

Professional Reflection (8-2)

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My capstone experience was both challenging and satisfying. The task of creating a comprehensive digital and print portfolio was initially nerve-racking. However, the experience of navigating through these challenges while adhering to a structured schedule and benefiting from valuable peer reviews has proven to be rewarding. The process allowed me to construct a portfolio that I am genuinely proud of, one that effectively showcases my skills and presents me as a capable designer to prospective employers and clients.

Throughout this project, I faced numerous significant decisions that influenced its direction. Initially, I had previously developed a bold and colorful brand identity for myself, but I recognized the need for a redesign to better reflect my calm and simple personality. Balancing these aspects while ensuring the brand remained distinctive posed a real challenge. However, I felt it important to stay authentic in crafting my personal identity, as it establishes genuine connections by showcasing one's true self, values, and uniqueness. It builds trust and relatability, fostering meaningful engagement and lasting identity (Esiekpe, 2023).

Another critical aspect was curating the content for my portfolio. The projects I chose would not only showcase my skills but also define my identity as a designer. For instance, I decided to exclude a coding project despite having worked hard on it. It wasn't my strongest work, and I wanted to steer clear of coding in my future career although I will mention my experience with those programs as they give me a competitive edge.

While I'm drawn to the artistic and aesthetic elements of graphic design, I'm fully aware that pursuing a career in user interface/experience (UI/UX) design aligns better with my aspirations and financial goals. UI/UX design means crafting digital interfaces that are user-friendly and attractive. It's divided into two parts: UI design takes care of how things appear, while UX design ensures the entire user experience is seamless and enjoyable (Norman &

Nielsen, n.d.). Looking back, I do wish I had more substantial projects in this realm. Recognizing this gap, I plan to pursue an external course in UI/UX design and undertake additional side projects. These efforts are aimed at reshaping the trajectory of my design path and enabling a smoother transition into the UI/UX field.

One challenge I grappled with was my perfectionist mindset, which I'm actively striving to change. While it's led to exceptional work, I've learned the hard way that it can lead to exhausting efforts and resources, aiming for expertise beyond my current experience level. Spending days refining a single project to match a senior designer's work was a common occurrence, but I've had to remind myself that I'm still a student and haven't yet gained that professional expertise (WP Engine, 2023). Additionally, I faced the issue of underestimating the time simple tasks would take. I often allocated just a few minutes for what turned into hours of work. In the field of design, this became a time drain. I've come to realize the importance of working within the allotted time and saving further revisions for later, understanding that sometimes, less is more.

I made sure to include various feedback in both my print-ready portfolio and portfolio website. Collaborating with peers and instructors was instrumental in this process. Peer reviews in design offer collaborative advantages, ensuring clarity, consistency, and improved teamwork. Conducted at various stages, they involve presenting designs, receiving feedback, and iterating for enhanced outcomes and streamlined processes (Singhal, 2022). Key feedback points I integrated focused on optimizing files, enhancing legibility and sizing, and incorporating effective call-to-action. For example, I received feedback that the logo for my website was too unassuming in size, and to update my personal statement to include more about my skills and traits as a designer. Though I saw no issue while I was designing, seeing my work through the

words of the feedback made me realize these issues. After fixing them, my portfolio had become just more appealing. I do not think there was any particular feedback I rejected, as they all addressed important issues or elements of my work. Collaborative efforts and critiques from others provide a fresh perspective, revealing flaws that I might miss due to being deeply involved in my work. These external reviews help me regain a holistic view, especially as my focus tends to narrow during the design process.

The capstone experience felt like reaching the summit of a long climb, where I could finally appreciate the progress I've made during my time at SNHU. Looking back at past projects, I've witnessed significant improvement over the years, dispelling doubts about my design skills. As the capstone approached, I worried about portfolio suitability, but assembling my work into a cohesive presentation has transformed my perspective, bolstering my confidence in my abilities.

In the realm of graphic design, creativity is celebrated, but designers must also navigate ethical considerations. They must maintain honesty and authenticity, avoid harmful stereotypes, contribute positively to society, and prioritize sustainability. Respecting intellectual property and ensuring user privacy is also paramount, allowing designers to balance creativity with responsibility for impactful and ethical designs (Singh, 2023). In advancing the graphic design industry and creating designs with a positive impact, I prioritize ethical principles and social responsibility. By embracing cultural sensitivity, I ensure my designs are inclusive and respectful, avoiding unintentional harm by understanding diverse perspectives and acknowledging cultural nuances (D. Saunders, n.d.).

