# EMBRACING POSITIVITY:

## Using the Power of Positivity to Enhance Design Classroom Critiques to Encourages Students to Feel Empowered as Artists.

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# ABSTRACT

# Abstract

While ample research and ways to handle an artistic critique exist, there is not enough that is created in conjunction with visuals to help and empower our art faculty. As a graphic design instructor at a regional university, I struggle every day to make sure that my students end not only becoming better designers, but also understanding that critique is about making them better and not meant to tear them down. My graphic design professors varied in technique when it came to the critique process and caused quite a bit of emotional distress on a young growing design student. I do not want that for my students.

Most of the research I have found so far has varying ways to conduct that critique, but I am creating a branded set of visuals that coincide with a set of guidelines that would help from both a faculty and student standpoint. As a relatively new graphic design instructor, I am constantly hunting for better techniques to teach lessons, connect with my students and to communicate without stifling their creativity. I feel that this is a sticky subject because of the stories I plan on putting into these pieces as well as the emotional aspect. Students, especially art students, tend to have a very fragile sense of self. Faculty needs to be educated to help them blossom and not wither and die under our scrutiny. My firsthand experiences lend further credibility to my idea as I have been a design student, worked in the design industry and then also came back and started teaching. This background gives me a unique viewpoint. My plan is to create a website that is branded to my concept and give instruction that can be downloaded while also providing a large supply of resources like posters and imagery that can be plugged into PowerPoint presentations. These materials will be well designed and available in several different formats considering that faculty could potentially be high school or university level and could have varying types of resources to print the materials. To make this concept even more "sticky," I will push past the expected and offer these posters, materials, and educational resources all for free to educators. This helps me to be unexpected, which in turns helps my idea be stickier. If some of these ideas are common knowledge in that one professor's mind, these visuals, hung in any classroom environment, will also allow the students to see that the main goal is growth and not to just be critical. This positive reinforcement will prevent the faculty member from constantly having to repeat themselves.

KEYWORDS: graphic design, critique, positive reinforcement, positivity, design classroom, designer, student, empowered, university, college

# CHAPTER 1 - INTRODUCTION

## Research Problem

Many design students struggle with understanding the purpose and the importance of feedback and critique in the design classroom, resulting in a perceived attack on their character and skills, which may lead to a detrimental effect on their mental health.

## Target Audience/Stakeholders

The stakeholders in this research are graphic design instructors and professors at the collegiate level. This would include technology schools as well as two-year and four-year colleges and universities. This research is beneficial to share with several organizations. The three most important organizations includes AIGA and their Design Educators Community, SECAC (a non-profit organization that promotes the study and practice of the visual arts in higher education across the US) and the NAEA (National Art Educators Association).

## Objectives

The purpose of my research is to develop a way to educate collegiate design instructors and professors to effectively handle the giving and receiving of feedback with graphic design students regarding their work while utilizing positive reinforcements. The common path for graphic designers to become professors is to acquire an undergraduate degree in graphic design and then go on to earn an MFA in graphic design. Historically, design professors never truly learn how to "teach" at the collegiate level. Most of the curriculum focuses on art, graphic design and art histories. After earning my M. Ed in Art Education before my MFA in Graphic Design, I realized how many graphic design professors just imitate how their design professors taught and gave them feedback. They may never research best
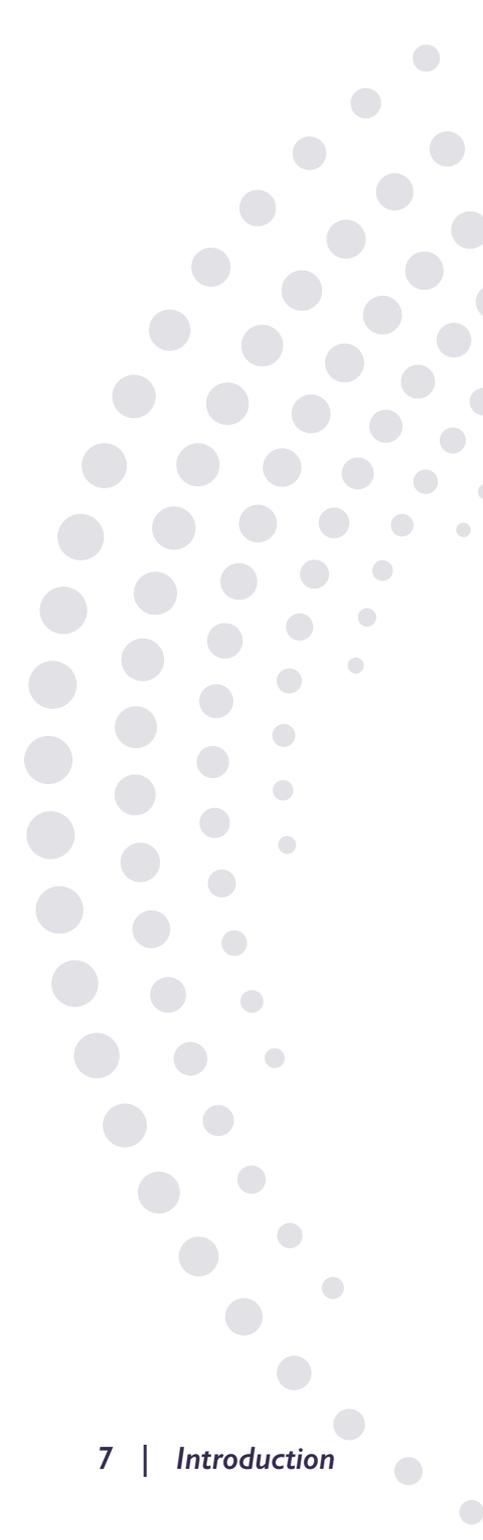
practices and design methodologies. The number of graphic design degrees conferred in the United States from 2019-2020 was 22,000, and that number has increased by over 83% in the past decade (Solomons). My solution entails creating educational materials to be distributed by request to any and all professors that want to advance themselves in the topic of critique on researched pedagogy to allow their students to feel empowered in the process.

## Research Question

How can we develop a graphic design guide or set of tools tailored to secondary education professors and instructors that emphasizes positive reinforcement for successful teaching outcomes?

## Knowledge Gap

The knowledge gap that has become apparent is the lack of feedback from the students themselves. The need for the analysis of the mental well-being of design students does not appear to be taking place. These young students' feedback could be crucial to the way in which critique and feedback are given when their mental health is at the forefront of why this research is needed.

## Significance

The significance of this research, and ultimately the end result, can make the design classroom environment so much more rewarding for both the professors as well as the students themselves. Imagine a world where no student ends up leaving the critique process feeling poorly and instead progresses with only positive reinforced changes that need to be made and the student's character no longer in question.

# Personal Motivation

For over eighteen years, I worked and advanced in the field of graphic design and multimedia design. And then six years ago, I took the leap and decided to go back for my first master's degree in art education. That degree led me back to my alma mater. I was taking classes and then started as an adjunct instructor at the same time. The next year, I became a full time faculty member during the first semester after COVID hit.

I see the mental struggles that our youth put on themselves when they take feedback and it has become more and more prevalent each year that I teach (especially since COVID). So, I decided that I wanted to help improve the process so that students can feel more empowered with their abilities and not so encumbered by their feelings of self-doubt. I want to create something to help all design professors as we deal with the results of distance learning, with the critique process and in turn, help students. With this, we will be reinforcing positive communication while also adding social parameters in our teaching to help build their confidence.

# Biases

The main biases that I have is that I already teach graphic design students at the collegiate level and I have a process that I use. I will be adjusting that process based on this research, but I need to make sure that my current process doesn't taint what the research pushes towards. I also feel that in general, social media is not good for their mental health as they compare themselves to others. But social media is a necessary tool needed for advertising and expanding this idea to deliver it to those that would like to utilize it.

# CHAPTER 2 - SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

## Research Rationale

Throughout this process, there have been many research studies done on the critique process in many different classroom environments. From graphic design and video design to even studying the critique process in the real world at design firms, there is a pretty standard, yet unimaginative method of critiquing one's work with little to no thought in regards to the designer's mental health during the process. As more and more people bring mental health to the forefront of our minds, the burned out designer is a common concern. If the process can be altered, starting in the classroom, these designers may be able to combat burnout simply by understanding how the process works best. As their educators, the professors who teach those design classes need to have an array of tools that help the design student understand the importance of the critique.

## Research Implications & Methods

The research implications could entail students having a higher proficiency in their craft, lower drop out rates, and increased mental strength of the students. This could in turn also increase the hiring and marketability of said students, which increases the effectiveness of that particular university's recruiting and retention of quality students.

The methods of research will be three pronged: case studies, visual analysis, and image boards. The case studies and visual analysis will be used for the method and technique, but the image boards will be utilized to create the visual materials to help determine the aesthetic of the campaign to engage both the teachers and the students.

# RESEARCH METHODS
## Literature Review

### Introduction

The following research is two-pronged and shows the need to address the current critique format to make sure that this generation of students understands the need for critique and assessment in the graphic design classroom, while effectively helping those students maintain their self-esteem and allowing them to thrive without taking a hit to their mental health. The first set of research shows multiple different styles and techniques when it comes to critique in various settings, such as in the classroom or with an employer. This research focuses on the methods used and why the critique process is so important. The following research shows multiple and various types of classrooms that are observed, such as the graphic design classroom, architecture classrooms, multimedia video classrooms, and, of course, the fine art studio classroom, as well. The need to look at all of these different types of classrooms will allow the research to be well rounded and thorough. There is also a section based on how, as an employee, that we are critiqued on an annual, semi-annual, or quarterly basis. Looking into the critique process in a workforce environment will help understand how explaining the critique process while at the university level will prepare these students to deal with workforce critique as well.

The second set of research branches into the mental health of students at the university level. The research here is categorized into three subsets. The first one is the mental well-being of students in the fine arts field and how being a fine art student might affect their mental well-being more than a non-art major. The second subset revolves around the mental health of students in general on university campuses and what universities are doing to help combat this. This research is integral to understanding where the trends are going in mental health on campuses, but it is also important to consider if there are any gaps in that research, as well. The third subset is based on the mental well-being of students and the online resource availability to them. This type of research is important because the mental load that

it takes to be on campus and take classes either online or in person, worry about financial aid, potentially also have a job and then have time for homework or creating artwork is a huge mental strain on these young minds. The first and second subset is in reference to the general university student campus life, and then the third subset refers to resources available to these students with all of their general mental health issues that go along with becoming an adult and dealing with all that entails.

## Critique and Assessment - Classroom Based Critique and Assessment Relevance

As a graphic design student, then an art education student, then an instructor, and then back to graphic design student, the word *critique* can strike fear or anxiety in the hearts of most graphic design students. To have your hard work put up for the whole world to see and then to sit there smiling while professors and other art or graphic design students slowly pick it apart can be excruciating. Most graphic design classes are practice based, in which several projects are due to be completed in a semester's worth of time. The somewhat standard way that the

design critique is done is usually based on how the professor's critique process went when they were in undergraduate or graduate school. In the beginning or during ideation, at the midway point, and at the end of each project, the student is given "feedback" or critique to allow them to grow their work and advance their knowledge in what does and doesn't work in the field of graphic design. The critique, in its simplest form, is a way to advance the project or the student's skills to a place of "completion" where the student can turn it in and get a grade. As design students, we sometimes get so caught up in the creation of design projects that we forget to learn along the way: "Critique is a mark of closure for the student and an opportunity for students to show off their accomplishments. While the ideas embedded in a specific piece are often themes the student will grapple with over a long period, the critique creates a stopping point" (Doren 196). The critiquing process is quite subjective and requires the participation from the instructor/professor as well as honest and relevant feedback from the other class participants, if they are allowed to join in. This is where that process gets sticky.

Most students, at their core, do not want to be critiqued. They dread it. They want it to be as quick and painless as possible, but they know it's just how it has always been. But why? Why is this necessary? Any type of art or graphic design student must subject themselves to the idea of their work being picked apart based on their skill level, the principles of design or the elements of design, or a hundred different little things. They also have to come to the realization that their first, second, or third idea might not be the best option, so to make sure that their work is ever evolving, creative, unique, and effective, they must in turn, subject themselves to the critique and take it with a smile.

## Styles and Methods

When it comes to the critique process in the university classroom, the styles vary, but all seem to follow a somewhat similar basis. The faculty's main role is to be the mediator, mentor, and judge when it comes to an end result. Since art is so subjective, students tend to question the faculty's right to be the moderator or expert in this situation. As Armstrong and Doren explain,

"When expectation is that the critique serves as a graded activity that also furthers students' artistic development, it intertwines assessment and feedback." (Armstrong and Doren 18) As faculty members, there may be a one-sided feel to the critique process so the faculty needs to make sure that their voice isn't the only one speaking. The role of the faculty member is also the one that tries to draw out appropriate discussion from the members of the class or studio. There is a fine line between the student's voice being too loud or the faculty member's voice being too loud. The research shows that most moderators are aware of this and act accordingly.

There are also some students that are drawn to a certain university based on who teaches there because, in some cases, the student feels as if they want to study under someone they respect as an artist and may even be a fan of the faculty member's work. This seems to add more layers of issues to the critique process if the student idolizes said faculty. This may become an issue if the student only wants to listen to the opinion of the faculty member and no one else.

Another way to fall into the critique "trap" is to have very pointed questions and prompts that force a student to answer a question a certain way. These questions are very pointed and obviously shows the student what the faculty member is wanting the answer to be. The other trap is to use too vague of a question regarding getting that classroom dialogue going, such as "What do we think about …?" When the class participants don't want to participate and you must drag answers out of them, there is a tendency to take over the critique and use your voice as that of the "trained expert" when, in fact, that can drown out the creative process. The research shows that again, the faculty are aware that they shouldn't fall into this trap, but it does still happen. The process gets even harder when the class is critiquing the conceptual ideas instead of just the technical or formal skills.

