

Reflection on Academic Journey through Graphic Design

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Undergoing the capstone course for my Bachelor of Arts in Graphic Design and Media Arts has provided me the opportunity to explore the growth I have experienced throughout my academic program. The final project for this course, revising old design projects to make a new portfolio, has helped me reflect on my strengths and weaknesses as a designer. The capstone course has also encouraged me to think critically about how the skills I have learned throughout this program can be applied to my future careers. Not only does this refer to the technical knowledge I have gained but also the ability to think critically and collaborate with others.

Throughout the final capstone project, I experienced unique challenges and solutions at rebuilding 10 designs for my portfolio. The first project for my portfolio was a branding set for the imaginary company, Upper Crust Bakery. When recreating this project, I was unsure how to change the logo design, as I still liked the original graphic. As I practiced tracing over the design, I thought about how I liked the simplistic design of my personal brand logo. At the same time, one of my peers critiqued the original design, recommending that I lessen the number of colors used by making both objects in the logo (the croissant and rolling pin) the same color. With these ideas in mind, I created a new graphic with simpler details and a color palette of only brown and green. I kept these hues because I wanted to focus on their meaning. Brown and green are associated with nature and health (Galvan, n.d.), reflecting the personality of Upper Crust Bakery, whose mission is to use natural ingredients to make healthier, tastier treats.

For my second project, McIntosh Sod Farm, I had to make a branding set entirely from scratch. Unlike the other pieces, I did not have a previous design to use for inspiration, so I spent some time researching sod farm logos and pictures of equipment used in the sod business. At first, I imagined the logo being an icon graphic. I tried to incorporate aspects like the client's dog into the logo, but the company mission wasn't clear through this design. A peer recommended

that I try exploring visuals more focused on the business. In the end, I decided to go with a logo that mostly focuses on typography. To add personality, I edited the s character in the word sod to roll out into a line below the company name, resembling a strip of sod being unrolled. For the business card, I made a graphic of a sod truck hauling sod. I spent time looking at real-life references and simplifying/smoothing the lines of the truck I drew. For the color palette, I picked brown, green, and blue; brown represents the soil, green represents the color of healthy sod, and blue represents the water that nourishes it.

The third project in my portfolio series is a set of advertisements (table tent and brochure) for the fake restaurant Pasta Amore. One of the most important aspects of these designs that I felt needed to be changed was the typography. The client information I received at the beginning of the project stated that Pasta Amore strives to provide a modern twist on traditional Italian dishes. The first font I used was a heavy serif font that looked inspired by traditional typography (Todd, n.d.); while it fit the idea of traditional, it failed to exemplify Pasta Amore's uniqueness in trying to combine traditional and modern values and ideas. After looking through various fonts in Adobe Fonts, I chose the font family Decoy. I think Decoy combines traditional type characteristics like serifs with contemporary attributes like bubbly shapes. I think this decision was very beneficial for my project, because it portrays the client as a fresh, unique personality.

My fourth project for the capstone course is an advertising set for the fake brand Amethyst Bay Spa and Resort. The Amethyst Bay advertisements were my first graphic design project, so going into the creation of these items for my capstone course, I knew that I wanted to completely transform these designs. In my original design, I decided to focus on the spa aspect of the company, but I had some trouble communicating the message of the advertisements. While the text stated that Amethyst Bay was having holiday deals on spa treatments, some of the

visuals I used in the ad (like the person receiving a massage) weren't communicating the message clearly to my peers. Remaking this project for my capstone, I decided to use imagery that focused on the resort instead. In the print advertisement, I used a photo of a person relaxing in the pool; in the background, there are chairs, tents, and palm trees. In the process of this project, I received feedback on my designs. One of my peers suggested that I should try making my print and digital ads match each other, so they would fit as a set. I think this was an important piece of feedback for me. For the web banner, I used the same icons and colors, and created a graphic of palm trees to tie back to the resort scenery in the print design. I think the changes I made for this project helped make a much more concise and visually pleasing product.

The fifth project for my portfolio, and the first of two 3-D designs, is a low-poly lantern prop for a video game. This was the first 3-D model I created, so the design was supposed to be simple. During the original course I created this design for, I forgot to make a light inside of the lantern. To make the light, I first made a sphere-like shape, and then applied a shiny material with a slight yellow color. To take things a step further, I added a light effect to the sphere. In the rendered picture, the light shines inside the lantern. One thing I would change about this project is its presentation. The rendered image does not do a great job at showing the colors and extra details on the model. To make a better render, I would need to experiment more with the number/intensity of lights present in the scene.

