

A stylized graphic of a wave, rendered in various shades of light blue and teal, positioned in the upper half of the page. The wave is composed of several overlapping, curved bands that create a sense of movement and depth.

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8-2 Professional Reflection
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When I started my program at Southern New Hampshire University, I had just completed my BA program at Washington State University with Cum Laude honors the day before. You might wonder why someone who had just completed their BA would immediately start another BA program. My original goal had been to complete my BA at WSU and go on to pursue an MFA with the goal of one day becoming a museum curator. Unfortunately, the stress of providing round the clock care for my late husband, Vaughn, as he battled military service-connected Amyotrophic Lateral Sclerosis (ALS) for 7 years had taken its toll on me and I was diagnosed with Spondylitis, Inflammatory Arthritis, and Fibromyalgia. As I was nearing the end of my first BA, it became clear to me that I would need to find a career option that would allow me to work from home. To be honest, I was devastated by this realization. I was 42, I had a plan for my future that honored my love of art and museums, and it felt as though my dream had died and I was lost. That was when I came to SNHU. My original plan had been guided by my background in and appreciation of art, so perhaps there was another way to honor that. This program literally gave me hope again, and that is the feeling I am left with as I complete my capstone project.

Overall, my capstone experience has reignited my passion for Graphic Design. It has given me an opportunity to reflect on my time here at SNHU and look at the progress I have made. When I started this program all of the Adobe applications were new to me and frankly learning new things when you are middle aged can be intimidating. As I reviewed and selected pieces for my portfolio, I could see the progress I had made over the course of my time here.

In the building of both my print ready and web portfolios I realized that all of these applications that I had been so intimidated and overwhelmed by at the beginning of my program,

had become natural and intuitive to me. One thing that I was particularly concerned about when I started was my concentration in web design as that meant learning code. While both of my parents had been computer programmers, I was not sure that I shared their aptitude for coding. As such I made it a personal goal during my academic program to avoid using visual web builders. I wanted to be able to write every line of code on my own. In the building of my portfolio website, that is exactly what I did, and this would not have been possible without the web concentration courses I took during my program.

Feedback I received during this capstone course was helpful, encouraging, and positive. I implemented a few changes based on peer feedback. One notable example of this is my two-page magazine spread. I received feedback from multiple people indicating that the background image was making the text in the article difficult to read. Looking at the layout after receiving this feedback, I could see what my peers were talking about, it was difficult to read. I had not noticed this issue before because I had been so focused on creating a design that was aesthetically pleasing that I didn't see that although the layout was visually appealing, the information on the page got lost. I chose to modify the background image in Photoshop, creating two images for the background, one for the area behind the text, on which I lowered the opacity, and another for the image that lined the bottom border and didn't interfere with the text. Now the design is much better, the information on the page no longer looks like an afterthought, and I was able to keep the colorful border that made the design so visually appealing. For me this demonstrates the importance of getting feedback on the pieces that I design. Sometimes you are too close to a project and fresh eyes on it can help you see things that you might otherwise overlook.

That said, there was some feedback that I chose not to take, specifically regarding the font I chose for my personal logo. I received feedback stating that the chosen font for my logo could be seen as less than professional. This is something that I have agonized over, as I'm striving for a balance between projecting professionalism and incorporating my personal style into the logo. I strongly believe that this font achieves that balance, as it possesses a playful and slightly unconventional quality that resonates with my own personality. This whimsical font mirrors my unique character. Moreover, considering the diverse range of freelance work I intend to undertake—spanning graphic design, photography, and imaginative artistic projects like the tree-topper—I'm primarily focused on portraying a sense of creativity and whimsy. I firmly believe that the professionalism I bring forth shines through in the designs I craft.

Looking forward, I know that the skills and knowledge I have gained through my program will serve me well. At present, my goal is to work as a freelance graphic designer and photographer, and I also plan to pursue an MS in Graphic Information Technology after taking a short break from school. Everything that I have learned in my program here at SNHU will apply to those goals, from the applications I learned how to use to the understanding of the importance of feedback on my work.

One of the most important things that I have learned in my time at SNHU is the importance of ethics and social responsibility within the graphic design field. Per the AIGA, “A professional designer adheres to principles of integrity that demonstrate respect for the profession, for colleagues, for clients, for audiences or consumers, and for society as a whole” (American Institute of Graphic Arts, 2009). This is the code by which I plan to conduct myself as a designer, as such,

if I am ever asked to create something that violates this code, I will decline. If that is a deal breaker for my client, so be it, operating with dignity and integrity is much more important to me than any money I could make for compromising my morals and ethics.

As previously stated, my plan is to work as a freelance graphic designer and photographer, and I believe that my time here at SNHU has prepared me well for this. This capstone course, in particular, has reinforced that belief. In reviewing my pieces and receiving feedback from my peers and Professor Cassidy-Vanek, I was able to reflect on my academic career and see the building blocks that have led me to where I am now. My degree program and this capstone course have truly been a rewarding and invaluable experience for which I will always be grateful.

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