Design critiques usually follow the Problem-Based Learning (PBL) or the Self-Regulatory Learning (SRL). Simpson explains, "The critical thinking and problem-solving skills the student need to learn to successfully navigate design challenges is routinely imparted through PBL" (68). There are new ideas being generated that allow instructors to break up the large group critique environment to smaller subgroups so that the level of understanding in their designs is more thorough. This is also a positive since they may feel more comfortable in the smaller groups. For this process to fully work, there needs to be ground rules established so that the group members all pull their own weight and the work is distributed evenly. Another aspect of this type of critiquing in smaller groups, requires that there be a diversity of members regarding race, sex, and experience. This allows the teams to be structured where there isn't too much work going to just one or two students as well as having a diverse sampling to allow for different ways of thinking. This process works great in larger universities, but might be somewhat problematic at smaller, rural colleges and universities.

Motley states, "The graphic design classroom, then, is an environment structured to emulate the practices of professionals, a place where students can learn the habits they will need as they move from the studio to

employment" (Motley 231). Unlike the fine art studio critique, the graphic design critique is supposed to mimic the critique process that should happen in the workforce environment. And since a large portion of the design feedback that a graphic designer receives in the workforce is not from a fellow designer, but most likely from a non-designer client, it is imperative that the graphic design student set aside their personal feelings and take the critique for what it is: a way to advance the student's work into the solution to the client's problem. When a graphic design student learns how to analyze an artifact or piece of art from history, the artist is usually not present for this analysis. But when a graphic design piece is analyzed, most of the time, the designer is present for the critique, which is why there needs to be a more structured procedure in place for these newer graphic design students so that they can learn how to be critiqued and not take a hit to their self-esteem that ultimately affects their mental health.

During these critiques, the student also learns how to use graphic design terms in a simulated professional environment. The fine art critiques that graphic designers go through in the fine art classroom allows them to learn how to analyze artifacts and then figure out how to use those terms and language to apply to the graphic design critique as well. The lessons they learn from this aspect of the critique is that designers who can communicate using the appropriate terminology have the potential to advance their critiquing skills by using examples and specifics to give other students feedback that is actionable. Broad, generic critiques help no one, so having action steps is necessary.

Based on the seven-step process in graphic design, feedback and critique comprise the main way that designers advance their design solutions. Problem definition, information gathering, ideation, concept development, implementation, feedback, and refinement are the seven steps to the graphic design process. Because feedback is literally in the process, students need

to understand the importance of this process. According to Motley, "The graphic design student must learn to embrace her sense of vulnerability in the face of public criticism" (Motley 237).

### The "Feedback Sandwich"

There are many styles of feedback that have been used in the classroom environment with graphic design students, but as a faculty member, the most prominently mentioned critique method is the "feedback sandwich" (Parkes, et al. 398). This method uses "sandwiching" critical or negative feedback between two positive comments. This clearly states saying something positive about the design, then something critical or negative, and then ending with another positive comment. As an educator, the reasoning behind this method is "discouraging feedback threatens self-esteem [and] has been shown to reduce learning and performance" (Parkes et al. 398). With the current generation of design students, there is unclear research to formulate if this process is effective and whether the

students focus on the critical portion of the feedback or if they just hear the positive comments.

### Studio Environment

As graphic designers, the standard environment that we learn in as students are studio classrooms. These studios are most commonly set up to have computers with individual desks for students to use, loaded with the software of choice, an open environment, large tables for collaboration and lots of space for displaying the design work created in such lab. In a perfect setting, the studio is meant for just one class per semester, and the students can come and go as they please outside of class as the "lab" is open for extended hours. This allows the students to have a designated area to come and work on the projects for that class alone. The more comfortable that we as educators make this space for the students, the more chance of the students being able to come up with more creative and unique designs. With more and more classes going online, pertinent software being available
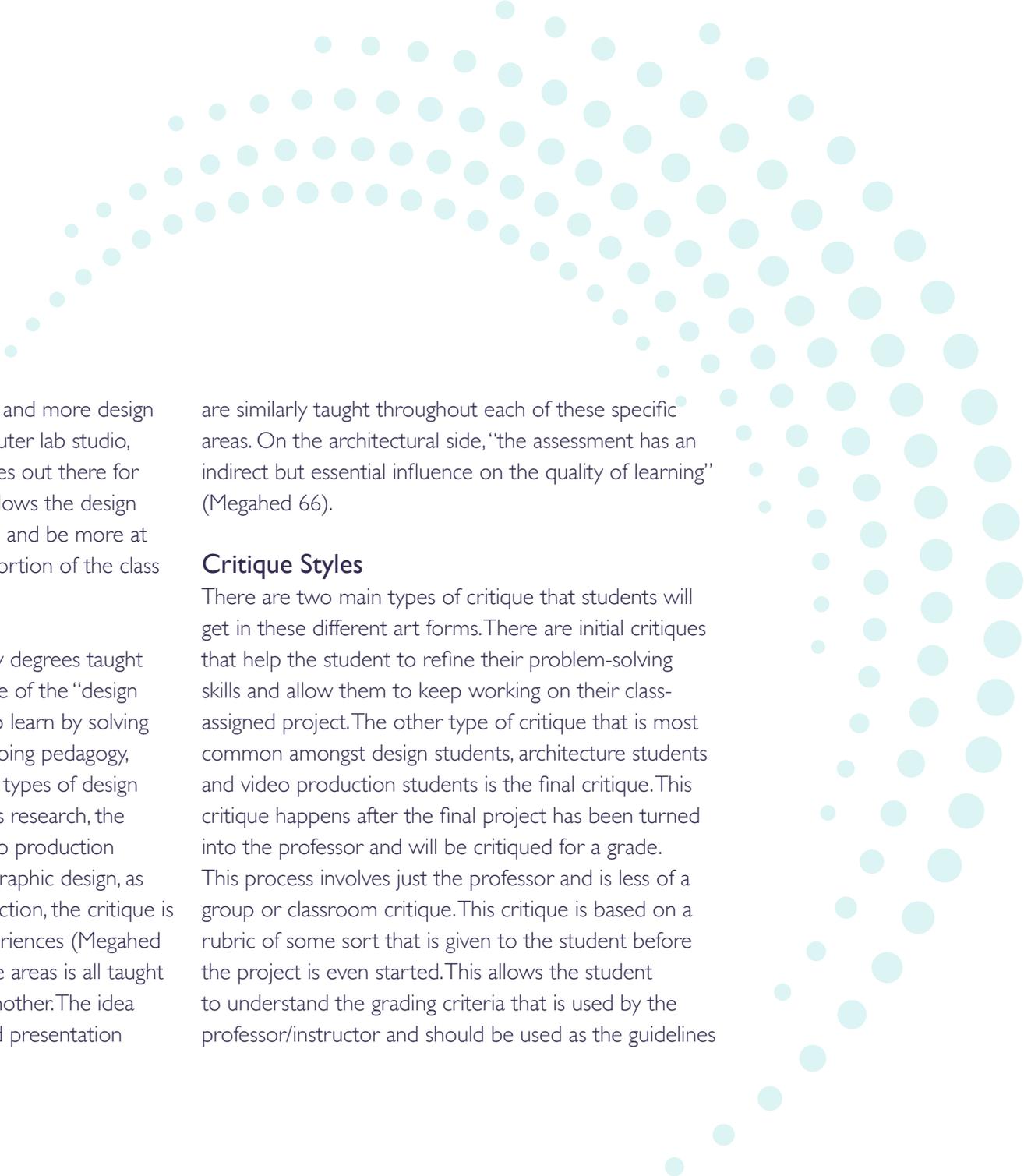
for students at a lower price and more and more design classes being asked to share one computer lab studio, there are less and less true studio spaces out there for smaller universities. The environment allows the design students to become more comfortable and be more at ease when the critique and feedback portion of the class comes around.

Since graphic design is just one of many degrees taught at the university level that utilize the use of the "design studio" as a way of teaching students to learn by solving project-based problems and learn by doing pedagogy, it seemed appropriate to look at other types of design studio types of classrooms. Through this research, the architecture design studio and the video production design studio were also examined.  In graphic design, as well as in architecture and video production, the critique is the "backbone" of all these studio experiences (Megahed 65). The similar pedagogy in these three areas is all taught with a similar thread in some way or another. The idea is that ideation, critique, discussions, and presentation

are similarly taught throughout each of these specific areas. On the architectural side, "the assessment has an indirect but essential influence on the quality of learning" (Megahed 66).

## Critique Styles

There are two main types of critique that students will get in these different art forms. There are initial critiques that help the student to refine their problem-solving skills and allow them to keep working on their class-assigned project. The other type of critique that is most common amongst design students, architecture students and video production students is the final critique. This critique happens after the final project has been turned into the professor and will be critiqued for a grade. This process involves just the professor and is less of a group or classroom critique. This critique is based on a rubric of some sort that is given to the student before the project is even started. This allows the student to understand the grading criteria that is used by the professor/instructor and should be used as the guidelines

for the final submitted project. This process mimics the professional world in that once a final design solution is complete, that solution is passed on to the client. Based on the parameters of the design brief, this solution can be critiqued by the client, but instead of getting a final grade, the professional might be asked to make additional changes once the design has gone to the client for the first time. This is why the pedagogy that design professors use is so directly linked with the professional practice of design. As Nixon states, "Most scholars today agree that what makes new literacies new is not the use of technology, but the mindset of collaboration, participation, and distribution" (Nixon 164).

In video production, the critique is a way for the students to work in a group environment and to share their experiences, what issues they may have had, and how they solved certain problems. The design process in video production may ultimately show a more group collaborative way to attack problems and class projects.

The use of unique pedagogy or the modification of existing pedagogy is at the forefront of what needs to happen in the existing design studio critique process. The idea that students need to also be willing to embrace self-examination is one of the main thoughts in some unique pedagogy out there. To be an effective designer, you must know who you are and what you stand for to be an effective designer. You must understand your strengths and weaknesses to help you know what you are capable of. As educators, it is less likely that design students have a solid understanding of who they are. Through unique pedagogy, these students might be able to get a better idea of who they are and the types of design that they gravitate towards. This will make them better designers down the road.

Another aspect of the critique process is the concept that the design professional and the design student both utilize more than just what they learn in design school in their designs. Student/professionals use personal experiences and their emotions to direct their thought process when

coming up with design solutions. The ability to make the viewer "feel" something is an important aspect of design that is not easily taught. Being able to tap into those feelings is a quintessential aspect of design. Seeing an ad for a car that has a great safety rating by depicting a wrecked car and a family emerging from said vehicle creates a personal response and, when done correctly, makes the end viewer who might have a family feel an emotional connection to that car company. This type of design can only be achieved using a designer's emotions, personal experiences, and their observations of the world around them. Because of this, a critical look into designers and their emotional state, their mental well-being and their overall participation in the design studio environment needs to be examined.

## Design Critique Methodologies

There is also research that asks the question, does the ability to design have any correlation with their ability to critique? After much quantitative and qualitative research on this question, the results came back inconclusive, which

ultimately says that the ability to critique properly needs to fall to the design faculty and their education techniques to make sure all design students are fully educated in the ways and vocabulary of the standard design critiques. This also goes to show that design students could benefit from a new way of thinking and pedagogy in terms of the process of critiquing and how to deliver it effectively from student to student and teacher to student.

## Adaptive Comparative Judgment

Another new way of thinking regarding the critique process is called Adaptive Comparative Judgment. This process utilizes the idea that rather than critiquing a specific piece from one student designer, there are two pieces that are compared to select which one is the better of the two instead of trying to critique one item based on its individual traits. According to Bartholomew et al., "Formative feedback, for learning and improvement, has long been an integral part of art and design in the form of critiques" (Bartholomew et al 75). This research examines whether the concept that good design happens

when a design is critiqued by many people and not just those formally trained in the art and design field.

### Getting Feedback

Professional designers are hired and work in varying sizes of companies that may or may not have design professionals to get feedback from. On one end of the scale, a designer may be the only one employed and have no one to get "professional design" feedback from, while on the other end of the spectrum, some designers are employed in a larger design department or agency that would allow that designer to get professional feedback. Because of this, the idea of feedback coming from non-design educated professionals makes complete sense. Students in the design classroom should be directed to get their friends' and strangers' feedback as well as in studio feedback to make sure that the design is well rounded. The professor/instructor could also enlist help from working designers to give students "real world" feedback and critique.

This concept also goes into detail about using historical design artifacts and critiquing those pieces in the classroom environment to help students understand what makes good design. This process discusses focusing on concept, criteria, craftsmanship, composition, and creativity. This would be a positive way to teach the concepts of critique to students without utilizing their individual works and hence putting one student on display. This would be an excellent way to gradually introduce critique in a positive light without causing undue stress and mental strain on beginning design students to allow them to see the process from the outside without feeling as if a spotlight is upon them.

Overall, the validity of the critique process is not what is being questioned here. The process in which design student are taught that critique process is what we are trying to identify and strengthen. The critique process and how that works in the studio environment will ultimately be what is utilized and even mimicked in the professional world. If a design student has a positive experience with

critique, they will be more likely to accept that critique in the professional environment after graduation. This does not mean that there is no need for peer-to-peer critique in the studio classroom as well. That also needs to be addressed as well in the process. All three categories (non-designer to designer, peer to peer, and educator to student) appear to build a well-rounded designer.

