my brand and aesthetic. This portfolio piece also does a great job showcasing my best designs, and I am quite happy with how it turned out. Another strength that I believe my capstone project has is how it represents my personal brand as a whole. To elaborate, my personal design brand/philosophy revolves heavily around modern minimalism and the use of shades. This is something that I believe my capstone project reflects quite well, as all the designs shown, including my portfolio website, reflect these values. This can be seen through the

significant use of white space and padding throughout my designs, as well as the use of color to add accents, with a higher reliance on shades to fill in designs. One final success in my capstone that I believe is worth noting, while more abstract, is my time management. To elaborate, while completing this project, significant time was spent in the beginning planning out the work that needed to be completed, and how each work should be divided to be completed efficiently. This planning is something that I believe contributed to the overall positive experience I had with the capstone, as it kept me from overwhelming myself, and allowed me to spend blocked out time refining works.

Moving on to the feedback I chose to incorporate into my print-ready portfolio and portfolio website, both of the works, as well as the designs inside them, were adjusted according to instructor and peer feedback. While these edits range in scope and significance, peer feedback was vital in improving and updating my works. For the print-ready-portfolio specifically, important feedback I received that was implemented into my current design was an issue throughout the work with spelling and grammar. Although this may seem mundane, these spelling and grammatical issues significantly detracted from the professional look and feel of this portfolio work, making these suggestions vital in refining my design. Looking at the portfolio website, this work primarily incorporated instructor feedback. Specifically, issues such as the `<h2>` tags being disproportionate to the `<h1>` tags were brought up, as well as spelling issues in the contact page, and the portfolio page not displaying ten works. All of these issues were addressed in the most recent version of my portfolio website, and they once again help enhance the professionalism of my piece, as well as the functionality and visual appeal. Considering the works within these designs once again, while all of them were adjusted based off peer feedback, some of the larger changes occurred within the Amethyst Bay Spa ad and the TOWN Restaurant

Trifold. For the Spa ad specifically, instructor feedback pointed out the poor font choice for the original ad, and the lack of color. These issues can be seen addressed in the most recent version of this design, which now has a script font used, as well as a focus on utilizing pinks and whites. As for the TOWN trifold, instructor feedback pointed out that my three columns within the work were different sizes, and peer feedback pointed out that some of the text in this work didn't have enough padding. Correcting both of these issues in the current design, the trifold now properly folds up, and the content within is visually separated through standard element padding. As a whole, collaboration with instructors and peers was vital for the improvement of all of my designs. Not only did this feedback help me gain new perspectives on my designs, but it also allowed issues that I missed to be caught, refining my works further. Receiving feedback on designs also has the benefit of enhancing collaboration skills, getting objective opinions on design decisions, and helping designers' backup their design choices (Mauduit).

Changing course to reflect on my future professional life, I believe what I learned throughout my education at SNHU can be applied in a variety of ways. Professionally, I intend to apply for graphic design jobs in the UX/UI and publishing fields, making everything I learned and designed up to this point applicable to my future profession. To elaborate further, at a foundational level, there are design practices that can be found in all graphic design works. These are things such as the elements of design and principles of design (Foote). Additionally, having taken courses on typography, desktop publishing, and multiplatform design, the design considerations and overall workflow management systems I gained from these courses would be directly applicable to UX/UI design or publishing. Equally as important, my time at SNHU has taught me life skills such as time management and good work ethic, which would be important assets for my professional career.

Switching to how I intend to maintain ethical principles and incorporate social responsibility in my future works and to advance the industry as a whole, I plan on doing this through considering how others may view my work, as well as being conscious of current social issues. To elaborate, to maintain my ethical principles specifically, this will be done not only through sticking to my personal values as a designer, but also being aware of how others may view my work. A good example of this could be working on a publication that is discussing the artwork of a painter. While the cover design for this publication could just use the artist's artwork, it would be unethical at best to do this without express permission from the artist themselves. Acknowledging this and viewing this issue from the artist's perspective, I could make an effort to talk with the artist about using their work, or I could make an active choice to not use the artist's work in the publication. This example is also an excellent representation of honesty and authenticity, which LinkedIn states are important ethical considerations for graphic designers (Singh). In this example, not passing off the artwork as the publications without permission would be honest and authentic, making this work ethical. As for how I plan on incorporating social responsibilities into my work, this will be done through filtering the work I accept and keeping up to date on current social issues. Making an active choice not to work on a magazine piece that is discrediting climate change, for example, would be socially responsible. By following these guidelines, this will help advance the graphic design industry through enhancing the professional standards designers actively hold themselves to, which in turn would enhance the quality of products/designs that people digest.

Reflecting on the skills, abilities, knowledge, and dispositional requirements I have displayed and will need to display when working with peers and clients, there are a wide variety of factors to consider. To elaborate, when working with peers and clients, various skills and

abilities that are necessary include being receptive to feedback, being able to create actionable and constructive suggestions, and being cordial. With this being said, when working with peers and clients, there is also knowledge that needs to be utilized that primarily comes from experience, and this includes things such as how to respond to tones in conversations and how to break down complex ideas into manageable chunks. While not perfect, these are all skills, abilities, and knowledge that I have and continue to try and display when working with peers or clients. Some additional skills that designers need to possess, according to Smashing Magazine, are knowing how to identify and define design problems and knowing how to properly and positively articulate doubt to others (Geraghty). To build and apply these skills moving forward, I plan on continuing to try and incorporate them into conversations with others within the graphic design field. This will give me firsthand experience at applying these skills, and will help me refine them, and possibly find areas where I am lacking.

Considering my goals for my professional life, as discussed previously, I would like to work within the UX/UI field, or within the publishing field to some extent. While these are somewhat broad goals, these are two fields I have a great interest in, and I would be quite happy to have a career in either. Outside of jobs, another goal for my professional life is to continue to enhance my graphic design skills. This is something that I think is quite important, as learning is something that never truly has an end, and with technological advancements, there will always be new ways to refine my graphic design skills. An important technological advancement in the graphic design field such as generative ai, for example, has the ability to transform the industry, and as such, would be beneficial for me to learn. This technology is offered by various companies, but Adobe's Firefly and Midjourney, to name a few, are generative ai programs that allow designers to use text to generate images and designs (Adobe). One final goal that I

currently have for my professional life is to refine my communications skills. Although I don't think my current communications skills are bad, I would like to refine them in a business setting, as academic discussion differs slightly from business. Specifically, academic writing and discussion often prioritize using more complex terms for precision, and have a tone tailored for professors and peers (Henwood). In a business setting, however, being brief and clear is necessary due to the different educational backgrounds individuals may have, and the tone needed in writing and conversation is constantly changing from person to person (Henwood).

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