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Senior Capstone: Communication

Social Media & Public Engagement Concentration

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Introduction

My name is Sophie Passerini, I'm currently a senior, majoring in Communication, at Southern Oregon University. Over the past three and a half years, Southern Oregon University has become like a second home to me. Larger universities may seem like the best pick for some high schoolers trying to figure out their college career path, but for me, that wasn't the case. When I was exploring the endless possibilities of college campuses, I realized I wanted to attend a university which felt like a second home. I also wanted to be apart of a college community that cared about the wellbeing of its students, and SOU was that close-knit community I was looking for.

Over my past three and a half years here, I've been able to expand my mental encyclopedia of knowledge through countless courses at SOU. With many of these courses not even applying to my major, communication. For instance, I found University Seminar, during my first year at SOU, to be extremely eye-opening. My University Seminar professor, Elizabeth Whitman, preached that college isn't about pleasing our professors with the "correct" answer like we were taught to do in high school; college is about exploring your own curiosities and forming an opinion through our own research, not by what we're explicitly told.

I had never once, in my high school career, had a teacher tell me to explore my own conclusions and curiosities through research. At that moment in my University Seminar course, I finally felt liberated from the confinement and repetition of meaningless essays which only echoed our high school teacher's opinion. At that moment I knew I was free to make my own conclusions and to form my own opinions, I was academically liberated.

This liberation pushed me to research unique areas of academia I never thought existed. For example, in my COMM 300 Research Strategies course, many students were drawn to "common" research topics including marital conflict or film analysis. However, I wanted to research a topic that I found captivating, not just something that would receive my professor's approval. Therefore I chose a research topic that pulled from multiple disciplines, internet anonymity. The research I found pulled from psychology journals, communication journals, computer science journals, and even from court rulings; in total, I had 34 references, with each one adding another dimension of interest to my research paper. I believe [my research paper was a well-executed paper](#) because I was given the freedom to choose a topic that genuinely sparked an interest for me.

COMM 206 Multimedia Writing was also another course that gave me the ability to explore topics that were of interest to me. Through the many [writing assignments](#) throughout the course, I was able to delve into the technology of VR, the empire of Disney, and the wonderful hobby of fish-keeping.

Although I've only shared a few courses that have helped shape me as an individual over my career here at SOU, I assure you these were not the only courses or activities that had an impact on my academic and personal life. My time here at SOU has been chock-full of inspiring and important life-messages from professors, supervisors, and colleagues. I could not have asked for a greater learning experience than the one I've received from Southern Oregon University.

Communication Learning Outcomes

The following digital portfolio reflects my personal and professional growth by highlighting four of the Communication department's learning outcomes. The first learning outcome is: "Students will make concrete connections between their studies of communication and their career aspirations. They will learn how to use relevant tools and technologies, acquire practical experience through internships and practica, and prepare and present portfolios of work suitable for gaining professional employment."

The second learning outcome is: "Students will communicate effectively in diverse social settings, including interpersonal, group, online, and institutional. They will be able to express messages, adapt the content and style of messages to social contexts, and engage in dialogue about a topic with respect to all participants."

The third learning outcome is: "Students will analyze problems in communication and develop solutions to those problems, contribute new knowledge to the field of communication, and apply disciplinary history and theory through research methods and analysis of evidence."

The fourth learning outcome is: "Students will access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages."

Learning Outcome 1

Throughout my college career, the Communication program at Southern Oregon University has pushed me to excel towards my intended career aspirations. The Communication program has done this by equipping me with the tools and technologies necessary to be qualified for my desired career path after graduation. Every single course that I've taken through the Communication program has given me that extra knowledge to give me the edge in those upcoming job interviews. The first learning outcome that I will be discussing in this digital portfolio is: being able to make concrete connections between my studies of communication and my career aspirations. While learning how to use relevant tools and technologies, acquire practical experience through internships and practica, and prepare and present portfolios of work suitable for gaining professional employment.

From my first term at Southern Oregon University onwards, I've been gaining the experience necessary to propel myself into the social media marketing world. COMM 214 Mobile Image Making was the first Communication course I took during my freshman year at SOU, a course that focuses on Instagram and visual storytelling, an essential part of the social media market. Through this course, I was able to begin the cultivation of my interviewing and visual storytelling skills. Multiple of the projects were designed to enhance these skills such as this interview with a student on the SOU campus. This course also taught me how to connect my visual to my story, which I demonstrated through my final project. I chose to interview four different SOU students who each had different "baggage" that they were carrying from past events in their lives; I compared that "baggage" to the physical weight that they carried on their backs and visually showed their baggage through the accompanying photos.