## Employer Based Critique and Assessment

As students will find once they have entered the workforce, there is a proclivity for assessment and critique in the world of employee/employer-based relationships. This is a double-edged sword in the case of the design student. As a graphic designer hired in the workforce, not only will they be constantly critiqued for their work from their fellow designers, from their bosses and then also by their clients, but they will also be critiqued for their general performance the longer they work at any particular company. The critique of their design work can be delivered in a range of ways but will happen with every project they work on. So, being able to take critique

from a workplace standpoint is imperative to their success as a graphic designer. Then, when you consider the critique disguised as a performance review, graphic design workers take more feedback than most.

Though, there are new models developing all the time, ultimately, most employers have some sort of standard for assessment to make sure that their employees are progressing in their job titles and duties. Employers use this critique and assessment structure by attaching monetary raises along the way when an employee meets certain levels or milestones in this process.

Annual, bi-annual, and quarterly reviews of an employer's work is a very real practice in our current workforce. Graphic design employees are critiqued more than most for the simple fact that what they create and for whom will drive that critique process. Designers are assessed on how they communicate, how they effectively deal with budgets and timelines in regard to their projects, how quickly they can come up with an effective solution

to the client's or employer's "problem," as well as their time management skills, their software skills, their communication, and ability to take feedback from multiple people in regard to the end product.

From a business standpoint, students need to be able to understand that critique is necessary regarding their role as an employee, but there is research that shows that the road goes both ways. Employers must also be able to take critique from their employees in reference to the standards that are in place for critique and assessment. According to Christensen et al., "License to critique means that critique is recognized as an important and necessary dimension of organizational development and that ongoing assessments of organizational practices therefore are welcomed, indeed encouraged, from all corners of the organization" (Christensen et al 246).

### Mental Health of Students at a University Level

The traditional university student must deal with a high level of stress that is tied to their overall mental health.

The on-campus therapists are seeing a larger number of students needing their help than ever before. This could be from the decreasing stigma that surrounds the idea of getting help for mental issues or that students are being diagnosed with mental issues around the time that they start to attend college. Whatever the reason, university students deal with an ever-present mental load when attending university classes.

### General Campus Based Students

Universities across the world are dealing with an increased number of students that need support on campus with their mental well-being. According to Baik et al., "The high prevalence of mental health difficulties among university students is a critical issue for universities as well as their wider communities. Psychological distress can have a powerful impact on every aspect of students' physical, cognitive, emotional, and interpersonal functioning" (Baik et al 675). When these mental health issues are not addressed, this could have a profoundly negative impact on that student that can potentially have

a "disturbing, disruptive or aggressive behavior that affects student peers and university staff" (Baik et al 675). We see students struggle to attend class, to turn in their work, to engage in extracurricular activities and overall, they struggle to acclimate to the university environment. For some students, college is a place to spread their wings, but for students that struggle with mental illness, the university campus may seem too big and too daunting to take on without proper help. This could potentially lead to a higher dropout rate from individual classes as well as a higher dropout rate from universities and colleges everywhere. The student could then end up with a huge financial debt with no way of paying it, especially if said student never even graduates with their intended degree or a degree at all.

Students' mental health also takes a hit when paired with the fact that many students are full-time students while working more than part time to help support themselves. Older students may struggle with less and less help from parents and family, which puts a greater financial strain on the students to work more. This is a double-edged sword because the less financial support they receive, the more they need to work, but also the further they get into their university classes the harder the classes get and in turn the student needs to study more. This turns into a vicious cycle. This lack of financial support can also add to the stress of the student, their mental state, and how much quality work they can accomplish as a student.

Students in one study wanted their professors and teachers to understand their desire for even more interactions with them and their peers. Students at the high school level are surrounded by their teachers and are constantly being pushed to interact more. Once those high school students graduate, there is a drastic decrease in the number of hours that they interact with their teachers and professors at the university level. They go from being in a class for an allotted amount of time, five days a week to only two, three, or four days a week. They are also responsible for remembering all their class work that each course requires with little to no preparation

for said student from the high school environment to the university one. As Baik notes, "Addressing factors that your students identify as causing stress and impacting their wellbeing is vitally important because when we do that, students have the experience of us listening to them and taking their concerns seriously" (Baik et al 685).

## Fine Arts/Graphic Design Students

Though the differences are far less than initially thought, there is still new research that shows a difference in the presence of mental issues between students that participate in the arts and those that do not. According to Lee, "Many college campuses have developed special services to address the needs of specific student populations, such as student athletes" (Lee et al 12). If this study takes hold, the need for specific services would be required to address special attention for fine art students. It is in this mental health of students, especially college and university students that we need to consider the ramifications of the critique and how this could affect

them, mentally. There were a few limitations to this specific study that give pause on the results. The students in the study that were not fine art students were not from a broad range of schools but only from a "large research university in the Midwest." This makes this source lacking in that aspect and not nearly as robust of research than would have been preferred. This research did find "evidence that students studying the fine arts differ from their peers who do not study the fine arts in levels of stress, overall mental health, and time spent on academic work" (Lee et al. 14).

The mental development of students from the age of seven to eighteen has been established as a crucial time when they develop "physiological construction, mental change, and social development take place" (Wei 1). And now, there is a growing number of research that states that the frontal lobe development continues until the age of 25. The mental health of students world-wide is a main topic of discussion on university campuses

everywhere. Appointments for therapy sessions being offered on campus is at an all-time high.

Another aspect of mental health in art students that we need to consider is the comparison between "needy students vs. non-needy students". This study implies that students "from low-income backgrounds also had a higher positive detection rate of psychological problems indicating that the mental health of students from poor backgrounds was relatively low" (Wei 6). This result is not surprising, and when you factor in the cost of a university degree, this is a significant factor that needs to be considered at a university level.

## Duty of Care

There are times that the mental well-being of students is disclosed to art educators to help the overall experience of the student in the arts classroom. Students at the university level choose how much or how little they will share with their professors and advisors depending on how comfortable they are with said professors.

There is still somewhat of a stigma around whether a student shares or doesn't share their mental state with their faculty and/or students. According to Ings, "Students engaged in self-declarative inquiries can often underestimate the potential emotional cost of their decision" (Ings 12). If a student publicly announces their mental state, this is something that cannot be undone. The student will always wonder if the critique they are receiving is based on actual issues with their design or if the critique is tinged by their declaration.

On the other side of that coin, the art educator must figure out how to handle that student's specific needs in a classroom environment. Because these issues can lead to a disruption in class, based on the mental need of the student, most educators are ill-equipped to help those students when an issue arises and how to limit the disruption in class. Some students have varying levels of anxiety when required to present or speak in public in the design studio environment. This situation alone requires the educator to consider the student's ability while not

sending the student into a mental spiral in the middle of a formal critique. Being able to formulate a plan with your students that have declared mental issues is the best pathway for success. But what do you do if a student is either undiagnosed or not medicated and trying to deal with those issues on their own? Though there are no tried-and-true techniques to deal with each separate instance when it comes to the mental health of our students, it is our responsibility "that as teachers we have a Duty of Care and many of us take this very seriously" (Ings 17).

There is much need of "art mental health teaching activities" that allow art students with specific mental health issues to feel free to create art, express themselves, and use art to help release their feelings and art can be that release. With so many art students across the world, being able to deal with these mental health issues while during studio classes in a tried-and-true method is imperative to student success as well as teacher success.

## Online Resources for Students

Although there are multiple online mental health interventions, there is still a great need for more and more advancement. One source examined twenty-three options for online mental health interventions, and this is what they found. One of the main interventions found, Thought-Spot, "advocates for the development of interventions using input from young people and scholarly evidence" (Oti and Pitt 8). Since 2020, and the COVID lock down across the world, the need for online mental wellness apps has been brought to the forefront of our minds as a society. There are more and more ways that people can get help.

The availability of utilizing online therapy is relatively new for students' mental well-being. With students utilizing on campus resources at an alarming rate, it is also expected that with this overwhelming need for mental care, that the online resources would be the next approach to be utilized. These online resources also need to include

interventions for students that may be suicidal or have thoughts of hurting themselves and others.

This would be beneficial to all college and university level students. Also, some art students use their fine art studio classes to paint or sculpt pieces that are representational of a traumatic event in their life. This has been a tried-and-true way of creating meaningful art for decades, but the research in regard to art therapy would be a bonus for design students to harness. Creating art that allows students to work through trauma can end up being very therapeutic.

## Conclusion

Throughout this literature review, we have discussed classroom-based critique and assessment techniques as well as the techniques utilized by employers regarding critique and assessment. We also discussed the mental health of students at the collegiate level in relation to fine art students, students in general, and online student apps that allow students continued access to mental health

professionals, especially in the case of an urgent threat to the student.

The concept of critique is something that everyone must deal with in their educational and professional career. If design educators can have a more well-rounded technique to administer critique, we can take care to preserve the student's well-being, keep their character intact and in doing so, help maintain their mental health. This would allow them to go into the critique process with more education and explanation and less stress and anxiety about the process. The more a student understands the process, the more willing they would be to participate in said critique in an open and honest manner.

If we structure design critique pedagogy to involve an aspect that realizes and takes into account the mental well-being of our students, extend the education process when it comes to the explanation for the critique, and
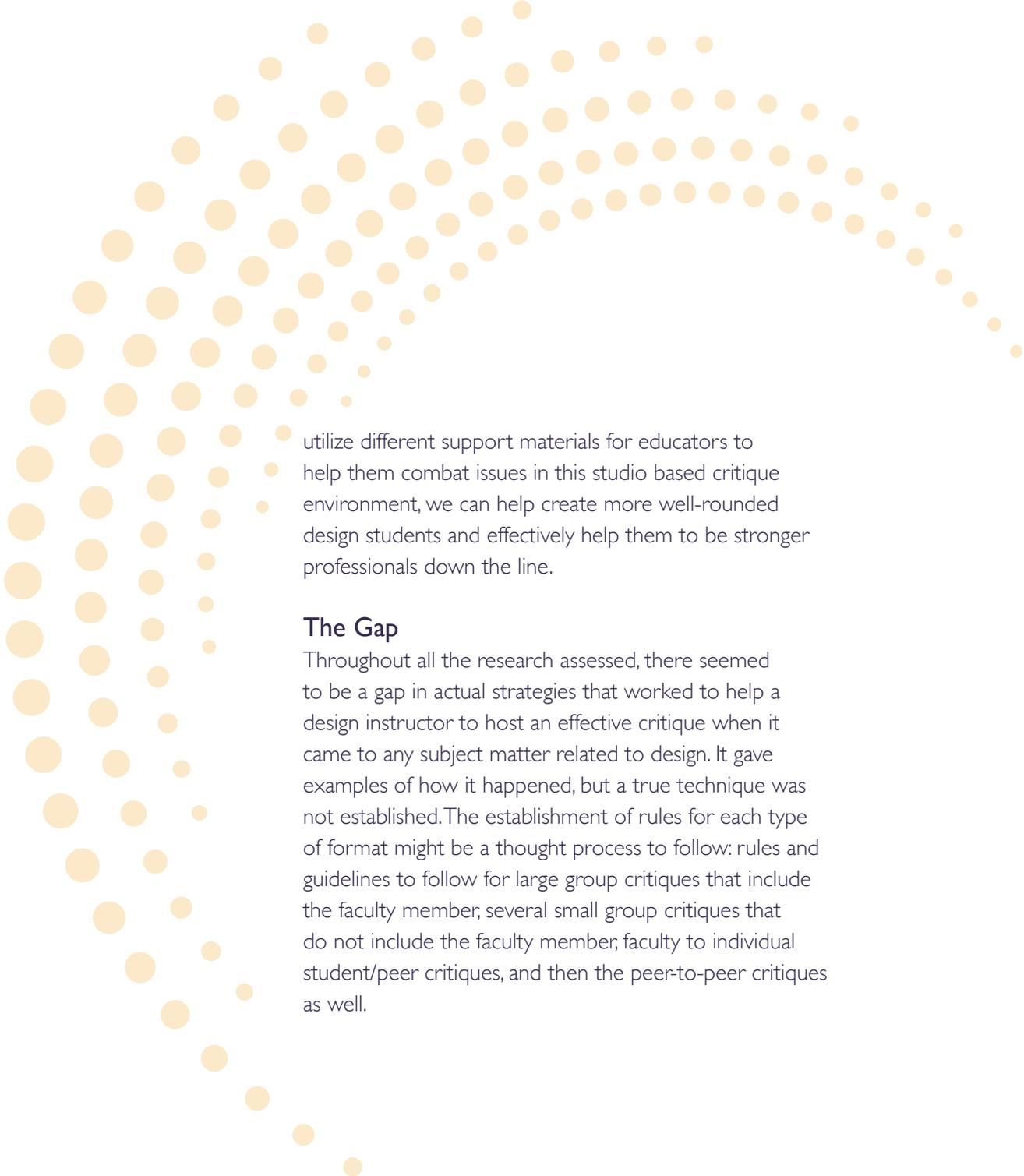
utilize different support materials for educators to help them combat issues in this studio based critique environment, we can help create more well-rounded design students and effectively help them to be stronger professionals down the line.