The 3-D carousel toy project was one of the hardest projects I worked on for my portfolio. The original idea I had for including this project in my portfolio was to recreate it entirely. I wanted to rebuild the carousel, giving it a new look, and then sculpt on top of it to make more details. Once I got to the point of the course where I needed to work on this project, I realized my idea was too big for me to conduct in the amount of time I had to do it. 3-D design is

a much more time-consuming process for me compared to 2-D design. I spent some time experimenting with remodeling the design but kept running into technical errors with the model. I was concerned with completing the design in time, so I ended up changing my goals for the project. I instead focused on changing the paint of the base model to look more like the theme I was originally going for. If I could change the decisions I made on this project, I would have kept the paint and sculpting details from the first rendition and focus on enhancing them.

The seventh project for my portfolio is an illustration of the fictional character Sakura Kinomoto. For this project, I decided to change a few things. Along with a different illustration style, I used a different brush tool to make it. I used the KYLE Ultimate Charcoal Pencil brush from Kyle T. Webster's dry media pack. Another aspect of the project that was changed was the character's pose. I tried to go for a more natural looking pose, using stock photography from Adorka Stock on DeviantArt as a reference. While the process for this project changed during its revision, the feedback I received from my peers still influenced the final image. Something my peers noticed about the first drawing is that there were errors in line consistency; while most of the linework was clean and round, there were some areas where the lines were sharp/jagged. Thinking back on my process, I realized this was most likely because I used an eraser brush that had a different consistency from the line brush. In the revision stage, I tried to use the eraser tool less, and made sure to use an eraser with similar brush properties to my line art.

The eighth and ninth projects for my portfolio are icons that I was commissioned to make. For the eighth project, I drew a bust icon of the video game character Princess Zelda. Like my previous illustration, I originally struggled with texture consistency in some areas. I decided to try a different method for this project; instead of creating it in Adobe Photoshop, I used Adobe Illustrator. I decided to use Illustrator because I find it easy to create smooth, consistent

lines/shapes using the pencil and curvature tools. The process for the ninth project, a Sailor Neptune icon, also shared similarities with the Sakura Kinomoto illustration. I tried to make the icon in a style like the Sakura illustration, but I was not as satisfied with the outcome for this project. If I could change what I did for this project, I think I would draw a full portrait instead of a bust and make Sailor Neptune more expressive/interactive with her environment. I would also focus less on trying to make the style like that of another piece, because I think focusing on this too hard holds me back creatively.

The final project I created for my capstone course portfolio is a design based on the Kirby video game series. I drew the main character, Kirby, and his friend Waddle Dee relaxing on a floating island during a sunny summer day. While I don't have much experience with drawing environments, I was happy with the simple island I made. Recreating this project for my portfolio, I kept a lot of elements from the original drawing but tried to make the design cleaner. The first time I created it, I was just starting to use Adobe Illustrator, so I wanted to show my experience working with this program in the final design. A great piece of critique I received during this project was about the perspective; a peer pointed out that the tree was not positioned properly according to the perspective of the island. While I ended up removing the tree entirely, this advice helped me pay more attention to perspective during the recreation process. I think the perspective improved in the final design, although one thing I would change is the lawn chairs, as they are still not aligned properly.

Collaborating with other designers has been an important part of the design process throughout my time in the Graphic Design and Media Arts program. Interacting with my peers has helped me see new perspectives towards design and has given me constructive criticism that I have used to enhance my projects. Throughout the design program, we've been encouraged to

provide real critics to our peers, detailing design strengths and weaknesses using the sandwich technique (*Feedback Strategies*, n.d.). While this method is not full proof, it has helped me provide precise constructive criticism to other designers. Collaboration is an important skill to apply in my future career, whether I am collaborating on a design with co-workers, or discussing a project with a client.

The design principles and technical skills I have learned throughout the Graphic Design and Media Arts program will help me greatly in my future career. My current professional goals are to create branding and/or advertising materials for various clients. I could also see myself making illustrations for clients, whether it is related to branding or other areas of design. Throughout my academic life, I have learned a lot about working with design programs like Adobe Photoshop and Illustrator. For my portfolio, I worked with a variety of tools in these programs, like the curvature tool, brush and pencil tools, shape tools, and transformation tools. I learned how to properly save files and export them in the appropriate format for their use on the web and in print. I utilized my knowledge on design elements like line, shape, color, and texture with design principles like pattern, contrast, emphasis, and balance (Butler, 2012). I expect to continue applying these skills and knowledge in my future works, and to continue exploring all the different possibilities that graphic design offers.

References

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