8-2 Final Project: Professional Reflection

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When I started this program, I had no idea what to expect. Online learning was a new concept to me and the structure of the term schedule took some getting used to. Throughout the program, I have learned so much and still have so much more to learn. I have yet to realize that I’ve completed school and earned my bachelor’s degree. I’m turning 38 next Tuesday and over the last 17 years, my biggest regret has been not completing my degree when I went to college the first time after high school. Throughout that time, I’ve worked at one soul-sucking job after another and came to really appreciate the value of a degree. This degree means so much to me and for the first time in a long time, I’m excited about my career future. I think that overall, the program set me up very well for this final project. Along the way I worked on a variety of projects that I was able to bring together in my portfolio, showing off my wide skillset. I was able to gain valuable feedback on my work so I could improve my designs and make them as effective as possible. Every class that I’ve taken has prepared me for what culminates into this final capstone project.

It’s been a long journey that’s come with many challenges and obstacles. My software proficiency has been my biggest challenge and obstacle while progressing through the program. This is the area that I think is also my weakness. I have to admit that I’ve felt as though I’ve had to teach myself the software throughout this program and without immediate help, it’s a very difficult thing to do. In my previous work experience, I’ve taken pride in my ability to learn any kind of software quickly and become so knowledgeable, that I could teach others. I’m finding that to very much not be the case here. At the moment, the only obstacle holding me back is my software proficiency. I can think of amazing creations but if I don’t have the knowledge or proficiency to use the software to realize my ideas, then it leaves me hindered. I am going to pursue further education with in-person classes so I can learn the software much quicker.

Throughout this program and within the capstone project, feedback has played an essential role in refining my work and bringing fresh perspectives. By involving others in the review process, I gained insights that I might have missed working solo. Different perspectives can highlight unseen flaws or opportunities for enhancement, leading to a more polished and comprehensive final product. It's a process that fosters growth, encourages learning, and ultimately leads to better design outcomes. I’ve always sought feedback and critiques because I believe that it’s the best possible way to see your design from an outside perspective. Collaboration with peers in an academic and professional environment will play an important role in the success of my designs and also those of the other designers on my team. For my print-ready portfolio, I incorporated feedback from a peer regarding the clarity, unity, and balance of my designs. I changed the layout of some of the pages in my print-ready portfolio to increase the consistency of the layout throughout the portfolio. Some peers also suggested that I ensure my designs can be easily understood at a glance, without sacrificing the complexity and depth of the concepts they represent. I adjusted the contrast in some works and simplified others to ensure they could be quickly and accurately interpreted. Additionally, I incorporated feedback about my color use in my print-ready portfolio. A peer suggested that I change the color of the font on each page to a color that is more professional and doesn’t pull attention away from the main design. On my portfolio website, I did not receive much feedback. A few colleagues pointed out that while the designs were eye-catching, the user experience could be improved as sometimes it was slow to load. Based on these suggestions, I improved the load time by reducing the size of all my media elements and ensuring that it was mobile-friendly, providing a smoother, more intuitive user experience.

The lessons I've learned through this program and while creating my print-ready portfolio and portfolio website have been invaluable and they will definitely influence my future professional endeavors. What I've learned in my journey as a graphic designer will be instrumental in both my future academic and professional endeavors. First, the technical skills and creative problem-solving abilities that I've developed will serve as a solid foundation for any future work. The technical skills I've acquired in the process of creating my refined pieces, a user-friendly portfolio website, and print-ready designs have given me strong groundwork that I can continue to build upon. These are practical skills that are highly sought after in today's digital world, and I plan to continue honing these skills through further study and practice. Understanding the principles of good design, mastering various design software, and knowing how to create visually compelling and effective materials are all skills that are transferable across many professional disciplines and roles. Moreover, the soft skills I've honed, such as collaboration, communication, and receiving and implementing feedback, are invaluable in any setting. In academic contexts, these skills will enhance my ability to work on group projects, present my ideas effectively, and continually improve based on feedback from instructors and peers. Professionally, these skills will enable me to work productively with team members, understand and meet client expectations, and continually improve my work based on feedback.

Last, the mindset of continuous learning and adaptability that I've adopted is something that I plan to apply in all future endeavors. In an ever-evolving field like graphic design, staying updated and continually improving is critical. This approach to learning and growth, however, is not limited to design, it's relevant in any academic or professional field. In academic settings, it will drive me to seek out the latest research and best practices in my field of study. Professionally, it will push me to stay updated on industry trends, learn new tools and techniques, and continually strive to improve my work. In conclusion, my journey has equipped me with a diverse set of skills and a growth-oriented mindset that I plan to leverage in my future endeavors. This experience has been a lesson in collaboration, technical skills, and design principles. I intend to apply these principles wherever my academic and professional journey takes me.

