Professional Reflection of Graphic Design Portfolio

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As I approach the culmination of my academic journey in graphic design, I find myself reflecting on the profound evolution I have experienced throughout this process. This capstone project, a significant milestone in my educational pursuit, stands as a testament to the knowledge, skills, and creativity I have gained over the years I have spent at Southern New Hampshire University. My educational odyssey in graphic design has been transformative. From the early stages of learning fundamental design principles to mastering complex software tools, every step of this journey has been an opportunity to broaden my understanding. This capstone project served as the ultimate synthesis of these learnings, challenging me to apply my knowledge in a real-world context.

In the initial stages of my graphic design education, I would categorize my work as decent—competent but lacking the finesse and depth that professional work demands. Basic design principles, color theory, and software proficiency formed the foundation of my skills. My projects demonstrated a grasp of fundamental concepts, yet they lacked the sophistication and creativity that define professional-grade design. As my academic journey progressed, the complexity of the classes increased. I found myself immersed in projects that demanded not only technical expertise but also creativity, strategic thinking, and a deep understanding of the end-users. These challenges pushed me out of my comfort zone and forced me to experiment, take risks, and explore innovative design solutions. While sometimes frustrating or difficult, this allowed me to do "the most important thing that any designers can do: be fearless and push themselves out of their comfort zone" (Ecker, New York Institute of Art & Design). Through countless hours of research, ideation, and iteration, I honed my ability to conceptualize ideas and translate them into visually compelling designs. I realized how important it was to keep every

design pleasing and engaging – always a vital aspect of any design (White, Elements of Graphic Design).

Navigating through creative blocks, tight deadlines, and mock-client expectations sharpened my problem-solving skills while collaborating with peers and receiving constructive feedback from mentors enriched my understanding of design aesthetics and user experience. Overcoming these hurdles instilled in me a resilience that I believe is indispensable in the dynamic field of graphic design. Moreover, grappling with the intricacies of project management enhanced my organizational and time-management skills, crucial for any professional endeavor.

Looking back on my journey through this graphic design program at Southern New Hampshire University, I am grateful to see how my work has transformed from merely decent to achieving a level of professionalism that I hadn't envisioned during those early classes. The evolution has been marked by a series of challenges, learning experiences, and a relentless passion for the craft. It helps that I have been surrounded by so many peers whose work is truly inspiring. Every class – indeed, every week – seeing their material made me want to become the best designer I could be. "Every great piece of design work you see should excite you, thrill you, and make you want to up your game," Lexie Lu writes in her article "Graphic Design Trends and Predictions for the Industry's Future." "Never be envious of another designer's work," she adds. "Just be inspired to do better." I have taken this advice to heart and love that my outlook has changed from "I could never do anything that good" to "I wonder if I could make this even better."

Some successes and educational moments I have experienced during this degree program included learning that utilizing negative space in projects can be the finishing touch to any design. I realized how important it was to utilize the "often overlooked but always important

less-is-more approach" (Hamilton, Portfolio Examples). I also learned that I should always think outside the box when it comes to creating something new and engaging, and that a "second or third opinion on a design can always give a new perspective" (Taylor, et al, p. 86). There have also been struggles, as I learned to navigate new applications to deliver graphic design projects for each class. I had not used Adobe Photoshop prior to starting at SNHU and had wished for more classes specifically teaching how to best utilize the Adobe Creative Suite programs. It has occasionally been frustrating, especially in my early classes, when instructors and curricula assumed a certain degree of prior knowledge in Adobe that I simply did not have. It often made me feel like I was running just to catch up when I had barely even begun.

Critically, I developed a keen awareness of the ethical and social implications of design. "The best designs, like all the best art, force us to think about think beyond our own perspective, to open ourselves to new ideas. They can change our soul while they fill our eyes" (Myers). Understanding the responsibility that comes with shaping visual narratives, I became cognizant of the power of design to influence opinions and promote positive change. This realization has profoundly influenced my approach to design, emphasizing the importance of empathy, inclusivity, and ethical considerations in my work. Maintaining ethical principles and incorporating social responsibility in the graphic design industry is essential in creating artifacts that have a positive and lasting impact on people and societies. Understanding and familiarizing myself with ethical design principles, such as transparency, honesty, and inclusivity help guide my design decisions. Making sure I stay updated on social issues and current events to ensure that my designs are "culturally sensitive and relevant" (Norcross, Forbes). I have learned the importance of respecting copyright and intellectual property to avoid plagiarism and using sustainable practices as I consider the environmental impact of my work. As I integrate these

principles into my graphic design practice, I can help contribute to the advancement of the industry, while "leaving a positive and lasting effect on people and societies" (Norcross, Forbes). Ethical design and social responsibility will not only enhance the quality of my work but also help build a more ethical and responsible graphic design community.

My aspirations as a graphic designer have been significantly refined and clarified through this capstone experience. Looking forward, I am inspired to leverage my skills not only to create visually captivating designs but also to contribute meaningfully to society. I aim to work with organizations that align with my values, focusing on projects that address social issues, promote sustainability, and champion diversity and inclusion. Additionally, designers "must be committed to continuously learning and staying abreast of emerging design trends and technologies" (Volk, et al), and I intend to do just that. Pursuing certifications, attending workshops, and collaborating with industry professionals are avenues I intend to explore to enhance my expertise. Moreover, I aspire to continue learning from professionals while also mentoring aspiring designers, and sharing my knowledge and experiences to nurture the next generation of creative talents.

This capstone project marks the culmination of a transformative journey—one that has equipped me with the skills, knowledge, and mindset necessary to thrive in the ever-evolving landscape of graphic design. I am grateful for the guidance of my mentors, the support of my peers, and the challenges that have shaped me into the designer I am today. As I embark on this new chapter, I am confident in my abilities, inspired by my experiences, and driven by a passion to make a positive impact through the art and craft of design.

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