

Laura Post

04/21/2022

### A Reflection of My Time at the University of St. Thomas

Back in high school when I was deciding what college to attend, I chose the University of St. Thomas for a reason. I believed that a liberal arts education would give me the very best tools to become a well-rounded member of society. Now that my college career is coming to an end, I reflect back on the things I've learned, and I know that choosing to pursue a liberal arts education has benefitted me tremendously. I am so grateful for my college education, as it has given me the opportunity to grow and become a better version of myself. In my four years at the University of St. Thomas, I have learned several lifelong skills, and I've pushed myself to strive for excellence. I have selected three important projects from my classes at the University of St. Thomas to include in my portfolio that demonstrate the critical skills I've learned and highlight my considerable academic growth.

The first exhibit included in my portfolio is a group project from my Website Development class with Dr. Thomas Marrinan. For this assignment, we were asked to create a dynamic web page that displays information on U.S. energy consumption. In the finished product, the user of the website could examine interactive energy consumption data taken from the U.S. Energy Information Administration. As a group, we wrote CSS and JavaScript code to allow the user to view energy consumption by year, by state, or by energy source. We used the Node JS platform to write server code that dynamically changed the HTML templates displayed by the web page. The U.S. energy consumption data was stored in a database that we connected

our code to so that we could dynamically fill in the information requested by the user using SQL queries. An additional feature of the web page was implementing navigation that allowed the user to page through the years, states, or energy sources using the previous and next buttons. To create the interactive graphs, we used the AnyChart JavaScript library. Our group received the highest marks for the web page we created. The success of this project demonstrates several important skills I've acquired during my time at UST, especially my strong communication skills. While working in a group with two other Computer Science students, I learned how to use effective communication skills to discuss our plans for completing the project. I demonstrated the ability to clearly communicate my ideas with the group as well as listen to and understand other group members' unique perspectives.

The second project included in my portfolio is a photo booth application I wrote in my Computer Graphics class with Dr. Marrinan. For this project, we were asked to implement different filters that would manipulate live video similar to a photo booth application. There were four filters that needed to be created: black and white, fisheye, ripple, toonify, and edge detection. Using the OpenGL API, I edited a fragment shader for each of the filters to manipulate the final color determined for the pixels in the live video. While working on this project, I used strong problem-solving skills as I navigated using new and unfamiliar technology. In the Computer Graphics class, we learned the core concepts through class lectures, but Dr. Marrinan also assigned us hands-on projects that challenged us so that we could learn the concepts from using them ourselves. This usually meant that several aspects of the project were completely new to us, and we needed to do some learning on our own to accomplish the tasks at hand. I developed strong problem-solving skills by finding resources to help with the various obstacles

we faced. This included reading the documentation for unfamiliar technology and using sources online to learn more about any issues we encountered. This skill in particular has helped me in my software engineer internships as I am able to face unfamiliar concepts and problem-solve by being resourceful.

The next exhibit included in my portfolio is a paper I wrote as part of my Medieval Theology course with Dr. Steven McMichael. This essay was our final project, and we were asked to choose a topic to research relating to medieval Christians and their theological world. I chose to write my paper about the influence of Christianity on medieval medicine. I did thorough research on my chosen topic and gathered various scholarly articles using the St. Thomas library online research tool. Combining what I learned throughout the semester with the information found in these sources, I argued that the Christian church had a large influence on medieval medicine, and as a result, both natural and religious theories were used to diagnose and treat illnesses. I concluded the essay by discussing the influence of the COVID-19 pandemic on the modern-day relationship between medicine and religion.

This exhibit demonstrates several important skills I've learned at St. Thomas. I needed to do detailed research to find reliable sources on the topic I chose. I developed the ability to evaluate the credibility of a source to determine if it can be considered reliable and accurate. I used the St. Thomas library to find articles and then used the CRAAP test to analyze its credibility by looking at the source's currency, relevance, authority, accuracy, and purpose. I also learned how to effectively form a strong argument. The topic I chose had an abundance of information, so I needed to narrow down the material I found in order to form a clear and concise argument in my paper. This included organizing the information in a way that flowed properly so

that the reader could understand the material and my thesis. Another skill shown through this paper is my ability to connect information to relevant modern events. I linked the information I learned through my research to the trends I was observing surrounding the spread of COVID-19. I took the Medieval Theology class and wrote this paper in the Fall semester of 2020 during the height of the pandemic. I recognized that what many people feel today from the stress of the unknown virus is very similar to what people may have felt in the Middle Ages when they had little to no concrete knowledge on how to treat illnesses.

The last exhibit included in my portfolio is a project I completed in my Introduction to Sociology class with Dr. Laura Fischer. This project included an essay as well as an art project to creatively demonstrate the discussed themes. For the paper, we were asked to provide a sociological analysis of an aspect of Malcom X's life. Throughout the semester, we read a book about the life of Malcom X and discussed his development in sociological terms. I chose to write my paper about how the process of socialization influenced Malcom X's values, beliefs, and political views throughout his life. For the art project portion of the assignment, I created a watercolor portrait of Malcom X. I used many shapes and colors to represent the underlying elements that made Malcom X who he was. Each shape and color represented a different agent in the process of socialization that influenced his views of the world.

I learned many valuable skills in completing the Malcom X project. Throughout the class, we discussed the basic concepts of sociology, including socialization. However, completing this assignment allowed me to actually apply the concepts I had been learning to a real person's life. This helped me develop a much deeper understanding of the sociological concepts in the class. I also learned a lot about Malcom X's life in general, and I broadened my view of his role in our

nation's history. After learning more about him, I was able to reflect back on my history classes and question why I hadn't learned some of that information earlier in my life. This expanded my critical thinking skills in being able to analyze the narrative our American education system chose to teach us. I believe that this is an invaluable skill for a person in our society to have. One should never just accept information blindly. Throughout my college career, I've learned to form my opinions on matters by doing my own thorough research. In this project, I also used creativity, an important and frequently undervalued skill. Being able to write a strong argument in an essay is valuable but being able to also demonstrate your ideas through a creative medium can be even more powerful. I learned how to communicate the ideas I discussed in my paper through my artwork.

Overall, these three exhibits together demonstrate the wide range of skills I've learned and used during my time at the University of St. Thomas. The classes I've taken have taught me how to become a better person in society. Through my theology classes, I've deepened my understanding of the Christian religious tradition, and increased my cultural awareness through studying a variety of religions around the world. Through my philosophy classes, I've learned important skills for forming and evaluating arguments as well as what it means to act ethically and morally. Through my sociology class, I learned the complex underlying structures that influence our society. And of course, through my computer science classes, I learned invaluable skills that I will apply to my future career, including ways in which technology can be used for the betterment of society. I am so grateful for the opportunity to attend the University of St. Thomas and for the growth I've experienced. I plan to use these valuable skills for the remainder

of my life, always striving to think critically, act wisely, and work skillfully to advance the common good.