

Graphic Design Capstone Professional Reflection

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My capstone experience this term is something that I feel has helped me hone my skills not only as a designer but as a teammate. Every week I was given the opportunity to receive feedback from my peers but also to provide feedback, and this is a skill that is essential to a career in graphic design. This experience has helped me to refine my online portfolio, create a print portfolio, and build my online presence in such a way that I feel is a good representation of my personal brand. I am leaving this capstone experience ready to take on the professional design world.

My experience at SNHU in the graphic design program has been challenging but rewarding. Learning all new skills in condensed terms while also working can be stressful and create a lot of pressure to put out really great work from the get-go. I was fortunate enough to take some graphic design courses in person at Christopher Newport University before I began my program at SNHU to learn the basics of the Adobe software, as well as the elements and principles of design, and I feel like this prepared me for my degree program here. This capstone project reflects not only my work from SNHU, but my work from prior to SNHU as well. This course gave me the opportunity to refine my older pieces and make them stronger so that I could put out a representation of my best works and differentiate myself from the crowd. My capstone project shows all the skills I have built from my time at SNHU and beyond and truly shows how far I have come from when I first started in this program in February 2022 to where I am today.

I read all the feedback left by my peers and instructor on the various discussion boards and assignment rubrics and took all of it into account as I refined my pieces and my online portfolio. The feedback I specifically chose to incorporate into my website portfolio was to remove my personal branding materials from my works page and update the mockups for both my web and print portfolios. While I did have some mockups to represent my work previously, I

did not feel these were necessarily the best representations of my work, so I found some new ones for the refined designs to go on. I also incorporated the feedback to make sure my print portfolio and my website portfolio both looked consistent regarding my personal brand and added testimonials and more social media links to my website. In regard to my actual design works, I incorporated lots of feedback from my peers, such as updating the colors and typography on my magazine designs, changing the colors and typography of my Upper Crust design to make it look more bakery themed, and changing the size and color of the text on my TOWN table tent to make it more readable. I also made changes to my Java Been and ZARA projects, increasing the size and weight of the fonts to improve the readability and accessibility of the designs. These are all adjustments that I feel have helped strengthen my designs that I may not have come up with on my own. Collaboration is crucial to the field of graphic design. If you never receive feedback, you can never improve as a designer. The importance of critiques is attested to by the professionals, and an article from the Nielsen Norman Group even states “it is nearly impossible to improve a design without feedback from others. Their input helps you avoid mistakes and thus create higher quality work” (Gibbons 2016). While this article is more specifically geared towards User Interface and User Experience design, it still rings true for all forms of design and art. Each person has a different perspective and something different to bring to the table, so showing your works to others to hear different opinions can only grow your skills. Even if you choose not to apply the feedback, it may help you to start thinking in a different way for your next project. Giving and receiving good feedback is a valuable skill to have when working as part of a professional design team as well.

As I begin looking for my first professional graphic design job, I know there are many skills I will take away from this capstone experience and my time at SNHU. There are several

soft skills that it takes to be a successful graphic designer, some of which include communication, persistence, time management, creativity, conflict resolution, and active listening (Brooks 2019). I already had a solid foundation for many of these skills from my retail customer service experience, but this course and my experience in the program overall have helped me to build on these. I have learned valuable collaboration and communication skills through the peer critiques in each of my courses and have had to become very adept at time management to make sure multiple design projects (academic and freelance) were completed in a timely manner. I feel confident in my skills utilizing the tools of the Adobe Creative Suite and look forward to growing in those skills with each project I take on. In my professional life, I will utilize my collaboration and time management skills to foster a positive team environment and meet deadlines. I will use my skills with Adobe Illustrator, Photoshop, and InDesign to create professional and polished marketing materials, layout designs, and web designs.

My courses here at SNHU impressed upon me the importance of being aware of potential cultural impact that can be created with design. Being socially and ethically responsible is an integral part of graphic design and art. In “The Role of Social Responsibility in Graphic Design,” Sarah Pajouh writes “there are three key components to effectively spreading a socially responsible message: making sure your message is accessible, relatable, and aligned with your values” (Pajouh 2019). What this means essentially is that your work should be easy to read and understand for all audiences, is content that your audience can relate to, and is something that does not conflict with your personal values. As a designer, I have a responsibility to keep these things in mind and to take on projects that I feel will have a positive social impact. If it is something that aligns with my own values, the work will be stronger anyway as it will be something I am passionate about. As I continue to create, I will do my part to make sure my

designs do not contain anything that could be culturally insensitive and will strive to create positive impact with my work. I always make sure I source my assets from free license websites and use them in line with the licensing guidelines. I want to create work that resonates with people and that makes a difference. My goal as a designer is to create work that inspires people and I hope this is something I will accomplish.

My current goal for my professional life is to find a role where I can learn more about the graphic design industry and be a part of a team of creatives, whether that be at a marketing and design agency or as part of a company's in-house marketing team. I intend to freelance on the side and do some work in the niche industry of stationery design. I plan to start small and start designing for Minted's card design competitions to get practice and put my work out there, while hopefully making some connections in the process. My ultimate career goal is to one day do book cover design or editorial design in the publishing industry, and to build my skills in that area I plan to create personal projects that showcase those abilities and make connections with people in the publishing industry.

My biggest takeaways from this experience are that collaboration and effective time management are key to successful design work and that you never stop learning something new about the design industry. The tools are always updating, and I look forward to keeping up with the new design trends and tools that come out each year. Collaboration will help me whether I am working as part of a team or working with clients. Managing my time wisely and displaying keen attention to detail will help me to make sure I put out designs that are what the client is looking for well before the deadline. Above all else, this capstone experience has showed me that the possibilities in the graphic design industry are truly endless, and that people can put out some incredible work when doing something they are really passionate about. I am grateful for the

opportunities I have had at SNHU, and I am looking forward to taking this next step forward in my career.

Sources

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