## The Gap

Throughout all the research assessed, there seemed to be a gap in actual strategies that worked to help a design instructor to host an effective critique when it came to any subject matter related to design. It gave examples of how it happened, but a true technique was not established. The establishment of rules for each type of format might be a thought process to follow: rules and guidelines to follow for large group critiques that include the faculty member, several small group critiques that do not include the faculty member, faculty to individual student/peer critiques, and then the peer-to-peer critiques as well.
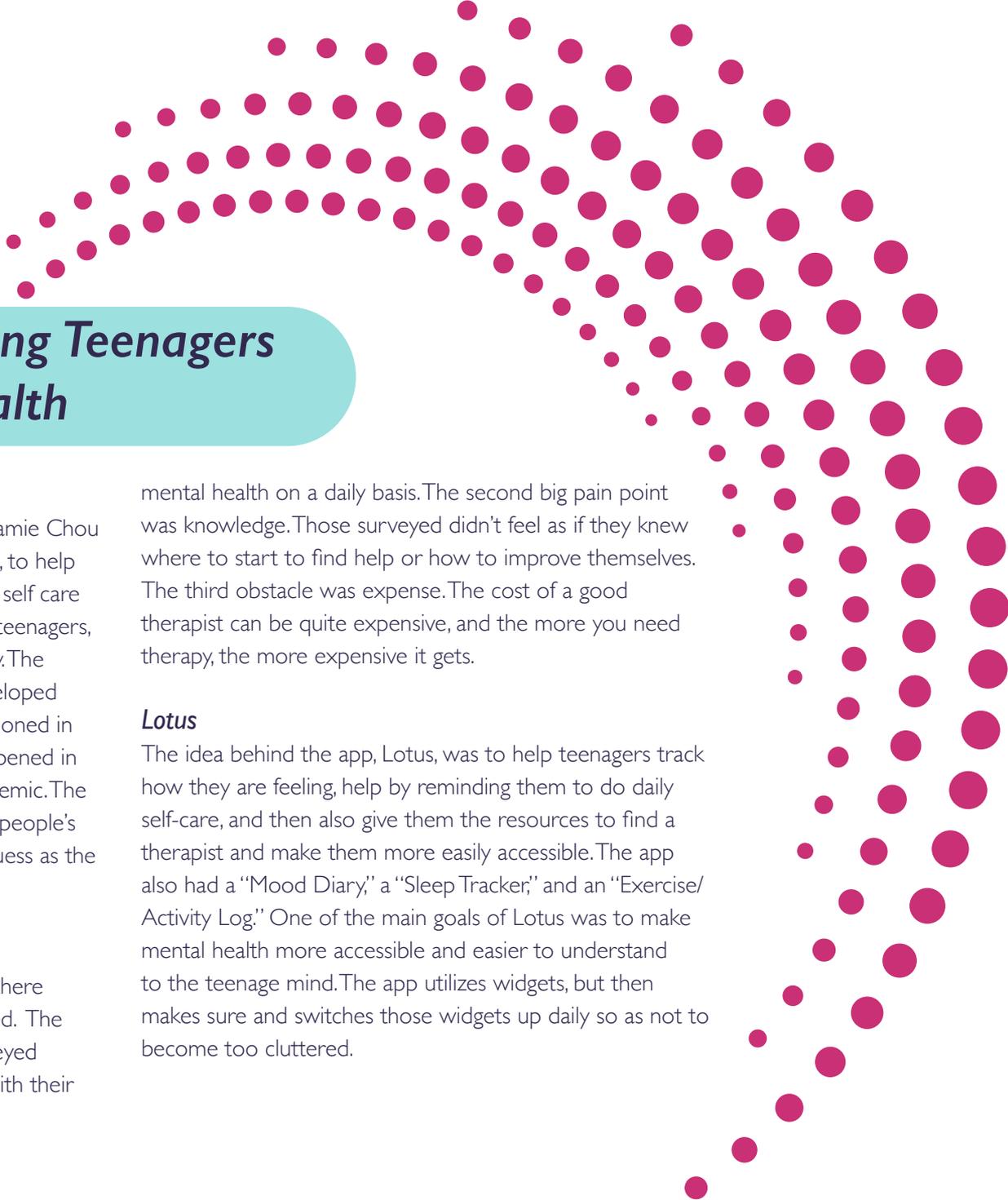
# UX Case Study: Helping Teenagers with their Mental Health

## About the Case Study

This case study was initiated and created by Jamie Chou in order to build a wellness app, named Lotus, to help teenagers by making more mental health and self care resources available. The app is developed for teenagers, aged 12-18. The app is meant to be used daily. The prototype for this app was designed and developed during May 2020. Even though it wasn't mentioned in the study, the timing of this development happened in during the lock down of the COVID-19 pandemic. The world's mental health was at the forefront of people's mind as we all stayed at home. This is just a guess as the pandemic was not mentioned in the study.

## The Challenge

After surveying three anonymous teenagers, there were three categories of challenges mentioned. The first challenge was time. Most that were surveyed mentioned how little time they had to deal with their mental health on a daily basis. The second big pain point was knowledge. Those surveyed didn't feel as if they knew where to start to find help or how to improve themselves. The third obstacle was expense. The cost of a good therapist can be quite expensive, and the more you need therapy, the more expensive it gets.

## *Lotus*

The idea behind the app, Lotus, was to help teenagers track how they are feeling, help by reminding them to do daily self-care, and then also give them the resources to find a therapist and make them more easily accessible. The app also had a "Mood Diary," a "Sleep Tracker," and an "Exercise/Activity Log." One of the main goals of Lotus was to make mental health more accessible and easier to understand to the teenage mind. The app utilizes widgets, but then makes sure and switches those widgets up daily so as not to become too cluttered.
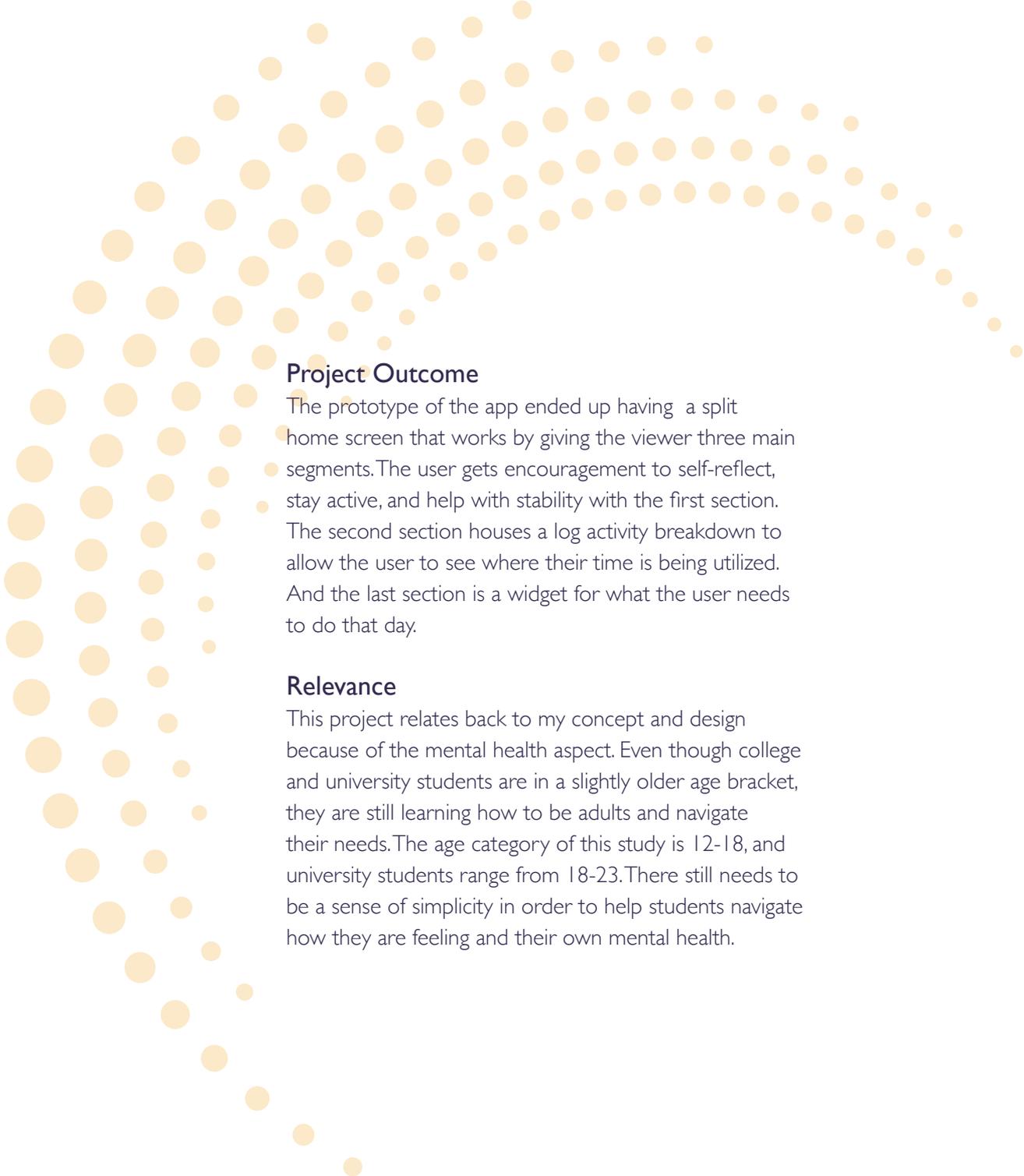
## Project Outcome

The prototype of the app ended up having a split home screen that works by giving the viewer three main segments. The user gets encouragement to self-reflect, stay active, and help with stability with the first section. The second section houses a log activity breakdown to allow the user to see where their time is being utilized. And the last section is a widget for what the user needs to do that day.

## Relevance

This project relates back to my concept and design because of the mental health aspect. Even though college and university students are in a slightly older age bracket, they are still learning how to be adults and navigate their needs. The age category of this study is 12-18, and university students range from 18-23. There still needs to be a sense of simplicity in order to help students navigate how they are feeling and their own mental health.

# *VISUAL ANALYSIS*

## *UX Case Study: Helping Teenagers with their Mental Health*



Fig. 1



Fig. 2

### Visual Analysis

For the Lotus app, there are varying images of the different screens and widgets that a user could go into to navigate the app. As you can see in Fig. 1, all four main screens that a user will see are laid out: the home screen with the Lotus logo and sign in, the main welcome screen, the mood tracker screen, and the screen that lets users log how they are feeling.

### Audience

The audience for this app is generically viewed as "teenagers," but the age range states from 12-18 years of age. Twelve would technically be considered pre-teen, but this would benefit that age group as well.

### Visual Solution

The visual solution is consumed through the use of the app, Lotus. It has soft, calming colors but still allows for a great amount of contrast to help with readability and ease of

Fig. 3


Fig. 4


Fig. 5

use. The typography utilized throughout is a modern, san serif font of varying weights. The kerning of the letters is also not too narrow to help make the type more legible, but to also help with anxiety as too tightly kerned letters can cause issues in reading. In Figure 2, the screen is cleanly broken into sections and the colors are soft and utilize gentle, calming gradients.

## Compositional Interpretation

Figure 2 shows the main home screen after logging in. The "Welcome Back" main screen starts off by referring to the user by name and is a soothing aqua colored background with white letters. You can also see the "Today's Progress" bar to help ascertain how much the user has accomplished today. There are three embedded icons that are simplistic in design but reference the "Mood Diary," the "Sleep Tracker," and the "Activity Log." There is a "For You" section that gives a breakdown of studying, work, social and exercise. At the bottom, there is a reminder section that is ordered based on time of event. The color palette has a pale gray background with varying levels of gray text. The rest of the color palette contrasts well with purple, a soft red, a cool blue, a warm

yellow, an orange and a teal/sea foam. Even though that sounds like a lot of colors, as you can see in Figure 3-5, the color palette works well and gives off a very relaxed vibe.

## Content Analysis

The content of the app keeps the information in small chunks of information that makes it easy to digest based on the age of the audience. For example, in Fig. 3, the first screen shows a "How are you feeling?" pop-up that uses a color to reference the feeling as well as typing out the feeling on that color button. The "Excited" button is a warm yellow color that could give the idea of the sun or warmth and can have a happy connotation. For the "stressed" button, the use of the soft red is used, which could give the user an anxious or frustrated feeling because it can be associated with anger. On each of the screens, there is an obvious hierarchy used not only with the font weight and type,

but also with the use of color and gradients that bring the eye down the screen. Even though there is a lot of content, the use of the soft colors and smooth gradients helps keep the user feeling calm.