However, that was just the tipping point for me; I have grown tremendously as a writer and as a social media strategist since my freshman year of college. Since my first term at SOU, I've taken a multitude of courses that have helped shape me as a writer. One of these courses that have helped me, in particular, is COMM 206 Multimedia Writing. The rapid-fire pace of the course always kept me on my feet and ready for the next story to write. Through this SOU course, I was able to explore different forms of multimedia writing such as listicles, newsletters, video stories, and more extensive informational blog posts. I believe all of the writing I completed during this course was critical to the development of my writing abilities. However, I believe that my interviewing skills, in particular, have improved dramatically since my freshman year. For example one of our assignments for COMM 206 required us to conduct a "5 Questions" interview with a noteworthy individual. I believe this interview shows that I dig much deeper for

information than I did in previous interviews I've conducted throughout my years here at SOU.

Along with the writing and social media experience I've gained from courses at SOU, I'm currently accumulating experience working as the Communication department's Social Media Strategist, a PEAK position at SOU. Through the short amount of time I've been working as the Communication department's Social Media Strategist I've learned an extensive amount about the analytics of Facebook and Instagram. I've also improved upon my informative writing skills by working on [multiple large blog posts](#) for the Communication department. These large blog posts required a few interviews and lots of research, which are all critical for the success of these types of informational blog posts.

Through these courses and this work position at Southern Oregon University, I believe I was able to make concrete connections between my studies, as a Communication major, and my career aspirations of being in the social media marketing world. Along my journey at SOU, I've gained the skills and knowledge necessary to acquire professional employment after graduating.

Learning Outcome 2

For me, personally, college has been nothing but a diverse social setting where communication is key to a positive and respectful learning environment. Through my academic, personal, and professional experiences at Southern Oregon University, I have been able to communicate effectively in diverse social settings, including interpersonal, group, online, and institutional. My experiences at SOU have also helped me to be able to express messages, adapt the content and style of those messages to social contexts, and engage in dialogue about a topic with respect to all participants. This ability as well as my ability to communicate effectively in diverse social settings, including interpersonal, group, online, and institutional, is my second learning outcome.

At the beginning of my college career, I was asked a then-unusual question "what are your pronouns?" I was taken aback, I had never been explicitly asked what my pronouns were. I was so naive; I didn't understand the enormous amount of respect that this individual was giving me by simply asking what my preferred pronouns were. Soon after that encounter, I learned the importance of respect on a college campus. During my time as a [Bridge Mentor at SOU](#), I mentored multiple students who chose to use nontraditional pronouns. From my past experience, I knew the importance of pronouns and was able to respectfully engage in conversations about gender with those students.

As a Bridge Mentor, we were given the tools necessary to communicate with the bridge students in a variety of different contexts and styles. We were also taught how to communicate, tutor, and assist students individually, or in small groups, to help them master their assignments and to reinforce learning concepts presented in the class. Through this mentorship program and other courses at SOU, I learned how important it is to address every person with the same respect that that individual gave me at the beginning of my college career.

Recently I was enrolled in PSY 369 Human Sexuality, a course which delved into the many dimensions of human sexuality from a psychosocial perspective. When entering the classroom, I was always very aware that every individual in the class had a different experience with sexuality and gender. Therefore, I adapted my comments in our online and in-person discussions to effectively communicate my messages while still respecting all of my classmates and their identities. Our final project for the course gave us the mission of educating a general audience about certain aspects of human sexuality. For my project, I chose a fairly taboo topic to describe and discuss to a general audience, fetishes. The goal of the poster was to destigmatize the topic of fetishes, all while still educating and respecting the reader and their identity.

However, that is not the only instance of myself being able to effectively communicate within diverse social settings. During Fall term of 2018, I was hired as the graphic designer for a student-run magazine, The Apostrophe. Our small group of writers, photographers, and myself would constantly be working together, online, in-person, in group meetings, and in one-on-one meetings. Due to the fact that we had seven contributors working on the magazine, there were a lot of diverse perspectives which gave our magazine a complete and well-rounded feel. Our goal for the magazine was to present new and relevant information about the undergraduate programs at SOU including USEM and the House programs, as well as entertain our target audience of SOU students with playful content.

Through my multiple job positions and the courses I've taken at Southern Oregon University, I believe I am able to communicate effectively in diverse social settings, such as online, group, and institutional. I also believe I'm able to express messages in a seemingly effortless way, while still adapting the content and style of those messages to social contexts. I've also had multiple opportunities, throughout my journey at SOU, to engage in dialogue about a topic with respect to all participants.

The Communication department at Southern Oregon University has helped to equip me with the tools and skills necessary to not only succeed in life after my college graduation but also to contribute new knowledge and a new perspective to the field of communication. The third learning outcome that I have attained through my time at the SOU Communication department is: being able to analyze problems in communication and develop solutions to those problems, contribute new knowledge to the field of communication, and apply disciplinary history and theory through research methods and analysis of evidence.

