

Professional Reflection

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A capstone experience is described as a “multifaceted assignment that serves as a culminating academic and intellectual experience for students” (Sabbott, 2016) and that has been true of this course. The many areas of this assignment have taught me how to evaluate my work, give constructive feedback, and the value of evaluating each other’s work. This has been an interesting course because I have never looked at my work as closely and critically as I did with this class. Through this course, I have learned to evaluate my work honestly and developed the skills to truly decide which pieces belong in a portfolio and which should be retired.

I suppose I view the capstone classes as a way to put everything that I have learned at SNHU to use. Throughout my time at SNHU, I have been building my way up to the capstone experience. All the classes before this one have prepared me for the final two courses. As I navigated each course, I learned valuable lessons in critical thinking and how to conduct quality research. Both of those skills have aided me in this final course. My prior classes in design have helped me to hone my critique skills, something else that has been useful for this capstone course.

In my website, I used the feedback I received from my instructor to improve the appearance and usability of my site. One piece of feedback I received was about the header image on my website. Instead of random nature photos that I have taken cycling through, I created a dark gray/black header, which is less distracting. Another change I made to my website is a section in one of the footer areas called “categories”. Previously, this was empty, displaying the word “uncategorized” only. I went through every page and applied a category that corresponds with the name of the section. Now, the “categories” area acts like a site map, giving users an

alternate form of page navigation. Collaborative design is extremely important. According to one article, “collaboration helps designers understand” (Bhalla, 2019) how to work in a team setting, and provides insight into the design process. By collaborating with others, you learn valuable skills, like how to be a better communicator and important critique skills. An article by the Nielsen Norman group states that critiques are vital for team building, and “help create a common foundation” (Gibbons, 2016) that offers a variety of perspectives. Through critiques that I have received from my peers at college and design friends, I have, in a sense, worked collaboratively with other designers. This collaboration has improved the quality of my design by providing useful insight. There are often things about our designs that we do not see, but others do, and it never hurts to ask someone else’s opinion.

In the future, professionally, I will take the skills I have learned and incorporate them into my life. Learning how to work collaboratively will serve me well if I find a job where I am part of a design team. Critique skills will be useful in such a job setting, also. If I were to only work for myself and take on contract jobs, having the ability to critique my work, and take constructive criticism, will be valuable. Furthermore, having good critique skills would be useful in a design firm. When you work as part of a team, some of that is spent critiquing designs and design ideas.

The goals for my professional life are to take everything that I have learned and apply it in the real world. Ideally, I would love to find a work-from-home job in the design industry.

Furthermore, I hope to find a part-time design job. However, if I need to start out working as an in-house designer, then that is what I will do. Also, if I cannot find part-time work then I will pursue full-time. My reasons behind part-time are that I want to pursue my fine art career,

too. Yet another reason for part-time work is my need for a good work-life balance, something that I was deprived of for years as I worked in retail management. Because I want to start a family, I require a proper amount of balance between my work and life. I have heard plenty of stories about parents unable to be there for their children. I do not want to be the person that is unable to take time off to care for a sick child or be there for important events. In addition, I really would love to have a job that lets me take time off for holidays. I have spent too many years celebrating Thanksgiving several days after the actual day, rushing Christmas Eve because I had to work that day, or going in to work on a holiday or day off because someone called in sick or just refused to show up. Part-time work gives me greater flexibility than a full-time job usually does. Another professional goal for myself is to possibly teach design. I love teaching and training, especially for the younger generation. I find it extremely rewarding.

According to an article in encyclopedia.com, ethical design “concerns moral behavior and responsible choices” (Buchanan, 2023) when we are designing. There are many ways that I can maintain ethical design principles while incorporating social responsibility. An article in 99designs.com feels that ethical design is about creating without harming. (Sownie, 2021) In other words, when I design something, be it packaging, a layout for a magazine, or a logo, I must continually evaluate my designs for any flaws that could be harmful to the environment or marginalized groups. As a designer, I need to make sure that my designs are not excluding whole groups of people or are negatively impacting the environment. Also, ethical design means that the designs are useful, engaging, and easy to use, navigate, or understand. What about social responsibility? It is Milton Glaser that said, “Good design is good citizenship” (Heller, 2015), and those words could not be truer. One way we can be good stewards and

remain socially responsible with our designs is to research the companies we choose to work for. (Heller, 2015) According to an article in Chiarscuromagazine.com, social responsibility shows “the respect and concern a designer has” for people in general. (Kokil, 2015) As designers, we are called to pay attention to how our designs affect people on a global scale. What we design and whom we design for can have major negative or positive effects. Part of being socially responsible is paying attention to cultural representations when we design. We need to ask questions about our designs. Are they offensive? Does this harm someone? What does this company that wants to hire me do? What are their business practices? Is this a company I want my name and designs associated with? By asking all of these questions, my designs can have a positive impact on the world. Design, if done correctly and ethically, can accomplish great things. For instance, design can raise money or awareness for a cause. Like the designer AJ Wiley, it is possible to have a positive impact on a group of people. As a senior graphic design major at the University of Nebraska- Lincoln, AJ Wiley created stickers inspired by his love of nature. (Unwire Text, 2019) Through his designs, Wiley is able to make others aware of different animal species, and how their habitats are in danger. (Unwire Text, 2019) People like Wiley inspire designers like me to make a positive impact in this world with the designs we create.

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