Maintaining ethical principles and incorporating social responsibility are fundamental to my role as a graphic designer. An essential part of my approach is honest communication. I am committed to creating designs that convey information truthfully and transparently because misleading visuals can erode trust. Inclusivity also forms the cornerstone of my design philosophy. By creating designs that are accessible and appreciated by a diverse audience, I aim to make everyone feel seen and considered. This includes being conscious of color choices for those with color blindness, ensuring legibility for people with visual impairments, and deploying imagery that respects cultural diversity. Additionally, I am environmentally conscious and advocate for sustainable practices in print design. I aim to use eco-friendly materials, such as recycled paper and vegetable-based inks, and strive to minimize waste throughout the design and printing process. I also emphasize cultural sensitivity in my work. By respecting the cultural significance of symbols, colors, and other design elements, I can avoid unintentional offenses or cultural appropriations.

In my relationships with clients, I will uphold high ethical standards by ensuring transparency in contracts, respecting confidentiality, and delivering on my promises. Additionally, I see my skills as a means to contribute to socially beneficial causes, such as doing pro bono work for non-profits, designing campaigns for social issues, or contributing to community projects. Through these principles, I believe I can contribute to the advancement of the graphic design industry and create work that leaves a positive and lasting impact on society. Each artifact I create serves not only its immediate purpose but also contributes to a broader narrative of a more inclusive, honest, and socially responsible world.

Reflecting on my journey throughout this program and within this capstone project, I've come to realize that while technical skills and creativity are indeed important, interpersonal and communication skills are equally crucial, especially when it comes to working with peers, clients, and other stakeholders. Collaboration is an essential aspect of my profession. The ability to effectively communicate design ideas and concepts, provide and receive feedback, and work cohesively as part of a team are all integral to achieving successful project outcomes. Soft skills like communication and teamwork were especially important during a group project in my design class. We had to come up with a design solution for a mock client. Despite the different ideas and opinions within the group, we managed to combine our strengths and produce a proposal that was highly praised by our professor. This would not have been possible without open communication, compromise, and collaboration among team members.

Creativity and problem-solving are skills I use every day as a designer. For example, I was once tasked with designing a call-to-action poster with a lot of specific information to include. The challenge was to make the poster visually appealing without it appearing cluttered. I decided to use a hierarchy of typography and color to guide the viewer's eye and ensure the most important information stood out. It was a creative solution to a common problem. In terms of technical skills, I've had to use my proficiency in Adobe Creative Suite extensively. For instance, when I worked on a branding project for a local start-up, I used Adobe Illustrator to create a unique and meaningful logo that represented their brand values. I also used Adobe InDesign to lay out their business cards, letterheads, and other print materials, ensuring that all elements were aligned and spaced correctly for a professional look.

Looking ahead, I know that these experiences will be invaluable. For instance, the technical skills I've gained in using Adobe Creative Suite will be crucial in almost every design role I undertake in the future. The soft skills I've developed, like communication and teamwork, will be useful in any professional or academic setting, be it participating in team projects, liaising with clients, or presenting my work to colleagues or professors. In terms of dispositional requirements, my attention to detail and ability to work under pressure will continue to be important. Whether I'm ensuring that a design aligns perfectly with a print layout or meeting a tight deadline for a client project, these qualities will help me produce high-quality work and succeed in the fast-paced environment of the design industry.

As an aspiring graphic designer, my professional goals are numerous and multifaceted. One of my primary objectives is to ensure continuous learning, which involves staying updated with the latest design trends, software, and techniques. To achieve this, I plan to regularly participate in workshops, in-person courses, and webinars. Concurrently, I aim to build a robust and diverse portfolio that not only showcases my skills but also demonstrates my growth and versatility as a designer. Networking is another crucial aspect of my professional blueprint. By connecting with other professionals in the field, attending industry events, and joining design communities, I hope to find opportunities for collaboration, learning, and possibly job offers.

While I appreciate all aspects of graphic design, I have a keen interest in specializing in specific areas, such as branding and package design, to deepen my expertise and open up more specialized job opportunities. Ultimately, I aspire to venture into working in the fashion industry or might even start my own design studio. This ambition is driven by my desire for the freedom to choose my projects and create a work environment that best suits my creative process. Finally, once I have accumulated sufficient experience and expertise, I would love to give back to the community by teaching graphic design. This could be executed through workshops, online courses, or even at a design school. Overall, I am enthusiastic and excited about the journey ahead in my graphic design career.