

## **8-2 Professional Reflection**

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This paper marks the completion of a goal and closes a long-awaited chapter in my life story, which began in the 90s. I started my degree and then, honestly, did not know what I wanted to be or do when I “grew up.” So, I went to work, thinking I would return, but then life happened. In 2015 a significant life change occurred, and over the next four years, I rediscovered my love for the arts. In the fall of 2018, I considered returning and finishing my degree. In January 2019, I jumped in, feet first, with my sights set on completing my degree and walking across the stage to receive my diploma. My experience with Southern New Hampshire University (SNHU) has been excellent. Have there been bumps and valleys over the years? Absolutely, but that is life. Taylor is my advisor; he was always responsive and listened to my thoughts. We worked well together—he even listened to my frustrations without judgment when those incidents arose.

I have heard of capstones over the years, never fully grasping the gravity of their importance; however, today, I understand the feelings, the anxiety, and the stressors of the word “capstone entirely.” The capstone project in college is the apogee, or completion marker, of a student’s coursework leading to the culmination of their program with a degree in their chosen field of study (Smith, 2021). These past eight weeks have been the most challenging of the past four years. This week, as I reflected on where I am and the reality of my accomplishments, I realized I was in the home stretch and preparing to cross the finish line and close this chapter. Then, the excitement began building while looking to the future and anticipating the next chapter.

The academic program here at SNHU has provided a well-rounded educational experience. Several courses pushed me out of my comfort zone, revealed some biases’, and taught me how to look at the world through the general education lenses of history, humanities,

social sciences, and natural and physical science. Looking back at my first graphic design requirement, COM 130 Media Com and Visual Literacy, the skills I have achieved are evident. Although I felt accomplished with my final presentation for that course, I reflect on the design today and see where I have matured and grown in my design skills. For most of my electives, I chose photography courses for two reasons. First, photography and graphic design complement one another, and second, I have a passion and love for capturing memories. From a very young age, I have enjoyed photography. This degree allowed me to develop my skills, learn the intricacies of my camera, and navigate the field of photography.

Along with these photography skills, FAS 240, The Business of Photography, introduced me to the ins and outs of owning and operating my own business. Although focused on photography, this course content easily applies to any field, especially the arts. Online degree programs are not easy; however, I could quickly go through my program evaluation, list my takeaways from each course, and show how each class provided the necessary skills and knowledge to push me along to complete the capstone. I found great support and encouragement from my advisor, instructors, and classmates. This feedback fueled my journey and my motivation to continue to completion of my degree. These skills include receiving and delivering feedback, compliments, and critiques.

### **Feedback and Collaboration**

Part of the growing process involves accepting feedback, compliments, and criticisms. These types of feedback help us assess our lives and progress to better ourselves as people and designers. “It’s through mistakes that you actually can grow. You have to get bad in order to get good.” –Paula Scher (Scher, 2021). This quote is so apropos because I have found that the greatest feedback and growth have been born out of what I perceive as my biggest failures.

Feedback also forces me to see myself as others see me and challenges me to move past those perceptions. I hold high expectations for myself and find it much easier to see my shortcomings than my accomplishments. My mindset changed while working through this capstone project.

Looking back at my work, both in written and design skills, I see tremendous improvement. I was able to go back and better assess where I was when I began my degree program and where I am today. I still have improvements to make and have been generating additional goals to continue to improve. I considered collaboration when processing the feedback on my portfolio pieces in this course. Collaboration is like putting together a jigsaw puzzle. By requesting and receiving feedback, I get different perspectives. Collaboration is a great tool, especially when looking for ways to expand my network connections, find clients to work with, or find places to display my work. Collaboration also provides opportunities to improve my skills by learning from others and potentially opening doors that wouldn't be possible otherwise.

My process for reviewing and implementing feedback is as follows. First, I considered my classmates as collaborators and my instructor as the client. I would take the feedback notes and generate a list. Once the list was complete, I would group duplicates and implement those changes. I did implement all of the feedback I received. When there were contradictions between classmate and instructor feedback, I always chose the instructor feedback, they were grading the assignment, and therefore I treated their input as I would that of the client, which holds more weight. Customer satisfaction is one of my top priorities.

### **Application for the Future**

My future is uncertain; however, there is a lot of excitement and anticipation about what the future holds. Morals and ethics are essential to me in all aspects of my personal and professional life. Being raised that your word is your bond, I live my life to that end.