## Semiotics & Iconography

There is not a lot of semiotics or iconography on this app, but there are a few. As you can see on Fig. 5, the Mood Diary, Sleep Tracker, and Activity Log all have a simple icon for these buttons. For the Mood Diary, it has a simple thought bubble icon on a teal color to give the idea of what is on the user's mind. The Sleep Tracker has a simple waxing crescent moon on a blue background to give the idea of night. The Activity Log utilizes the happy yellow color and a simple icon of a heartbeat. This gives the user the idea that they need to get their heart pumping. There are bars and charts on the app, but they all have smooth edges and rounded corners to give a nice, easy feel.
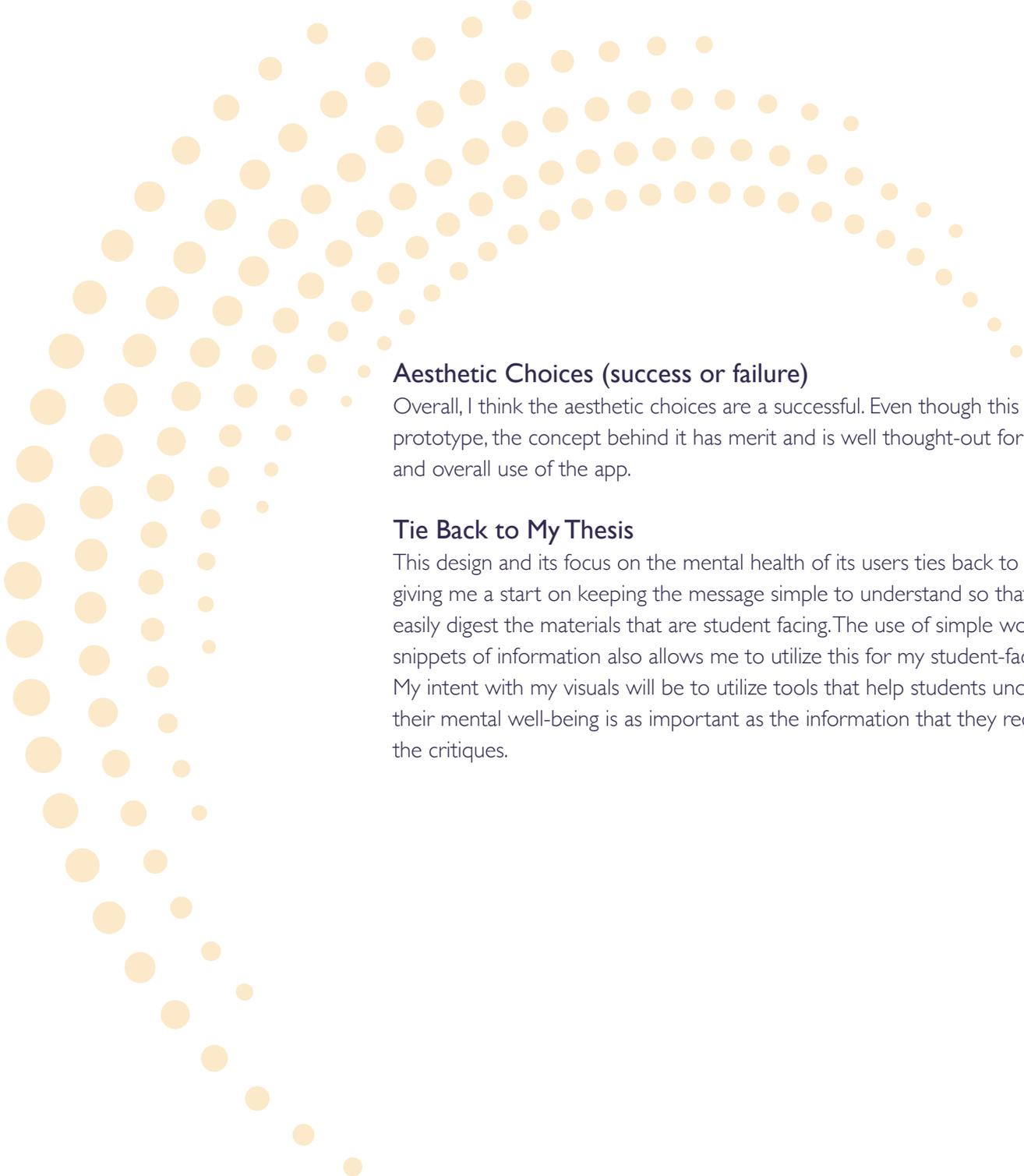
## Aesthetic Choices (success or failure)

Overall, I think the aesthetic choices are a successful. Even though this is just a prototype, the concept behind it has merit and is well thought-out for the age range and overall use of the app.

## Tie Back to My Thesis

This design and its focus on the mental health of its users ties back to my thesis by giving me a start on keeping the message simple to understand so that students can easily digest the materials that are student facing. The use of simple words and short snippets of information also allows me to utilize this for my student-facing visuals. My intent with my visuals will be to utilize tools that help students understand that their mental well-being is as important as the information that they receive from the critiques.
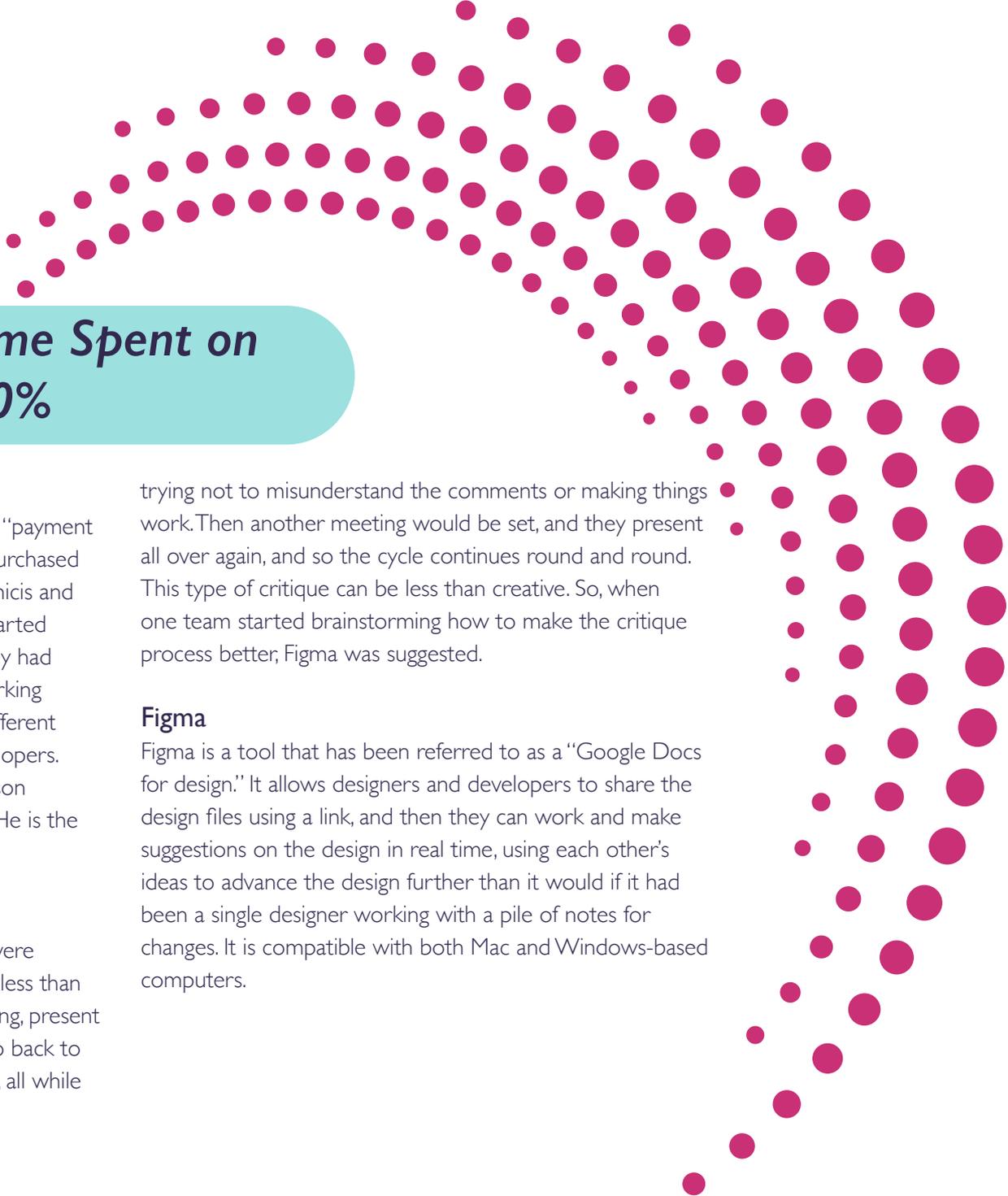
# CASE STUDY

## How Braintree Cut Time Spent on Design Critiques by 50%

### About the Case Study

This case study was initiated and done by the "payment processing company" Braintree after PayPal purchased the company. It was written by Carmel DeAmicis and published in Figma Design. The project was started because once PayPal purchased Braintree, they had a larger group of designers to get aligned, working across multiple interfaces, dealing with two different style guides, as well as multiple teams of developers. Craig Wattrus was a designer on a three-person team responsible for Developer Experience. He is the designer interviewed for this case study.

### Challenges

When it came to critiquing the designs that were happening, the current process was slow and less than effective. One designer would create something, present it to a team of people, get lots of feedback, go back to their desk and make changes all on their own, all while trying not to misunderstand the comments or making things work. Then another meeting would be set, and they present all over again, and so the cycle continues round and round. This type of critique can be less than creative. So, when one team started brainstorming how to make the critique process better, Figma was suggested.

### Figma

Figma is a tool that has been referred to as a "Google Docs for design." It allows designers and developers to share the design files using a link, and then they can work and make suggestions on the design in real time, using each other's ideas to advance the design further than it would if it had been a single designer working with a pile of notes for changes. It is compatible with both Mac and Windows-based computers.

## Results

The results were nothing but astounding. The team noticed an instant change. Instead of multiple in-person meetings, these varying teams were able to just "get on an audio Slack call and jump in the file together." One designer could be in "observation" mode, while another designer would walk one or more people through the design. One designer would be able to make real time changes, while the other person watched. This process eliminated the need to write down all the changes needed, go back to their desks, make changes, set up another meeting, etc. You get the idea. The one-on-one collaboration meetings turned into "more collaborative work sessions". The designers were able to peek in on each other's work and maybe even build a third version of a piece that had several designers' best ideas. Their biggest praise was that every time they used Figma collaboratively, they ended up with a much better design than if anyone had gone off and done the design on their own. They were also able to stop scheduling so many meetings to go over how the designs were supposed to function.

## Where's the Connection

This digital critique process and how Figma streamlined the critique process will allow the critique process to evolve. Most design classrooms at the collegiate level model their critique after the way they were taught critique in college or the way they were taught critique as a designer in the industry. The techniques need to be updated, and since technology is becoming more abundantly used, the way we design our critique process can benefit from some technology being used. The biggest difference between this case study and how critiques happen in the classroom is that you must balance what is being done in the industry while also allowing students to learn and experience critiques as a class to be more effective at coming up with new ideas and ways to answer their design question. So, there must be a balance between this case study and what is proposed in the classroom.

# *VISUAL ANALYSIS*

## *How Braintree Cut Time Spent on Design Critiques by 50%*

Fig. 6

### Visual Analysis

The visuals in this analysis depict the design process when two or more designers utilize Figma to create, customize, and critique the various designs made for Braintree. For example, Figure 6 shows two Braintree designers as they work, edit, and brainstorm an idea on screen in real time. These two variations are different Dev Landing pages. You can see that Craig and Shannon both have their marked color cursor to show each other their ideas and suggestions to help make the design better.

### The Audience

The design team is who these visuals are geared towards. This interface is all about virtually editing and making suggestions to a design without having to physically being in the same room. The audience would also be anyone that deals with designers. Figure 6, even though it depicts two designers, could easily be a designer and a software developer as well. This product is for anyone that might need to comment or have a say in that design.

Fig. 7

This solution is seen and consumed by a designer sending out a link to whoever needs to be in the critique session and can be pulled up electronically. The design of the interface is clean and easy to read so as not to distract from the design that is being formatted. For ease of read, there are icons instead of words along the top left to help streamline that as well.

## Compositional Interpretation

For designers, the layout of Figma and how easily it works for designers comes partly from the concept that the art boards and the documents are navigated and edited in much the same way as the software that all designers utilize in the industry. The treatment of multiple documents along the top navigation bar going from left to right along with an "x" to close that tab as seen in Figure 7 will feel very familiar to designers. For this reason, the designer will feel right at home with the layout. There are rulers along the top and sides as well as layers to show the different grouped objects. This layout seems designed with the end user in mind.
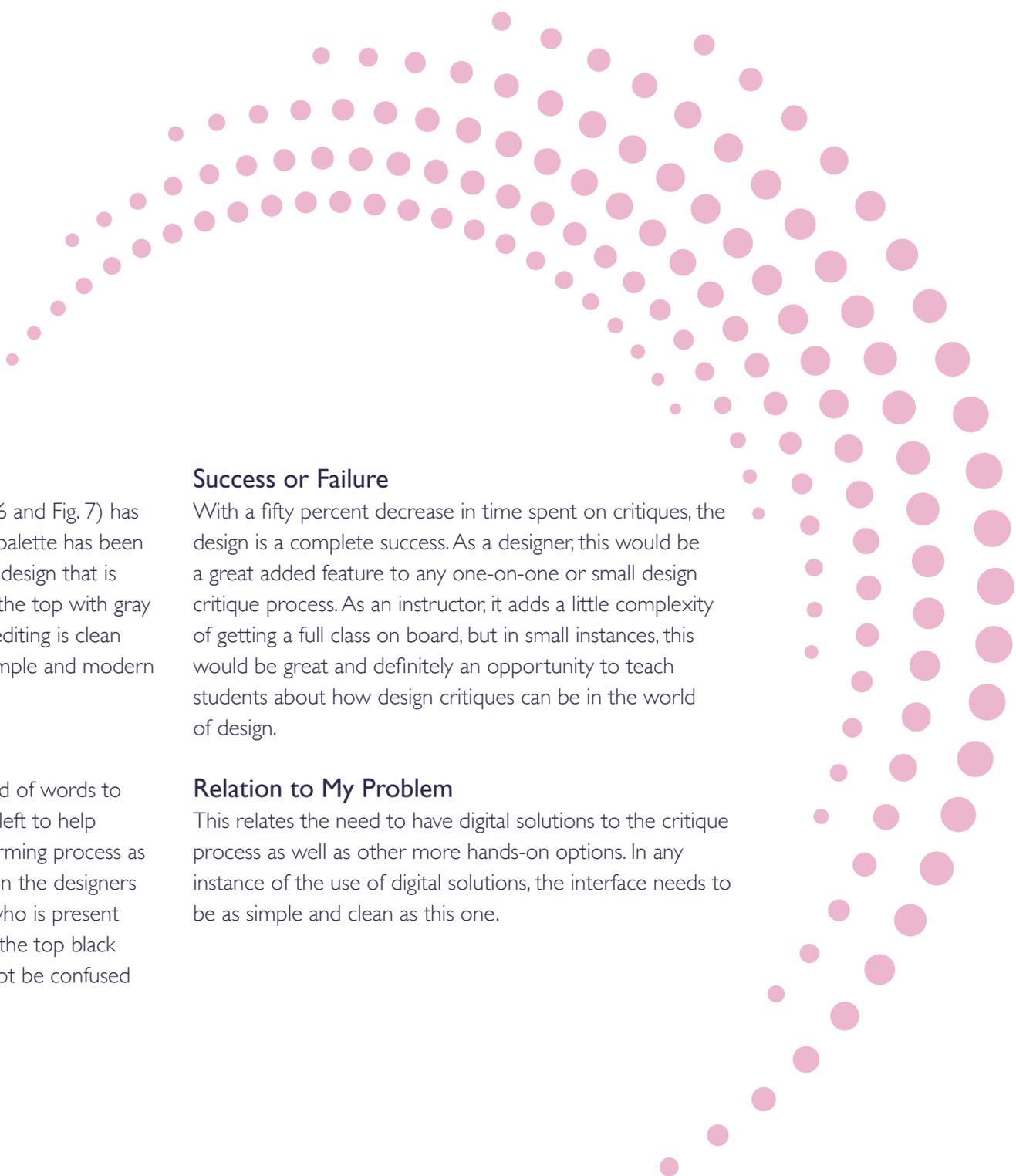
### Content Analysis

The content of these two images (Fig. 6 and Fig. 7) has been kept clean and simple. The color palette has been simplified as if not to distract from the design that is being critiqued. The use of black along the top with gray document names and white icons for editing is clean and easy to read. The fonts used are simple and modern sans serif fonts.

