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Final Self-Assessment

1. Expectations and Goals

Questions then:

- What, specifically, did you expect to learn so far in this course?
- What, specifically, have your goals for the course been so far?
- How has your approach to the course so far helped you learn what you expected to learn and achieve your goals?

At midterm, I wrote:

Going into the course, I expected to learn skills that would help me learn how to use tools that would allow me to be able to research for a topic of interest more efficiently. I expected for the general structure of the class to give us useful activities that would allow for our research question to become more apparent. It was my expectation that this would be done as we continued to work through exercises and activities designed to be able to gauge our interest in a certain topic.

My goal for the course so far has been to allow myself the opportunity to dive deeply into the content of my research and to have time for connections between texts and the development of my research question to come by organically, as opposed to being forced to choose a topic set in stone and have to adjust everything to a predetermined idea. So far, the course has been very helpful in providing enough structure to keep being realistic in moving forward with the process but also laid back enough to allow for flexible research that allows for the question and interest to develop more naturally as the research into potential topics progresses. This structure has allowed me to move forward efficiently in finding material and content to evaluate while also keeping a pace to the research that keeps the thesis progressing forward, which as a result has helped me achieve the goals I originally set out for myself of developing a question of true interest based on how my research has been going, as opposed to the other way around.

Questions now:

- What, specifically, were your goals for the course?
- How did your approach to the course help you learn what you expected to learn and achieve your goals?
- What, specifically, did you learn in this course?

Now, I write:

As mentioned in my expectations for the course in my midterm self-assessment, I came into the class wanting to have a better idea of how a thesis is created, in addition to seeing what tools I could use or what structure would be implemented for myself in order to be able to split my thesis into more manageable chunks. Personally, coming into the thesis class, I had already had the general idea of what it was that I wanted to write my thesis about, but at that point I only had an extremely broad scope, given that at that point I could perceive that the connections could be made between UX and work processes, but I wasn't able to formulate it at all, only perceive it. With that being said, I feel like my sole goal for this semester and the course was to be able to explain the concept to myself well enough where I could know concretely what would be talked about when I actually created the thesis.

Among the most important things that I felt like I needed to understand before starting a thesis, was the basis behind creating a thesis in the first place, and conceptualizing, what exactly, a thesis project could be. Thinking of what an honors thesis is, I am well aware that often this is seen as a huge hurdle standing in between senior year and graduation, and many times the size and demands for creating such a project is seen as just this, something to be hurdled over. My approach to the honors thesis, my perception of what it is, and what it can become was among the most important things that I learned during the duration of the course. I see my thesis as an opportunity, not only to explore a topic that I am truly passionate about, but also as an essential opportunity to discover more about myself and truly challenge myself and grow as an academic. I think when people think of a capstone project, for many it can be seen as just another (big) assignment that they have to cross out of the imaginary list of things needed to receive a certification that they are now legally a bachelor of something. Like the hundreds of quizzes, tests, and assignments that have been done through [rote learning](#) and forgotten forever, this project for many stands as just that, which once submitted will be pushed out of mind and never thought of again. My approach to the course has been to make a true effort to really take the unique opportunity that we, as honors students, have of really diving deep into learning something for which we are genuinely interested in. I see the thesis not in terms of just a big project that was assigned before we graduate, but

more of what I believe this project really should be in the context of academia: an **undergraduate thesis** that is an extension of myself, one that can represent the work that I, as a student and academic, can produce through the synthesis of what I learned in a decade and a half of being a member of learning institutions.

I think part of why projects like this become just another assignment to be done, is unfortunately, only a symptom of a [broken education system](#). Part of the problem, I think, has been from a loss of the essence of what it really means to be a student in the context of [Academia](#) and what that represents. The symptoms, therefore, are shown discretely in different places, which is why [some people think their degrees are worthless](#), [why many professors write papers than no one reads](#), and why many students will continue to churn out disinterested, dispassionate, and meaningless work, just to get a degree. I have neither the scope, the means, (or the interest) at the moment to singlehandedly try to find a solution to reform the entire school system, however, I think it is necessary to understand the role that I as a student have in this environment, in order to be able to know what it is that I am trying to accomplish in making a thesis project.

Even as I write this final self-assessment, my initial inclination (telling of the perception that so many other assignments have) was to [bullshit my way](#) into managing to write enough sufficiently self-reflective words to satisfy the 900-word requirement from the assignment guidelines and get the assignment over with. Yet, in a moment of self-awareness, I come to realize, yet again, the value of what a true self-reflection of the time preparing my thesis has had on the development of my project. Having said this, and attempting to save this answer from completely digressing into a tirade about the problems of the educational system, I think this relates to my thesis preparation in that in order to make a thesis, I first had to learn what it meant to make a thesis, which is one of the key goals that I set out achieve, and which now allow me to be able to produce a thesis that is worth making.