While taking the courses COMM 125 Interpersonal Communication and COMM 455 Conflict Resolution, I was able to analyze problems within my own communication and was also able to develop tentative solutions for these problems. During the course COMM 125 Interpersonal Communication, I was able to acknowledge that my lack of self-disclosure was hindering my relationship with others. Through my research into self-disclosure, I discovered that empathic listening increases the mutual understanding of a conversation and the trust between two individuals. And through self-reflection that initiated through COMM 125, I acknowledged I was able to achieve high-performing listening skills throughout my childhood, but I still lacked the skills necessary for self-disclosure. It was only until I began researching more into self-disclosure, through COMM 125, that I was able to develop my self-disclosure abilities.

COMM 455 Conflict Resolution was another course at SOU that assisted me in evaluating my personal deficiencies in Communication while also helping me in developing solutions to those deficiencies. While taking COMM 455, I was required to analyze many aspects of my personal communication style, including my conflict style. Throughout the class, I researched further into the multiple conflict styles and administered assessments regarding my conflict style on multiple individuals close to me. From my research and these assessments, I was able to thoroughly analyze my conflict style and was then able to apply my knowledge of my conflict style to other areas of conflict resolution. For instance, I was then able to take my knowledge about my conflict style and the Hocker-Wilmot Conflict Assessment Guide to analyze a past conflict in my life. Through this thorough analysis, I was able to develop future solutions to my communication conflicts.

Another communication course where I exhibited my ability to analyze and develop solutions for problems in Communication was COMM 424 Creative Entrepreneurship. In this course, one of my many business ideas was turned in an MVP (minimum viable product). This particular business idea was for an app called #FILTER, which would be

a social media filtering service which quickly and effectively scans through your old social media posts to suggest posts to remove/edit for professional or job searching reasons. I was prompted to formulate this business after seeing a massive amount of controversy over social media and its real-world implications while job-searching. In order to test the validity of this business, my group members and I created a smoke test through a Facebook post which prompted users to share their email if they were interested in using this product. The results we collected indicated that this product would've been better aimed towards thirteen to seventeen-year-olds; online users who, my group believed, may be beginning to create their online social media presence or who may be high school students applying to universities.

Learning Outcome 4

Throughout my four years at Southern Oregon University, I have grown tremendously as an individual, as well as a writer and social media strategist. I have used the knowledge and tools that I have obtained through Communication courses to craft thoughtful and impactful media messages. I have crafted these media messages for both personal projects and professional projects. The fourth and final learning outcome that I have attained through my time in the SOU Communication department is: being able to access, analyze, evaluate, and create media messages.

Our final project in the course BA 330 Principles of Marketing prompted my group to evaluate our target market and create a media message that resonated with those individuals. We were tasked with creating the business plan for a mobile tattoo shop in Ashland, but the catch was that we could only provide one type of tattoo. My group decided to venture into the realm of cosmetic tattoos and focused on creating a mobile tattoo shop which specialized in permanent eyeliner tattoos. Our group created a target market which included specific categories of individuals who would be most likely to receive a permanent cosmetic tattoo. My group then used a geographic information system (GIS) to assess the local demographic of our target market. Our group then created multiple ads to reach our target audience. These ads included a print ad which would be featured in a magazine or newspaper, a printed brochure, a television advertisement, and a radio advertisement.

In the course COMM 195 Digital Life we were asked to evaluate a piece of media, a personal photo, which we had *already* posted online and evaluated what messages the viewers may obtain from that piece of media. The photo I chose was of my grandparents and myself, and surprising to me, I was able to uncover many different

messages within this piece of media. In my final reflection on this project, I noted that this message can be seen through multiple different lenses depending on the viewer. Through this course, I was educated about the importance of knowing exactly *what kind* of message that you're sharing to your audience before you do so, and about the real world consequences of posting undesirable pieces of media.

EMDA 350 Projects in Digital Media was another course where I did lots of observational research throughout the term. During this course, I chose to create an [Etsy company](#) where I plan on selling my "unique and cute wearable and collectible pieces of art" and all of the brand identity and signage. However, before creating my company and brand identity, I had to do a lot of research. I first conducted an informational interview on graphic design, in particular, logo design, with one of my past professors, Sasha Timen. Professor Timen teaches graphic design at SOU as well as a local high school, and she also has her own graphic design business. Throughout the interview, I was given great advice as to how to make a brand identity and the most important aspects of logo design. From there I decided to research trends in logo, packaging, and business card design for popular Etsy shops. Through this research and my research into my target market, I was able to create a [brand identity](#) which communicates our brand message to the viewers: our goal at Catpeas' Corner, "is to make cute and unique wearable pieces of art to let everyone express themselves the way they want."