### Semiotics & Iconography

For ease of read, there are icons instead of words to explain the editing tools along the top left to help streamline the critique and/or brainstorming process as well. The tools are kept simple, and even the designers have a small round icon to represent who is present in the discussion. Those are kept along the top black navigation bar, but on the far right to not be confused with the editing tools.

### Success or Failure

With a fifty percent decrease in time spent on critiques, the design is a complete success. As a designer, this would be a great added feature to any one-on-one or small design critique process. As an instructor, it adds a little complexity of getting a full class on board, but in small instances, this would be great and definitely an opportunity to teach students about how design critiques can be in the world of design.

### Relation to My Problem

This relates the need to have digital solutions to the critique process as well as other more hands-on options. In any instance of the use of digital solutions, the interface needs to be as simple and clean as this one.

# CASE STUDY

## Redesigning the Remote Critique Process

### About the Case Study

This case study revolves around the redesigning of the remote or virtual critique process for the UC Davis Design school during the 2020-2021 academic school year. During this time, UC Davis Design decided to do all their classes online during the fallout from the COVID Pandemic. The project was initiated by a team of four design students, Rochelle Dai, Sienna Gonzalez, Morgan Creek, and Gennifer Hom. They are all part of Design Interactive, which is a student-run design consultancy at UC Davis. The motivation for this project revolves around wanting to "create a comfortable and beneficial critique environment for design students to receive feedback on their projects in a remote setting." These four students wanted to create a platform that would not only make the online critique process comfortable for students but also for the professors running the critiques. The project would be a five-week race to get a prototype created and tested.

### Challenges

After surveying a group of twenty people that consisted of both students and professors, they were able to break down the challenges into three pain points. The pain points were lack of personal connection, frequent awkward silences, and unorganized documentation of comments. The students didn't feel connected to their peers or their professors and felt that they could "hide behind our screens." When a student was presenting, there could be long stretches of silence as they waited for any bit of feedback, which made the critique process harder than it would have been in person". The last pain point was that since the typed-up comments were all in different places, it made it hard for the students to implement the changes and hence the professors noticed a lack of changes made by said students.

## Breaking Down the Data

After breaking down the comments and data, they found several examples of contrasting comments. Some students loved being able to type their critique in the comments because they had issues with speaking in front of other people, while some students wanted verbal comments and didn't like that some students would mute their mic and turn off their video feed. Another issue they found was that some students would prefer one-on-one critiques with the professor, and others wanted them to be group critiques but to have a time limit on each critique as they can drag on too long. The last conflicting data they discovered was that some students thought the typing of comments was too time consuming, but others loved that they could go back to the written comments easier to implement their changes.

## Project Outcomes

From the low-fidelity prototype to the high-fidelity prototype, the team was able to implement several aspects to make the process as painless as possible. To increase the students' feelings of connectedness with the process, they implemented an "ice breaker question" to help with students' anxiety and to help students feel more at ease with the process in general. They also let the students select their presentation time to allow the students to feel at ease with when they would be presenting their work and to hopefully ease their anxiety. Through various testing phases, they also tried to implement emotes so that students could react on certain areas of the design but found that it needed to be visible to the student presenting and not to the rest of the class because it made students feel like it was a bit of a competition. They also switched all emotes to be positive in nature as they were meant to be a positive reinforcement to the online procedure. The feedback from students and the professor was then put into one central document that was accessible to the presenter after the full critique was over, making it easier for the student to make additional changes. Ultimately, the design team ended up winning the "Most Innovative UX" award as well as the "Audience Choice" award for the project.

## Relevancy to My Project

Though there are some differences in the online critique and the in-person critique process, the number of surveys and results will lead to a greater understanding about the pain points of students and professors. This will allow for an even more educated outcome to the end goals of my design pieces as well as to my research in general. The incorporation of ice-breakers and the positive emotes also helps give ideas for possible solutions when it comes to the power of positivity in the design critique process that is being hypothesized. Overall, this case study is one of the most in-depth one out of all the case studies and will advance the research the most.

# *VISUAL ANALYSIS*

## *Redesigning the Remote Critique Process*



Fig. 8

### Visual Analysis

The visual analysis of this project will encompass multiple screens and visuals throughout an interactive prototype. The result is a simple, cohesive, and easy to work prototype of the online digital critique process. In Figure 8, there are multiple images showing the different screen designs in each of the steps in the critique process. The intended audience is design students as well as the professor running the critiques. The UI is meant to be user friendly to both members of the audience. The visual solution is consumed in the form of an interactive online interface that is both easy to use and visually appealing. Through testing and surveys after testing, the team was able to not only make sure that the interface worked properly, but surveyed students even went as far as critiquing the visual hierarchy of the product, so the end result not only take into account the usability factor but also design and visuals as well.

Fig. 10



Fig. 11



Fig. 9

## Compositional Interpretation

Throughout the entire composition, the simple use of typography and a simple color palette make the interface unobtrusive and quite easy to read and follow along. As shown in Figure 9, the clean white background in combination with the high contrast black sans serif text is easily read while the simple, calming purple helps draw attention where there are important aspects to the current area. The purple color is used sparingly and is mainly for highlighting. The generous white space allows for students to follow along easily in the critique process. Visual hierarchy of typography and placement of elements of the design help draw the eye around the screen as needed per screen display. From the time selection seen in Figure 10 and the "Welcome to the Critique" screen seen in Figure 11, the use of typographical hierarchy truly helps lead the students through the process.

## Content Analysis

Overall, the content of the prototype was refined through multiple low-, mid-, and high-fidelity prototypes. These prototypes were tested and then also surveyed shortly after. After each round of testing, the color
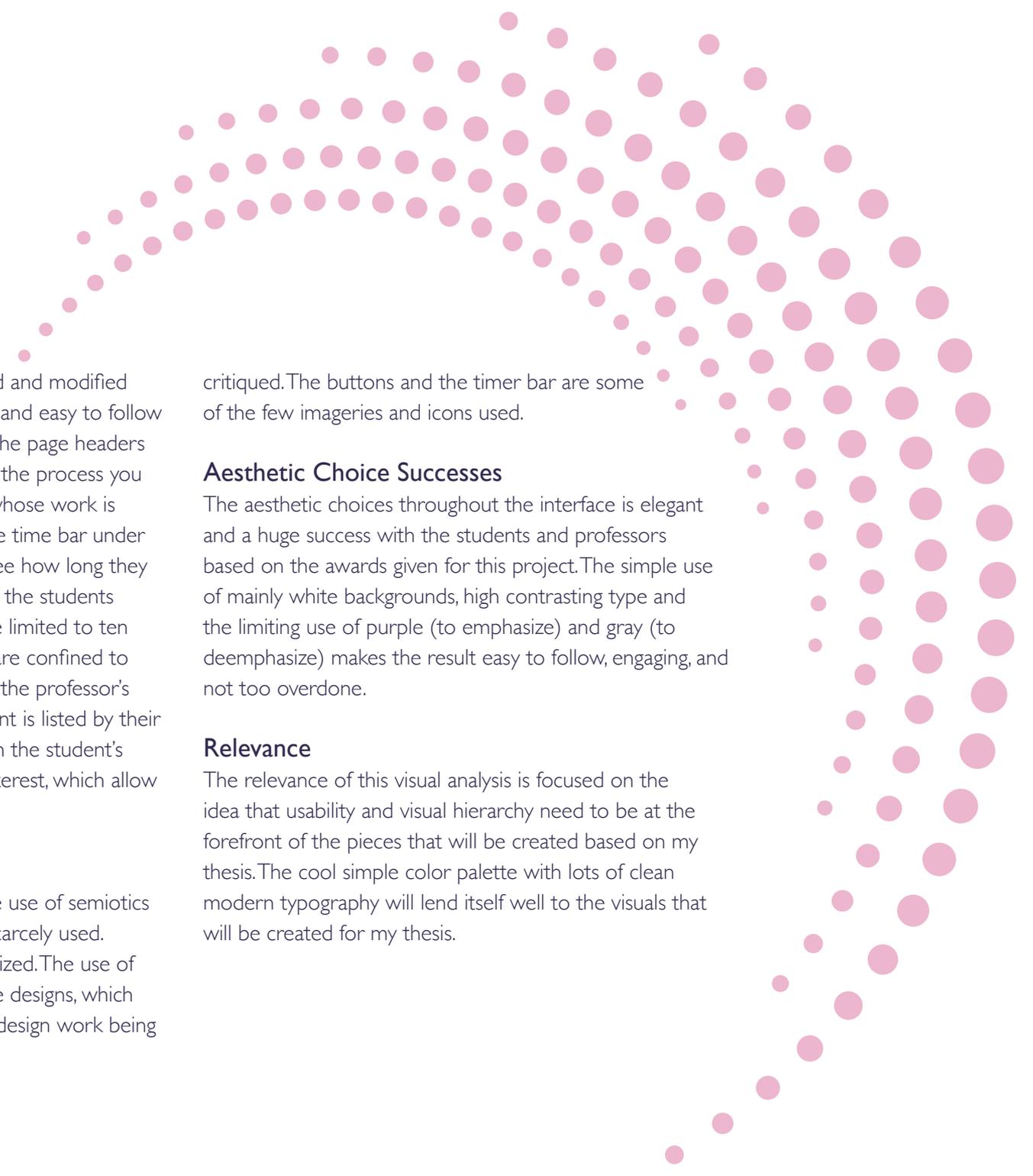
palette and typography were tweaked and modified until the end result is a clean, elegant, and easy to follow along interface. Simple elements like the page headers at the top let you know what part of the process you are in, while the far, top right shows whose work is being critiqued. (See Fig. 9) The purple time bar under the main header allows students to see how long they have been presenting. This also allows the students to keep tabs on their time as they are limited to ten minutes per critique. The comments are confined to the far-right side and are divided into the professor's feedback and then each peer comment is listed by their name. The purple areas of highlight on the student's work also highlight special areas of interest, which allow the areas to be focused on.

## Semiotics and Iconography

Throughout the whole prototype, the use of semiotics and iconography is simple and vary scarcely used. This brings emphasis to when it is utilized. The use of typography is the main element in the designs, which allow for the focus to remain on the design work being critiqued. The buttons and the timer bar are some of the few imageries and icons used.

## Aesthetic Choice Successes

The aesthetic choices throughout the interface is elegant and a huge success with the students and professors based on the awards given for this project. The simple use of mainly white backgrounds, high contrasting type and the limiting use of purple (to emphasize) and gray (to deemphasize) makes the result easy to follow, engaging, and not too overdone.

## Relevance

The relevance of this visual analysis is focused on the idea that usability and visual hierarchy need to be at the forefront of the pieces that will be created based on my thesis. The cool simple color palette with lots of clean modern typography will lend itself well to the visuals that will be created for my thesis.

# *Additional Research Method*

For my additional research method, the process of creating an Image Board was chosen so that the final designed results will be carefully planned and organized. To do this, I will be creating an image board to help effectively create a visual reference to the design pieces that I will be creating next semester. The samples collected for the image board will range from color palettes and aesthetics to typography and even sample illustrations to use as a reference. This method is effective at not only creating a visual reference for me to use but also as an external tool to add to the thesis as visuals for others to see when reading the paper.

This method was chosen because of the wide range of visuals that will be analyzed in the visual analysis section of the thesis. This image board will be based off of the case studies and additional research on color psychology, but will ultimately be able to home in on the exact feeling and aesthetic that will need to be achieved. Because my proposed pieces will include screen-based design as

well as printed materials, the color palettes that will be chosen in the images board will need to take that into consideration as well. The fonts and typography chosen will need to be able to be read on screen as well as printed, so the direction that is taken needs to be thoroughly investigated and planned for. The effectiveness of the designed pieces will need to be well thought-out with research to back it up. The materials created not only need to be effective in communicating their process, but also be easily understood by students of varying backgrounds and interests.

The design plan for this method entails more research and then creating a digital image board that can be utilized digitally but also printed for reference while building the digital pieces next semester.

# *Conclusion*

Overall, the research documents show how critiques are done at the university level, how critiques are currently done at the professional level, in regards to annual assessments, as well as how students are needing more and more mental support on campuses, especially for the fine art students. The research showed that the critique process is happening in varying types of design classrooms, but there is no real breakdown of how the process should happen, or even sufficient tips on handling students in general. Based on that, there needs to be visuals such as posters and potentially worksheets for new professors to utilize to break down the critique process. Breaking down the process and educating students will be the key theories that will be used as building blocks to help shape the information and the deliverables for this thesis.