I have learned so much through the academic program at SNHU concerning copyright infringement, obtaining releases, plagiarism, attribution, and citations. Alongside those legalities, I became more aware of diversity and inclusion. We live in a constantly changing, multicultural world with demographic diversity and a culture of inclusion. Both are crucial to the success of the graphic design industry. My goal in designing is to present a clear message without offending anyone. I must be aware of how images “speak louder than words.” If the design is going to be seen by a global audience, the image may communicate a different message under different cultural, economic, and social values. That being said, I am aware that it may not always be possible in this day and age. It seems there are a lot of things that could potentially offend. I feel my responsibility is to be aware of potential offensiveness and communicate that to the client. They ultimately decide what they want to communicate. A recent real-life example just exploded in our country when Bud Light chose to create a partnership with the transgender influencer Dylan Mulvaney. This decision sparked some outrage, but Bud Light stands behind its decision, with its marketing director stating, “...the brand is in decline and needs to evolve and be more inclusive.” (Dennis, 2023).

### **Professional Goals**

I desire to continue as a lifelong learner, and Dictionary.com defines lifelong learning as the provision or use of both formal and informal learning opportunities throughout people’s lives to foster the continuous development and improvement of the knowledge and skills needed for employment and personal fulfillment. My professional goal is to continue adding tools and skills to my design and photography toolbox. I have watched several YouTube videos and Adobe Tutorials, which I will continue. I am in the process of relocating; therefore, one big goal is to make connections to grow my professional network. I am moving from a more rural area to a

large metropolitan area and expect to find several networking opportunities. I have also registered with the local art association. On the recommendation of a classmate, I have a subscription to Communication Arts magazine and follow graphic designers and photographers on social media.

One goal I found as I reviewed my reflections from past coursework was my dream to open a small gallery in an area that lacks the resources or opportunities to experience art. I want to display different types of art and offer a chance to create different kinds of art at minimal or no cost. This endeavor would encourage art exploration to spark an interest or tap into a gift they may not know they have. I strongly desire to give back and contribute to the arts in any way I can.

### **Skills and Knowledge**

The skills and knowledge I have obtained at SNHU are innumerable. As a graphic design and media arts major, my skills and understanding of the Adobe suite of products have been the most beneficial. When I began my educational journey, I had not used any Adobe products, so I started at square one. Through the coursework, I have gained a working knowledge of Adobe Illustrator and Photoshop and beginning knowledge of InDesign and Dreamweaver. If there is something I am trying to design and I am not sure how to accomplish the task, I will find the solution. The course GRA280-Design Thinking Graphic Design is a course I wish I had taken earlier in my journey. Mind mapping and mood boards were turning points in my design process. I utilized an approach, but it was not as efficient as these two skills have proven to be, especially after completing a project and writing my reflections.

I have increasingly used Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator more and more as I learn new skills and investigate software improvements and updates. I find myself lost in discovery as I

dive into these programs to see what the tools and filters can achieve. I look forward to the additional time I will have to learn more about these two products. Over the past four years, I have compiled a list of projects I would like to create that will involve improving my skills in programs like Adobe InDesign and Dreamweaver to increase my knowledge in page layouts and web design. I can honestly say this degree has ignited a fire, a passion for dreaming, creating, and communicating. My best days are when I have had the opportunity to create something. This creation may be a miniature doodle on a break or lunchtime or one of the rare days where I can spend an entire day with my pen and paper and lose myself in curves, lines, dots, and dashes. Whichever scenario, the skills and knowledge from my academic journey have been essential in propelling me into the future.

So, as I arrive at the end of this reflection, which equates to a final upload accompanied by a last click on the submission buttons, I am experiencing a wide array of emotions. “Transitions are a time for reflection, and a time for looking forward.”—Roy Cooper (Cooper). Mr. Cooper captures the feelings I am experiencing today as I reflect on the last four years of my educational journey. There is a sense of relief and accomplishment, and although there is a sense of sadness, there is also a sense of anticipation and excitement for the next chapter of my life. My success is not exclusively mine; it was a collaboration of the support of my family, friends, advisor, instructors, and classmates. I am so glad I faced my fears and enrolled at SNHU. As I walk across the stage at graduation in one week, I believe these emotions will be magnified. I look forward to sharing my SNHU experience with others who may be considering returning to school for their degree. Although the journey was not always easy, it was worth it. Now, I look forward to turning my “projects to create” list into the whimsical doodles that have been rousing in my soul and waiting to be released.





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