

Final Project: Professional Reflection

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It is hard to believe that my time with Southern New Hampshire University is coming to an end and a goal I saw as being so daunting many years ago has been accomplished. In 2018 I set out as a transfer student with my AFA, which was completed in 2001 and had its own ups and downs, to achieve my BA in graphic design by starting at a local college here in Florida, Florida Atlantic University. My journey at FAU included my Introduction to Digital Art course which really opened my eyes to fine art in digital form. I had been working as a graphic designer for many years already, but digital fine art was different for me and at first, I did not like it. I did not like taking someone else's work, manipulating it and then calling it my own. I did not like artists who solely did this as their art form. I did however learn to embrace using royalty free images and mixing them with my own photography to create one of my favorite pieces that is in my final portfolio titled *Little Girl Dreams*. I was also able to take a Digital Photography course, my only brick and mortar in person class on my BA journey. This class I thoroughly enjoyed and was able to learn some great photo editing techniques and my professor was very complimentary of my work and told me with my style and skills as a photographer I could definitely find work in that industry. I got an opportunity to connect even more with my muse and daughter, Izzy, who posed for countless photoshoots and led to another of my favorite projects in my final portfolio.

I ended up having to take a break from my studies due to an unexpected job change followed by the pandemic. It was during that time that I found SNHU and enrolled to finish my degree online. My design courses here started with some of the more basic digital graphic design classes where I excelled and even had my professor for Graphics & Layout Print Media ask to use my final project as an example for future classes. I really enjoyed peer critiques where I could get fresh eyes on my designs and also provide some real-world experience critiques to others. I also enjoyed getting my hands dirty again with hand coding web design, I used to

create websites back in the days of Adobe GoLive and then I moved up to Dreamweaver and over the past several years I got pretty good at manipulating WordPress and other CMS platforms. The web courses got me into learning some coding that I would have used a plugin for on WordPress so there was definitely some hardcore learning going on there. Typography was another course I had looked forward to, it was not quite what I had expected with our final project being a typography portrait but there was a lot of good refreshing of typographical hierarchy and nuances that took my designs to the next level of professionalism.

Coming into this capstone course I was excited for some seasoned feedback from my professor and my cohorts who had also been on this learning journey. I was also curious to see the final portfolios of my classmates and happy to provide what I felt was some great feedback to them along the way. Looking at other designer's work is a great way to learn more about your own work and style. When just starting out, this helps spark ideas and creativity and when one is further along in their design career, it still helps with ideas but also allows us to find creative solutions for improvement as well. I found my own style in graphic design to be very different from a lot of my cohorts. Some of these folks have come with gaming backgrounds so their approach was more adventurous, more intricate in certain ways or bolder in others. I discovered my own style was developing clean, concise and well-structured pieces while always keeping the theme or branding close in mind and making sure all projects are cohesive.

When it came to building my final portfolio, I had a lot of different types of works that I had created in my courses versus the portfolio I was already using with my resume which was purely work from my time on corporate marketing teams or with smaller businesses as a freelancer. Because our final portfolio is to be our best work, I did pull a few pieces from my professional work that I felt fit the flow. Almost all of my projects received a green light from

Professor Previte and my cohorts. There were a few tweaks needed to my TOWN brochure and the Woodblock Printing layouts which I gladly incorporated. They had to do with orphans on my paragraphs and choosing the appropriate paragraph structure to avoid odd rivers in the article flow. These are things that can be missed by the designer but picked up with fresh eyes and are important to be mindful of. Putting the print pieces all together in one book was probably the most challenging part in the end. The website was easier for me to set the flow and order of projects and how to separate them. I had never really shown my projects in an in-context view before and that was a key take away from my time in this program, especially in the advanced courses. I would do this for client mockups so they could get a better visualization but had not brought that into my own portfolio book or site much. I am used to having actual individual printed pieces with me versus a single printed book so using this format helped in its creation. In the end, I do feel I have produced something polished and professional that I can have printed for future job interviews and have available for download.

SNHU took great care in all of my design courses to include training and information on being an ethical designer. I keep this in my mind every day with my current position when looking for and using royalty free and creative commons imagery. We should always follow the creative commons licensing rules and give attribution where required and never steal another artist's work. As I mentioned earlier, I have a hard time with artists using another person's work and manipulating it slightly then calling it their own. It seems a very fine line exists that allows this to happen way more often than it should, it is my goal, as a professional in my field, to be sure this line is not crossed in my own work or the works of those I collaborate with.

My goal with achieving my BA in graphic design is to be more than the designer. I have already been working as a graphic designer for quite a while and want to move into more of a

creative or art director role. I really enjoy working with corporate marketing teams and collaborating with managers, copy writers and communication specialists to create visually compelling collateral. Many large corporate companies require bachelor degrees to even be consider as a designer let alone a manager or director. I feel my journey with SNHU and the level of professionalism I have stepped into with my final portfolio through these courses will help me get to that next chapter in my career.