The case studies and visual analysis give a more in-depth look at how the process has been adapted and changed at not only the university level but also at the professional level. This is a step in the right direction. This shows that the process has the potential to be so much more geared toward building mentally prepared students for the design world who have a better understanding about how a critique is there to make them better, not destroy their self-esteem and cause harm to their mental state. All of these things combined help us make choices on everything from color palette to the design deliverables themselves. The visual analysis will guide the deliverables in many aspects such as color palette and font selections for ease of reading and mental calmness. There is a definite path forming to help create a well-educated visual solution. Also, the use of the surveys from students and professors found in the case studies show the missing key to the rest of the research in regards to how the process should be designed and thought out.
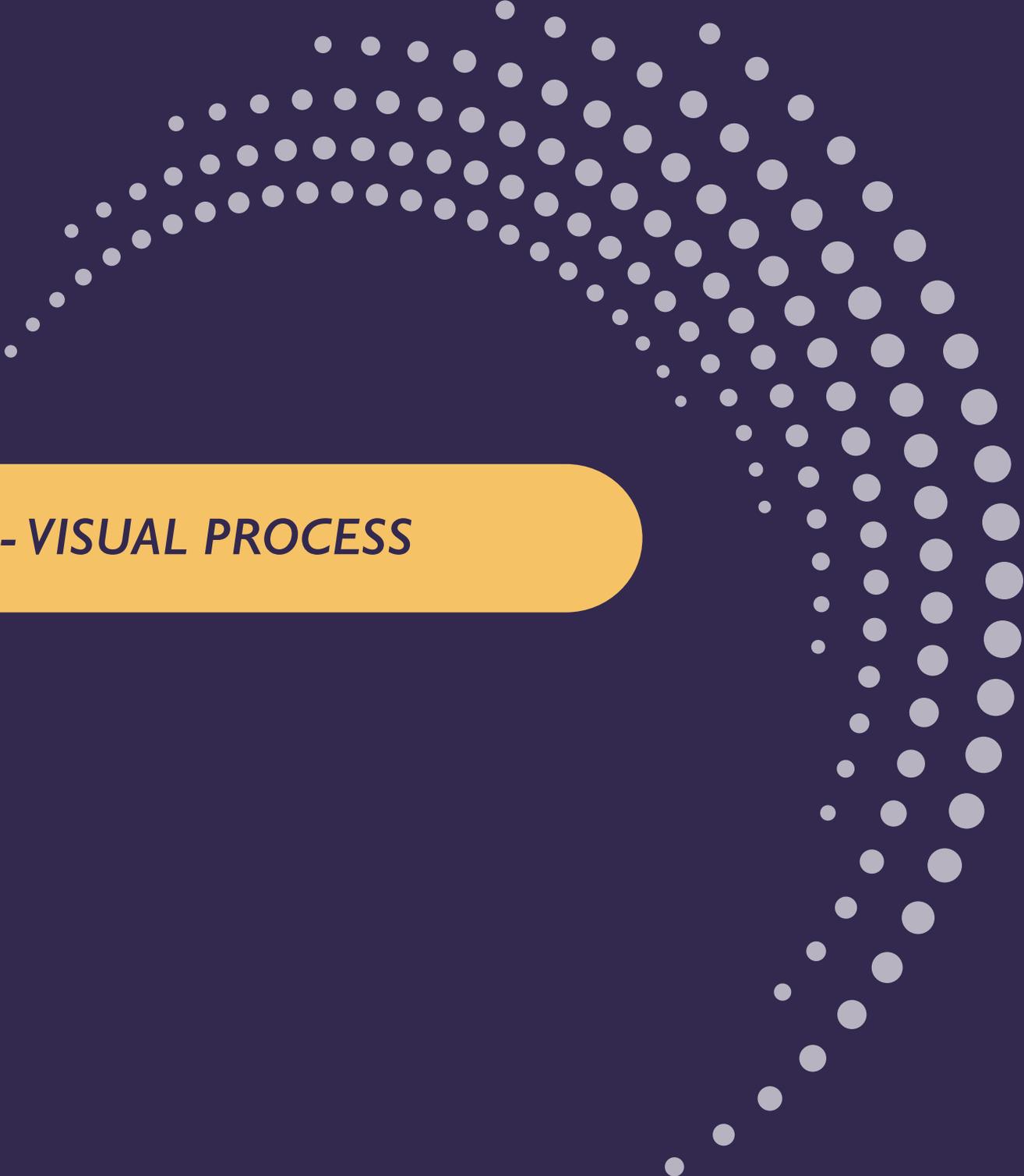
# CHAPTER 3 - VISUAL PROCESS

# *The Concept*

## The Path Forward

With the help of the research, case studies, and visual analysis, the selection of design deliverables was pretty straightforward. There needed to be a way to get the information delivered to professors worldwide, so the concept of a website was the first design deliverable chosen. There then needed to be tools for the design professor to educate themselves and then ultimately their students on the process, so the idea for posters, a guidebook, and worksheets emerged. And lastly, there needed to be a form of advertisement to push everyone to the location of the website, so a social media carousel fit that need perfectly. With these five design elements in hand, this would effectively give new and existing educators a clear path to success.

### The Website

The first design deliverable is the creation of a website.

This would allow for an in-depth explanation of the process and reasoning behind the need for the solution, a place to house all of this research for professors and instructors to read for themselves, and a location for all of the tools for those professors and instructors to download and use. These tools would be used first to educate themselves on the process, allowing them to be able to implement the process in classrooms and design labs, as well as educating the students on the importance of the process.

### Posters for the Design Studio

The second set of design deliverables chosen were posters to display in the studio or classroom. These posters were not only needed for the educators but also as a guide and a reminder for the design students to reinforce the process. These posters would not only be free for download but also available in varying sizes depending on the printing capabilities of the design studio classroom. For example, if an educator had a wide format printer, then the full-size

poster would be the size chosen. If the printing option was smaller, then 11x17 inch (tabloid) or 8.5x11 inch (letter) posters would be available. The letter-sized posters could also double as fliers for handing out to students or utilizing the PDF to place on their educational platform. All of these options would be available on the website for download as high resolution PDFs. Eventually, there could also be international sizes added to the available options.

### A Guidebook for Educators

Once the idea of the poster was chosen, there needed to be some sort of explanation and guide for the educators. The guidebook needed to be detailed enough to be useful for the graphic design educators, but also simple enough to still be useful but not overwhelming. The guidebook would be set up to be viewed online but also fully downloadable in case the guidebook ever needed to be printed. The layout needed to take into account possibly being printed in the design studio so the finished

dimensions (once folded) would be letter sized (8.5x11 inch). With that in mind, the guidebook needed to have a front and back design with just a fold to be cost effective.

### Worksheets - A Tool for the Classroom

Once the guidebook was chosen, there needed to be more tools available to the educator than just posters. As a design educator myself, the need to have multiple options to educate my students is of utmost importance. The worksheets also needed to be easy to use and easy to print in a classroom environment. The concept of ease of print allowed the idea of making the worksheets smaller and be designed with two worksheets per page came to mind.

### Social Media Carousel

The last design deliverable needed to be some sort of advertising to push people to the website, hence the tool box for design educators. This advertisement needed to
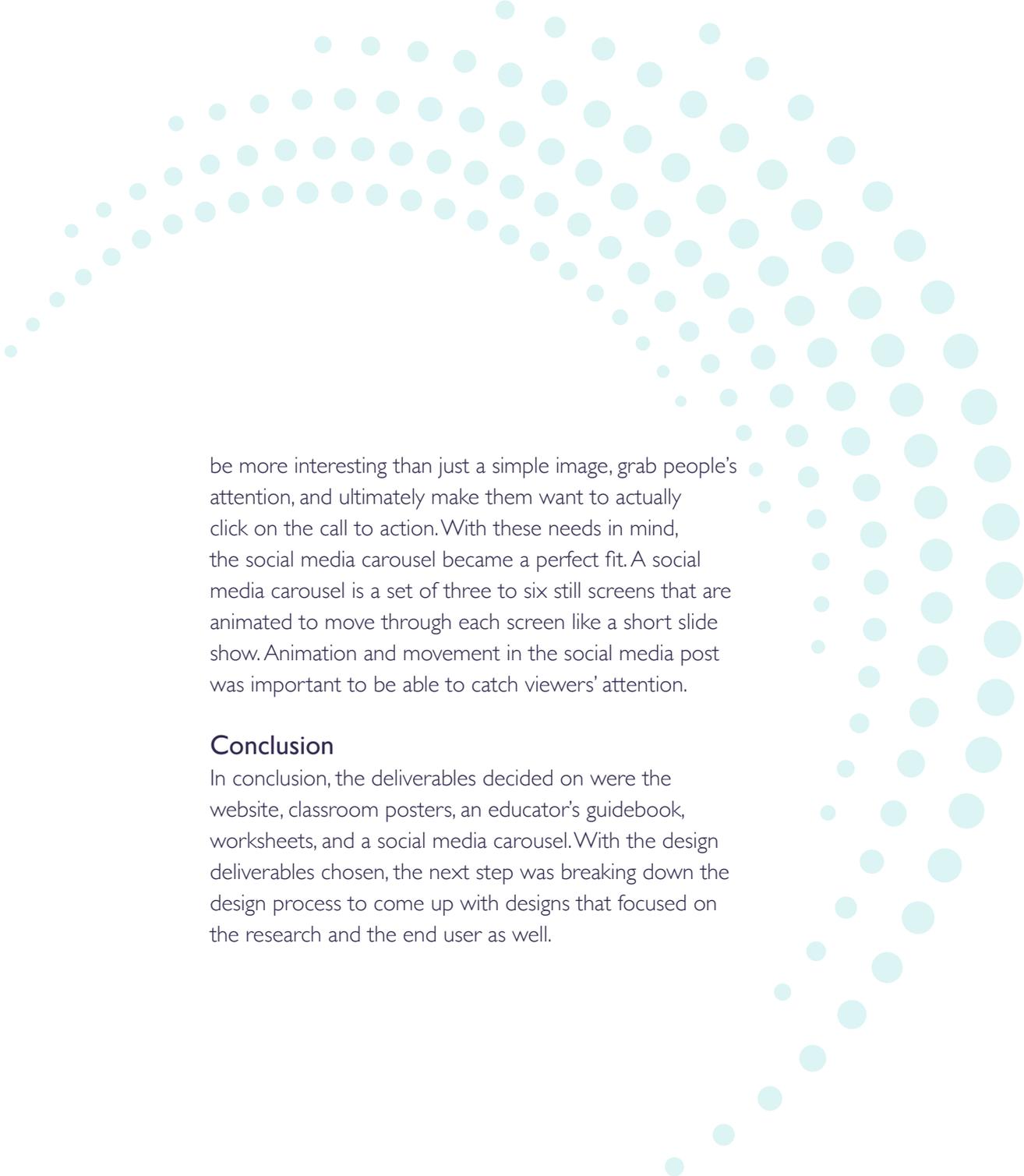
be more interesting than just a simple image, grab people's attention, and ultimately make them want to actually click on the call to action. With these needs in mind, the social media carousel became a perfect fit. A social media carousel is a set of three to six still screens that are animated to move through each screen like a short slide show. Animation and movement in the social media post was important to be able to catch viewers' attention.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, the deliverables decided on were the website, classroom posters, an educator's guidebook, worksheets, and a social media carousel. With the design deliverables chosen, the next step was breaking down the design process to come up with designs that focused on the research and the end user as well.
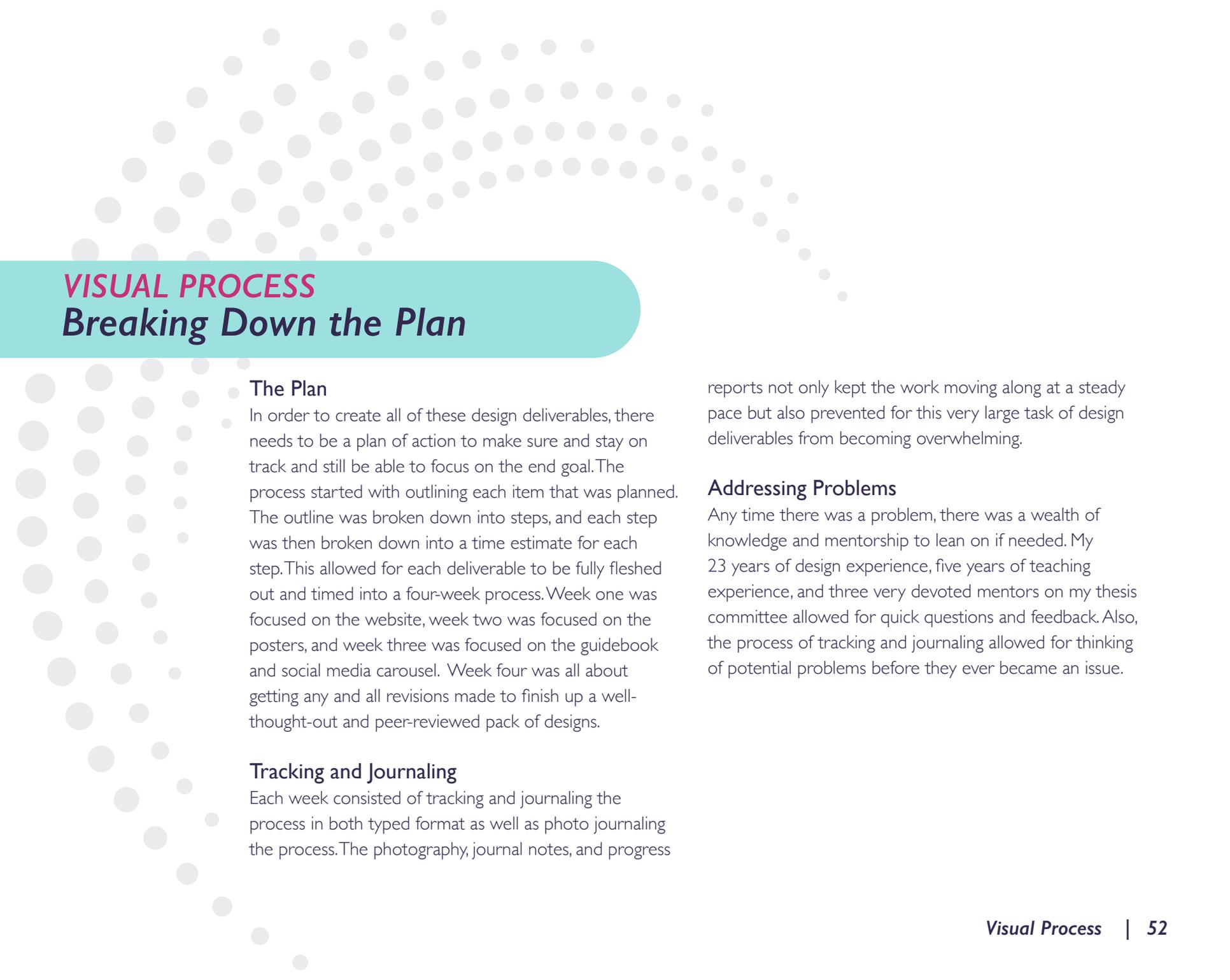
# *Breaking Down the Plan*

### The Plan

In order to create all of these design deliverables, there needs to be a plan of action to make sure and stay on track and still be able to focus on the end goal. The process started with outlining each item that was planned. The outline was broken down into steps, and each step was then broken down into a time estimate for each step. This allowed for each deliverable to be fully fleshed out and timed into a four-week process. Week one was focused on the website, week two was focused on the posters, and week three was focused on the guidebook and social media carousel. Week four was all about getting any and all revisions made to finish up a well-thought-out and peer-reviewed pack of designs.