2. Performance

Questions then:

- Have you completed all the assignments and done all the quizzes and activities?
- How has your performance been so far? Are you on track to earn a B under the basic contract?
- How, if at all, have you improved as a writer so far?
- What specific strategies have you used to find a way through confusion, hang-ups, procrastination, your workload and life outside of class, lack of experience, or unfamiliarity with the work? These might include using the Writing Center, coming to my office, asking me questions, and other strategies too numerous to name here

At midterm, I wrote:

In terms of performance, I believe that I have been successful in maintaining the correct balance and speed in which my question has developed. I have been engaged and participating actively to hone down my question. I have completed all assignments and activities to the best of my ability and believe that my performance is on par with the expectations delineated to us at the beginning of the year, placing me on track to earn a B under the basic contract. Over the course of the semester, my writing has improved by several aspects that can be attributed to the exercises that we have done in class. Among them are the Beam Heuristic, which has been essential for considering sources and analyzing them objectively, the distinction between source types and levels of citing, and a new restructuring of how I write, which is moving from an overly academic tone into a more conversational one. To keep myself on topic, as well as focused on the thesis inside and outside of class, I have used techniques such as time blocking to schedule time a week solely for thesis work outside of class, the creation of the honest weekly schedule which has given me more realistic expectations of how long things take and how much time I have at hand, and also strategies such as doing work more efficiently by breaking up in more manageable chunks spread out over time. When it comes to things relating to the thesis itself that are not related to external time management factors, one strategy that I have used to stay on track and continue to produce content has been productive procrastination. This strategy of procrastinating productively refers to being able to distinguish the levels of cognitive power that several factors of the thesis research process take, and being able to do the work according to how I feel my energy and motivation is. In times where I feel like I might be too tired or too inattentive to do deeper and heavier level work such as deep analysis of scholarly sources, I still am able to be productive by doing easier tasks that still pertain to my research such as watching informed videos on the topic or absorbing media that does not require as much effort, such as watching videos, documentaries or listening to podcasts on the topic I am researching.

Questions now:

- Did you complete all the assignments and do all the quizzes and activities?
- How was your performance? Did you meet the expectations for a B under the basic contract? Exceed them?
- How, if at all, did you improve as a writer, thinker, editor, analyst, researcher, or arguer?
- What specific strategies did you use to find a way through confusion, hang-ups, procrastination, your workload and life outside of class, lack of experience, or unfamiliarity with the work?

Now, I write:

Looking back at the semester, I believe that finding a true motive to create a meaningful thesis allowed me to complete all the assignments, quizzes, and activities that we have had with much less internal resistance than other projects that I have done in the past. Several times during the course, the class and its purpose was framed as an opportunity to create material that would be “a gift to your future (thesis writing) self”. As a result, when I was asked to do something, because I could see the impact that it would have on my thesis, and also because I realized that my work this semester is ultimately for my benefit, I was able to put in the time to make work that would be self-supporting that would ultimately help me out in the long run. In terms of performance, I have been very satisfied with the work that I have been able to produce.

Through the feedback that I received as I worked on my projects, I was able to improve as a writer and researcher by learning how to synthesize and break down information better. Project 1 began as a collection of sources that I could tell had the elements of the topics that I wanted to talk about. From project 1 to project 2, my greatest challenge was being able to describe and talk about the contents that each of the sources had to offer as a unit, given that most of my sources were dense books that each contained sections and subsections which described smaller sections and categories of a multifaceted concept, such as user experience and the many aspects that can be broken down into much more specific (yet still large) pieces, like user interface, perception, aesthetic... to name a few. Taking the advice from project 2 to slow down and unpack my sources, I believe that my first major step into seeing where concepts merged together

concretely was by doing a synthesis matrix in order to do project 3. Taking a step back and breaking down the sources in smaller pieces and grouping them together made me think of ways in which I had not before. One of the strategies that helped me be able to synthesize and make new connections by some of the sources was to allow flexibility in the ways in which I absorbed information about my topics. I did this by varying the forms of which I absorbed information depending on how receptive I felt to certain mediums. At times I would feel that reading a book would be the best way to absorb new information, while at others, it felt best to watch videos or documentaries that would talk about the concept in different ways. Ultimately my goal was set myself up with the right stimuli to be able to make new connections, given that at times the best solution to be able to talk about a concept was simply to let the ideas “marinate” in my head. Connections sometimes come from subconsciously having the thesis in the back of my mind while I did other activities, like watching a movie for leisure, which could be additionally primed by choosing to watch something loosely related, such as a [documentary on design](#), a [podcast about how a company was developed](#), or a [movie about a famous entrepreneur](#).

