

**Professional Reflection: The Final Capstone**

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When I decided that I wanted to go back to school two years ago, I had already been working in the medical field for ten years, thirty had somehow snuck up on me, and COVID was in the middle of turning the world topsy-turvy. With so much going on around me, I decided it was time to take a big leap into the graphic design program. With little to no design experience under my belt, it was a bit intimidating not knowing exactly what to expect in this program, but I was willing to put in the work and hoped that would be enough to give me some success. Throughout the course of this program, I learned the importance of the creative process and the very intentional thought behind every design. I was given the opportunity to work a design through from start to finish and develop my own creative process. With the advantage of utilizing milestones and peer critiques, I was provided with a good foundation that could be taken and built upon in the professional realm. In this capstone class I was challenged to revisit my previous work and improve upon it, through feedback and critiques, for the purpose of creating print-ready and digital portfolios.

At the beginning of this capstone experience, inventory was taken of all the work I had accomplished over the last two years. I was intentionally searching for the strongest pieces to complete a portfolio that would not only represent my abilities as a designer but reflect positively on my brand (Kimbarovsky, 2024). At the beginning of my search, it became painfully obvious which projects were completed earlier on. As I continued further in this program my designs became more complete with full suites that I could utilize, however my earlier projects were much simpler and needed to be expanded upon. With the help of my professor, I was able to take a simple logo design and turn it into a well-rounded portfolio piece with tangible representations of its usage. Logos were shown on merchandise, paper goods, and promotional materials;

Publication layouts were expanded upon to produce additional pieces for a more complete portfolio piece.

Not only did this class help to expand my portfolio, but it also gave me the opportunity to give and receive critique. Each discussion proved helpful with well-rounded feedback that not only shed light on what needed improvement but also highlighted what had been done well (Anitra Nottingham, 2020). One of my web designs was directly influenced by a peer who suggested a greater contrast between the text color and the background photo on a web page banner. These opportunities of critique also gave me the chance to develop this muscle by simulating experiences that I will encounter in my professional career. Viewing other designs, processing, and understanding what worked and being able to acknowledge what could be improved upon and why.

Each discussion and revision reiterated the importance of incorporating and recognizing the principles of design, and this was directly applied to my portfolio. How was I utilizing the space and was I leaving enough of it (White, 2011)? Was the layout clean, logical, and balanced (Fig Taylor, 2012)? All these elements needed to be considered for a clean portfolio and to exhibit that I understood the roles they play in design. Each piece was laid out in a logical order, categorized for better understanding and flow. For my website, ease of navigation played a big part in its design so that any potential employer could get to where they needed easily, without being overwhelmed with unorganized clutter (Myers, 2009).

The written portions of this class proved to be just as important as its design counterpart. Preparing annotations helped me to revisit the process I took for certain projects and made me really think through why certain decisions were made. As a designer, part of my job will be communicating my design decisions to either clients or team members and being able to walk

them through the connection from a design brief to its execution. Not everyone is going to understand just by looking, sometimes I will be required to verbalize my thought process in order to justify a design choice and make it make sense. Not only will this clarify but will show that I have an understanding of the roles that each element plays in a particular design to communicate visually.

This semester, I was able to transition and focus my projects for the purpose of pursuing specific career paths, within the realm of graphic design. Logo and publication design were two areas that I came to love over the course of this program, so my portfolio was heavy with those designs, but the layout of my portfolio posed its own problem. While keeping in line with my personal branding was a no brainer, how to incorporate it was a bit more challenging. For continuity, the brand colors, shapes, and typography were carried throughout the layout but a bit more minimalistic. At the urging of my professor, I utilized differing scales to highlight certain pieces and add more interest to the layout (Geissbuhler, n.d.). Overall, the design was kept fairly simple to allow space for my work to breathe.

This class also helped me to visualize my portfolio and job search process as a designer which is very different from my current field. In the medical field a clean, well-organized resumé, references, and a good interview are all that need to be thought of, but graphic design is much more involved than this. Everything that is being presented must be pleasing to the eye – no matter what it is. I'm not just submitting a resumé but the design that the resumé is presented on and how it fits into the brand I've created for myself. For me, this class provided a lot of valuable information that adequately prepared me to pursue this new path.

A lot of emphasis was placed on presenting your brand well – whether that be in content, layout, or ethically. Research is a big component of applying to jobs so that each presentation

can be slightly tailored toward the potential employer or client. As in almost any design process, it's important to consider the target audience so that the most appropriate representation of my work can be displayed. Ethically, this means that I've followed all the rules and considered who will be viewing my work and what that might mean to that viewer personally. The most important thing I've learned in this program is that a brand needs to be protected and considered above all else (Stribley, n.d.).

As I move forward from this degree program and from this class, I hope that I will be able to retain everything that I've learned, even though I'm sure some ideas will have to adapt over time. A key take away was that inspiration can come from literally anywhere and anything – to keep an open mind and keep a sketch book (Lupton, 2011). I am excited to be able to move forward with my learning experience in a professional capacity, gleaning as much information as I can from my peers and developing my craft as a visual designer. I look forward to working towards developing and executing designs that will end up in magazines, on store fronts, or on promotional pieces in people's homes. Creating functional designs that are appreciated to their fullest capacity.

The purpose of this capstone class was to give each student the opportunity to look back and reflect upon their time in the graphic design program, revise previous work and turn it into a presentable portfolio. It also provided vital information to transition each unpolished student to a well-prepared professional, especially for those pursuing a career change. The information gleaned was pertinent and valuable in the transformation process from a brand-new design student to a design graduate; equipped to take on the professional world.

## Works Cited

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