Right after graduating with my Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design, my immediate goal for my professional life is to enhance my skills in UI/UX design. Since my degree program

lacked in this area, I intend to dedicate my available free time to taking courses, working on projects, and mastering essential tools. I want to boost my confidence, which is currently a bit lacking, to better prepare for interviews. Once I've gained enough education and beginner-level experience, I plan to apply for entry-level roles in UI/UX design, focusing on companies with established positions that offer mentorship and training. Additionally, I aim to pursue freelance design work on the side to supplement my income and keep my creative design skills sharp. My overall aim is to build a strong foundation in UI/UX design and continuously grow in my professional journey.

Professionally, my journey in the field of graphic design has equipped me with a diverse set of skills, abilities, knowledge, and dispositions that have proven essential when collaborating with peers and clients. Throughout my academic and early professional experiences, I've demonstrated proficiency in various forms of design, such as logo creation, branding, layout design, typography, and both digital and print design. This foundation has enabled me to approach projects with a comprehensive perspective, ensuring that each design I create aligns with the intended message and audience.

In terms of technical abilities, I've strengthened my expertise using a range of industry-standard tools within the Adobe Creative Cloud Suite. Specifically, I've gained mastery in Illustrator, InDesign, Photoshop, Lightroom, and Flash, allowing me to design intricate projects and manipulate visual elements effectively. I also recognize the evolving nature of the design landscape and the growing importance of user interface and experience (UI/UX) design.

My focus is on cultivating a range of skills crucial to UX design, including wireframing, prototyping, user research, interaction design, visual design, usability testing, UI design, and basic front-end development. I'm also committed to enhancing my analytical abilities, deepening

my understanding of accessibility considerations, and refining my expertise in mobile and responsive design. Additionally, I recognize the significance of effective cross-functional collaboration to ensure seamless implementation of designs (Mockplus, n.d.).

Moving forward, I'm committed to building and applying these skills dynamically and purposefully. I plan to take proactive steps to expand my knowledge base by seeking out online courses, workshops, and tutorials to learn about more Adobe programs, and external programs like Figma and Sketch, which are growing in popularity within the UI/UX world. This will not only equip me with the technical proficiency required for modern design challenges but also empower me to create more engaging and interactive user experiences.

In addition to technical skills, I am aware of the importance of soft skills in the design profession. Effective communication has played a pivotal role in my interactions with peers and clients. I've practiced active listening to understand clients' visions and requirements, ensuring that my designs effectively communicate their intended message. Collaborating on group projects has refined my ability to work in teams, leveraging each member's strengths to achieve optimal results. Furthermore, I have developed a keen eye for detail, which has enabled me to produce designs that are visually pleasing and impactful.

Soft skills are essential for designers as they go beyond technical expertise, enabling effective collaboration, communication, and understanding of clients' needs. Skills like active listening, empathy, and teamwork allow designers to translate client visions into tangible designs, fostering strong relationships and successful outcomes. These interpersonal skills also aid in presenting and justifying design choices, enhancing client satisfaction, and elevating the overall design process (Team Designlab, 2022).

To develop and apply these skills, I will utilize online educational resources to establish a foundational understanding of each skill and tool. Affordable programs will provide a head start, allowing me to learn the basics and gradually improve. I also intend to engage in mentorship programs to gain insights from experienced designers and will seek internships alongside to gain beginner-level practical experience in applying these skills in a professional setting. This will also give me experience to add to my resume, which will give me a professional and competitive edge in the long run.

The skills I'm building, such as wireframing, user research, and UI design, will significantly impact my academic and professional journey. As I enter the field of UX design, I'll be equipped with a foundational understanding of crucial tools and concepts, allowing me to contribute effectively from the start. My commitment to ongoing learning through mentorship and internships will ensure that I continuously refine and apply these skills, enabling me to thrive in the ever-evolving landscape of design and make meaningful contributions to both academic projects and professional endeavors.

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