

Capstone Component 3: Professional Reflection

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As a Graphic Design and 3D Animation student at Southern New Hampshire University, I have learned and grown exponentially as a designer both from completing fun, and at times, challenging projects, and being fortunate enough to have a team of amazing instructors who were there to help me out whenever I needed some guidance. When I began my long journey through the program, I honestly did not know the extent of what a Graphic Designer does or the broad array of tools and programs they used to complete projects on time. All I knew was that I had a passion for designing and wanted to learn as much as I could about the field.

Patience has been the number one hurdle that I had to overcome when tasked with some projects; I had to practice patience when programs crashed unexpectedly and when my designs did not go the way that I wanted them too. I also had to practice the art of patience when learning how to do things for the very first time such as navigate through a program or create something from scratch such as my website or design portfolio. One of the things that I learned along the way though is that a little time and patience can lead to amazing creations that you never thought you could do and little revelations such as how much fun coding in HTML5 and CSS3 can be as well as how much I enjoyed preparing my capstone projects.

To be perfectly honest, at first, I did not completely understand what the definition of ‘Capstone’ was in reference to academics such as graphic design, so after a little digging, I found out that: “A capstone project is a culminating assignment, on which students usually work on during their final year in school or at the end of the academic program.” (Paulus, 2021). Well now this made sense as I was prompted early on to begin my final portfolio projects and continue creating and editing them throughout the course of my degree program. ‘Capstone’ simply referred to finalizing those projects and buttoning them up in a nice package to submit at the end.

Designing a website from scratch can definitely be challenging and it's something that the term 'patience' I mentioned earlier played a huge role in. One of the most challenging aspects of coding my website for me was deciding on what design, color palette, and layout I wanted to stick with; I think that I may have re-designed and re-worked the overall look of my website no less than a dozen times. In the end I think that, for a beginner (and perfectionist at that), my website looks pretty good and is visually appealing. The direction that I was aiming for when creating my website was a sort-of boho-chic look since it plays in with my personality and Pacific Northwest roots a lot. The way that I wanted to convey this was to use some earth tones and arched images as well as use some outdoor themed images of my own design on the index (main) page. I did not come to this decision quickly though as I had to research design layouts on various websites to include Wix, Pinterest, and Etsy but I did not want to pay for something pre-created and instead opted to code everything myself and design my images in InDesign and Illustrator. Any issues that I ran into (and there were a lot) were usually explained on helpful websites such as W3Schools, Bootstrap, Bootsnipp and StackOverflow.

Learning how to design a print portfolio proved to be challenging at first as well simply due to the fact that I had never done it before, which meant that I wanted to do it right. I had previously learned about marks and bleeds in InDesign earlier on in my degree program but I still had to go back for a refresher course of sorts. This landed me to a wonderful how-to tutorial written by Grace Fussell titled *Create a Stand-Out Portfolio Book in InDesign: Part One - the Cover* and *Create a Stand-Out Portfolio Book in InDesign: Part Two - the Inside*. This website taught me a lot about how a professional portfolio should look when printed and what elements you needed to include on both the outside cover and inside layers. It also taught me a lot more about how InDesign as a program was beneficial with projects such as this and how user-friendly

it was – it’s similarities to Illustrator and Photoshop helped out as well which is something that Adobe as a company perfected to a degree. The step-by-step process of these tutorials were easy to follow along with (although I did have to modify some steps as InDesign had undergone several upgrades since 2014).

One of the most helpful and beneficial things that I feel a designer needs in their toolkit is the ability to both give and receive criticism and feedback with grace and respect. Having one person, a group of peers, or a potential client critique your work not only strengthens you as a designer but it also helps you understand what direction you should go in as well as what your strengths and weaknesses may be. This helps you grow as an artist, employer or employee and it is something that can get you noticed and it also helps you to stay ethically true to yourself or your brand. It is my firm belief that you never stop learning no matter what you plan on doing in life. “When companies are considered ethical, consumers trust them, feel like the brand cares about their experience, and identify with the company. On the other hand, when brands use tactics that feel unethical, consumers lose trust in the brand which could lead to less brand loyalty or purchases.” (Bump, 2020).

The feedback that I received on my own work from my peers and instructor was, for the most part, taken very seriously and used to modify and improve my pieces to better fit the demographic of people that will be viewing my work. One critique that I got was in regards to my ‘Amethyst Bay’ ad. It was suggested to me that I re-arrange my text and change some of the colors so that it was more legible. I also took this suggestion to modify the logo placement and shapes around it. Another helpful critique I received was to fix the text on my Halloween flyer and ‘TOWN’ brochure/menu so that everything was left-aligned and easier to read. Again, doing

this allowed me to see my work in a different light and it inspired me to switch some images around as well as re-size them.

I would say that the most rewarding lesson that I got out of creating my capstone projects was that hard work pays off. I can't begin to describe how fulfilling it is to see all of your effort together in one cohesive format whether it be on a website or print portfolio. Designing my capstone projects was very similar to my experience at SNHU in that even though there were times where I felt like the workload was too much to handle, I pushed through and persevered. Although I am not yet entirely sure what professional goals I have when using my skills on the outside, I plan on applying everything that I have learned and will learn in the future to memory and practice my newfound techniques regularly so that I can produce the best work that I can for potential clients. I sincerely hope that my advanced knowledge and expertise with an array of applications and programs from Adobe products to 3D animation software such as Autodesk's Maya and Mudbox shows potential clients that I am willing to do whatever it takes and learn whatever I need to complete a project to the very best of my ability. SNHU has given me the tools to succeed and the most important thing that I can do is use them wisely.

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