3. Ownership of Learning

Questions then:

- Have you been coming to class regularly, on time, and prepared? Have you taken proactive steps to avoid distractions, such as social media or texting (except for emergencies) during class time (in F2F classes) or work time? If so, how consistent were you? Have you found ways to improve so far?
- Have you made specific note of any problems and questions and shared them?
- Have you sought guidance outside of the classroom (office/videoconference visits, Writing Center, other)? If so, what, and how consistently? How has that helped, or not? If you have not been seeking help outside of class, what is your plan for doing so in the rest of the course?
- Which specific areas do you want to improve on in this class?
- What is your concrete, specific plan to improve in those areas during the rest of the class?

At midterm, I wrote:

Analyzing the semester so far, I do believe that I have been taking ownership of the project by coming prepared and on time to class, in addition to using the time

efficiently to work on my thesis. I have been consistent in keeping the development of my question into consideration when doing assignments and working, and have found myself improving in how I research thanks to some of the strategies that we have learned or read about in class. In thinking of my question and its scope, I have been good about taking the time to ask for help on how to think of the next steps of my research by sharing them with my peers and professor. I have found that this has been very valuable in showing me fresh ways to address a question. Outside of class, the meetings with my mentor have been highly rewarding and extremely productive. We have developed a mutual interest in the subject which allows for the sessions in which I meet with my advisor to be fruitful after I have taken the time to develop any ideas that were gathered from previous sessions. An area that I want to improve on this class is to be able to have more structured time for pure research in which I allot more time to reading and immersing myself in the material that I have gathered. During the rest of the semester, I am working on devising a plan to have more time structured for “discovery”, in which I give myself chunks of time to look around online for things that can be helpful or added to my thesis in a more structured way, as opposed to just googling parts of my focus whenever it occurs to me without a certain time dedicated to it.

Questions now:

- Did you come to class prepared (F2F classes) and participate (all classes) regularly? If so, how consistent were you? Did you find ways to improve in this way?
- Did you made specific notes about problems and questions and bring them to class to share (F2F classes)/share them electronically (online classes)?
- Did you seek guidance outside of the classroom (office visits, Zoom hours, Writing Center, other)? If so, what, and how consistently? How did that help (or not help)? If not, why not?
- Which specific areas did you want to improve on in this class?
- What was your concrete, specific plan to improve in those areas during the second half of the class? How did you do in carrying out that plan?
- What will you carry forward out of this class into the future?

Now, I write:

Throughout the semester, I was able to consistently come to class prepared, which allowed me to participate fully with whatever it was that we would do on that specific day of class. There was never a shortage of questions that I asked and continue to ask myself about the project, which is why I found it useful to keep track of these questions in a journal that is geared specifically for keeping track of my ideas for my thesis. Much

of the guidance I received outside the class came from meetings with my thesis mentor, Dr. Kart, and several occasions of feedback that I received electronically from Dr. Loewe. Sometimes the best way of continuing to understand the concepts was to try to teach them to someone else, and simply by having conversations with Dr. Loewe and Dr. Kart on the progress of my thesis I would come away with a better understanding of the topic myself (very much like [rubber duck debugging](#)). In my midterm, speaking of specific areas which I wanted to improve, I mentioned that I wanted to increase the time spent immersing myself in material, which I referred to as “pure research”. The change of class structure to accommodate for more time during class for working on the thesis went hand in hand with what I hoped to achieve. I found that this time was perfect for this, and in the few weeks of pure working class time I was able to take this time for discovery and additional research of my topic, which then allowed me to focus on my thesis proposal and the other aspects of my thesis outside of class. Now that the class has come to an end, I carry forward much of the structure and work that I was able to generate throughout the semester. Among the most important, I have had the opportunity to fully be able to conceptualize the shape that my thesis will take. For the most part, I wished to gather much of the instruments, tools, and material needed to make a thesis, which to me is what *Thesis Preparation* really sets out to achieve. Now that the foundations have been set, I have now placed myself in a position in which I am now able to begin building.

4. Grade argument

As I conclude the semester, I continually ask myself what the whole point of an entire semester dedicated purely for preparing for a thesis was, while also asking myself whether I was able to get out what I hoped I could get out from the class. Thinking of what the thesis proposal sets out to achieve, I think at its essence it is trying to see whether or not the work that was done in the semester has laid down the foundation for creating the thesis itself. Asking myself this question, I can genuinely say that I absolutely believe that I have set myself up to create my thesis, and believe that at this point, I am now ready to create it, which is something that I was miles away from saying at the beginning of the semester. Taking a look of the structure of the class, it is

understood that given the large variety of topics, interests, and fields that a thesis encompasses for each person, a general type of template has to be created that can be used for a variety of students that accommodate these factors as best as possible. Traditionally, the format of many theses are large academic papers that take the shape similar to that of a [dissertation](#) (but much shorter in length).

Among the most important (if not the most important) thing that had to be done given the subject of my thesis was concretely being able to conceptualize what the final product would be. When I first began conceptualizing my project, and thinking of how I would be able to share what I have gathered, I quickly realized that I would not be able to explain these concepts like I wanted to if I had to be subject to the limitations of text being my only medium of communication. One of the central ideas that drives my thesis is examining the way information is shared and presented, and the different ways that different types of media can be used to present complex concepts in ways that are more effective than from only the use of text. Because of this, writing a traditional paper would have been a fatal redundancy, given that my attempt to show visual and design heavy concepts through just text ineffectively would result in me doing exactly what my thesis is trying to stay away from. Using modern adages, I am effectively trying to show why “a picture *is* worth a thousand words”. In some ways, talking about visual concepts without showing them is not unlike the problem of trying to [describe color to a blind person](#), describing the [taste of a food to someone that has never tried it](#), or [reading about zen intellectually](#), a description of these things can only get you so far, these have to be *experienced*. Because of this, I realized that to truly be able to communicate what I wish to get across, my final product is something that my audience has to *experience directly*, I can only go so far in explaining the concepts I talk about before I have to show them to you, [the map is not the territory, the menu is not the meal](#). For some time I had thought of the concept of having an end product that was [self-proving](#), in that the product itself would be a literal example of what could be done by presenting data with mixed mediums (text, images), in addition to creating the product specifically considering the (user) experience that an end user would have with the product. Which for some time was conceptualized as a physical booklet that would present my research and analysis with a mix of heavy visuals and text, that considered the reader’s experience of reading, *and*

interacting, with the booklet. However, because I was talking to user experience directly, I felt like there were several limitations to using paper to convey this if I truly wished to make my project be its own proof of concept. As I abstracted closer and closer to a project that would allow an audience to truly experience the concepts for themselves, I realized that in order for people to truly have a deliberate [user experience](#) with my product, I had no other choice. I have to make a website.

In the challenge of being able to convey to an audience the complex and self-referential nature of my project lies the proof of concept for the effectiveness of being able to present complex information through ways in which people can directly experience concepts. As I abstracted closer and closer to a full user experience, and as I finally realized what my final product was. I not only found a solution of how to conceptualize my project, but I essentially found what the entire basis of my project is:

Experiencing something is *non-verbal*, and when it comes to describing and explaining non-verbal concepts, these have to be directly experienced in order to be truly perceived and understood.

A verbal description of complex non-verbal concepts and information is inferior to a direct experience with the force at work. I had been able to intuitively understand this for some time, but it is only recently that I am able to describe this concretely. Bringing it all together, if a grade is to represent whether not the work that was done in the semester has laid down the foundation for creating the thesis itself, I would probably have to give myself an “A” for Absolutely. For the same reasons that I have described, I will have to show concepts through experience and a direct interaction itself, presented with the task of writing a thesis proposal, given the nature of my endeavor, the proposal will have the same limitations than can only truly be shown through experience, for this reason, I have chosen to begin to develop my website already, and part of the thesis proposal itself will try to explain the framework for what I wish my thesis will encompass, and will have a link to the website so that I can begin to show what I will do with my thesis. I realize that my self-assessment is much longer than what was asked, and my thesis proposal might be slightly shorter than others but I justify this because unlike other types of projects, self-analysis represents a much larger part of my project since I’m also wishing to describe the ways in which I developed my thesis by providing an extensive look at all the steps to

get there in order to have a proof of concept of how processes and documenting can further even deeper understanding of a concept. So, in a way, this is also fundamental material in order to set myself up for writing my thesis, which the thesis proposal seeks to achieve.

This is probably the most meta project I've had to work on but for which I am extremely passionate about. I believe that for my type of project, much of the essential goal and necessity behind a thesis prep had to be how I conceptualized the idea and how I would present it, with information from sources and findings not weighed as heavy as other types of theses, since much of the information will be self-generated. Overall, I am extremely satisfied with my thesis preparation and the outcome that this course has had on my thesis, for which I think that an "A" truly represents how I believe I did in accomplishing this task.