### Tracking and Journaling

Each week consisted of tracking and journaling the process in both typed format as well as photo journaling the process. The photography, journal notes, and progress reports not only kept the work moving along at a steady pace but also prevented for this very large task of design deliverables from becoming overwhelming.

### Addressing Problems

Any time there was a problem, there was a wealth of knowledge and mentorship to lean on if needed. My 23 years of design experience, five years of teaching experience, and three very devoted mentors on my thesis committee allowed for quick questions and feedback. Also, the process of tracking and journaling allowed for thinking of potential problems before they ever became an issue.

# *Narrative of Creation*

## Designs in Progress

Each design deliverable goes through the same process. There is visual research and brainstorming to get all of the concepts for that one piece down on paper, mood boards to get a vision, sketches (both thumbnail and rough) to help quickly go through all variations possible, comps and iterations to hone in on the best design, and then a proof to my peers and thesis committee. After that process, there only remains revisions from said committee to tweak the final design so that the visuals go with the thesis and research. Even though this process is long and time-consuming, it allows a designer time to ruminate on a design to come up with design deliverables that best fit the need.

## Logo Design

When I started the process of creating my first design deliverable project of the website, I decided halfway through the brainstorming process that I wanted a logo to use throughout this entire process. I did not originally plan to create a logo, but as I got into the sketching process for the website, it became abundantly clear that I needed to be able to not only build a unified brand, but that I would need to have a logo that reflected my intensions for this thesis. It is at this point that I went back to my research and stared looking for inspiration for a name for this technique. I focused on the thesis and zeroed in on the "power of positivity" in the wording of the thesis. This phrase would become the focus on several of the design deliverables. With that phrase in mind, the brainstorming process of imagery and names was quickly put down on paper. The word "critiques" needed to be in the name, but it needed to be paired with the concept of positivity and being aware of a student's mental state needed to be paired with it. The word Mindful came up while brainstorming, and so the process would be coined "Mindful Critiques". Once I had the wording complete, the imagery was kept pretty simple but also happened while I
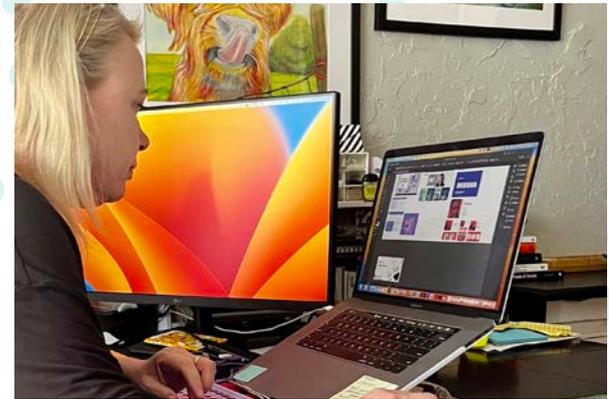
Fig. 12


Fig. 13


Fig. 14

was brainstorming and sketching for the website design. This made the process more organic, and both designs seemed to grow off of each other.

## Website Visual Research & Brainstorming

For this first round of design deliverables, focusing on the research and also using the visual analysis from chapter two was my main goal. The visual research consisted of looking for design inspiration on sites like Pinterest and Behance and using Google as a search engine for more. As you can see in Figure 12, this process took approximately two hours to feel like there was enough inspiration to brainstorm and also create a mood board. As the visual research progressed, so did my notes (Fig. 13 - 14) of everything from where the research needs to focus, the target audience, what types of fonts will work best across all platforms, the theme, color palette ideas, and then ultimately the brainstorming clusters and rapid ideation.  It is at this point that the name Mindful Critiques was chosen for the process and then ultimately worked into a logo, as mentioned previously.

## Website Mood Boards

Based on the brainstorming process and the research from the case studies, the color palette needed to be cooler or pale colors and not too bright or bold to keep the mood calming. This helped focus the mood boards to find inspiration that had calming colors. Also, the typography of the inspiration images needed to be more modern so that professors and students both could feel as if the process was fresh

and clean. The mood board focused on three elements: mental health conscious websites and apps, fonts that could be combined to have a traditional feel for the professors and instructors that would be using them, and a more modern font as well to appeal more to the graphic design students. As seen in Figure 15, the mood board was built in Adobe Illustrator so that it could be printed or viewed digitally and uses for my inspiration. In Figure 16, the final mood board features six images on the far left to show app design, website design, and social media post templates that utilized the modern feel and also calming color palettes.

## Typography Inspiration

Once this was complete, then the inspiration typography can be seen close up in Fig. 17. Originally during the brainstorming process, the plan was to have three different fonts used throughout. There was to be a serif font for headlines, a script font for quotes, and a sans serif font for body copy. But during the visual research and image search, it became clear that three different fonts might become quickly overwhelming, so the plan slimmed down to just two fonts. A serif would represent the professor and how their education was steeped in tradition. On the other side of that coin, a sans serif font would be used in conjunction to help visually show a stepping into a modern era of mindfulness and calm when referencing critiques.

## Color Palette Inspiration

At first, the color palette was to be focused on just cool colors but during the visual research process, soft pinks and yellows were also being used. It is at this point that



Fig. 15



Mood Board/Inspiration

Font Inspiration

Color Palette Options

Fig. 16



Font Inspiration

Color Palette Options

Fig. 17

Fig. 18



Fig. 19



Fig. 20
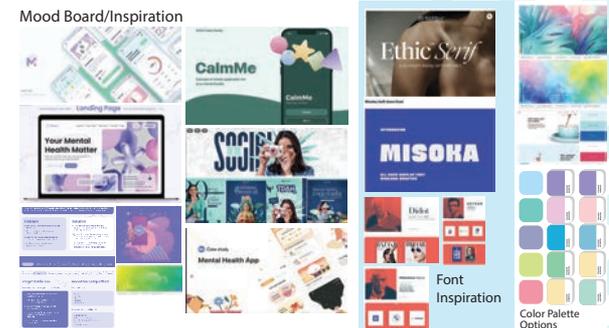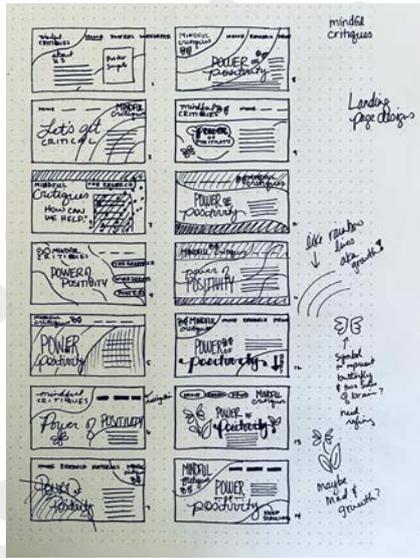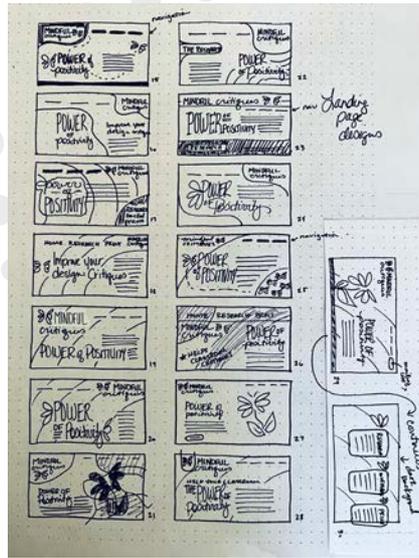
the idea of a pale, muted version of a rainbow comes to mind for not only a color palette but also as a graphic. The concept of using a simplified image of the human brain also kept showing up in my brainstorming, so incorporating that imagery was utilized during the next step of sketches.

## Website Sketches

The process of sketching allows a designer to go through numerous ideas in a short amount of time. The sketching process starts out with thirty thumbnail sketches and then from that thirty, gets narrowed down to four cleaned up, larger, rough sketches. The thirty thumbnail sketches (Fig. 18-19) focus on the landing page for the website and different variations of the Mindful Critiques logo. It is during this process that the hierarchy of importance comes into play. Also, the imagery of the two halves of a brain started to morph into a stylized flower but still keeping the two halves separate. The flower/brain imagery eventually worked its way into a flower that is meant to represent growth. These concepts are explored even more in the rough draft sketches shown in Figure 20. It is here that the logo is starting to come together with the rainbow element, the flower element, and
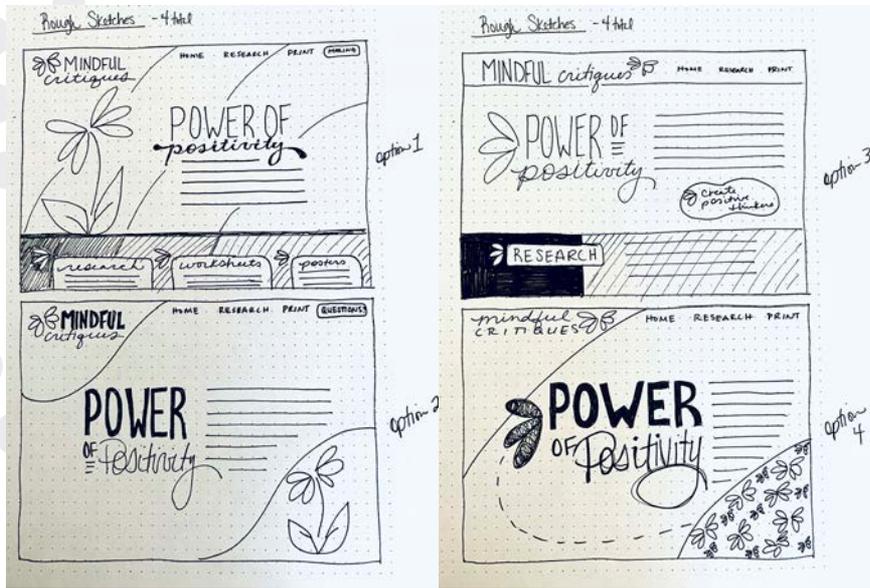
Fig. 21

the phrase "Power of Positivity," which will be the headline of the first paragraph on the home page.

## Website Comps and Iterations

Once the rough sketches were complete, the process moved onto the computer. The sketches were scanned into the computer and used to mock up the website as well as being used for the logo design. Even though the sketches utilized a script font, this font was always meant to be an italicized serif font that could be graceful and script-like, but also easily read. After going through the inspiration fonts and still not finding the right fit, the fonts Didot Italic and Gotham Light were both chosen. Didot Italic was used for the text "Mindful" and the Gotham Light font was used for "Critiques." The word "critique" was put in all caps and the kerning was expanded to 325 pt. to allow for a stable base for the logo. The brain/flower imagery was traced from a sketch and utilized for the final logo, as seen in Fig. 21. The website mock-up was built using Adobe Illustrator as seen in Fig. 22, and the first proof was sent on to my committee for feedback, as seen in Fig. 23.

At first, there were plans to put a link on the top navigation for educators to join a mailing list, but ultimately decided to change the four tabs across the top to Home, About, Research and Print Materials. This would allow the website to be self-sufficient and not require visitors to the site to feel obligated to do anything other than take advantage of the tools and materials provided.
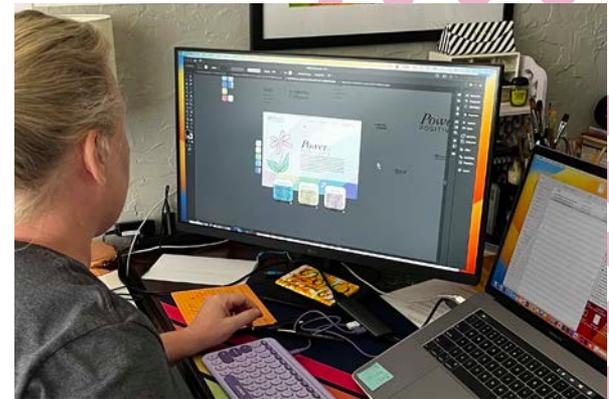


Fig. 22



Fig. 23
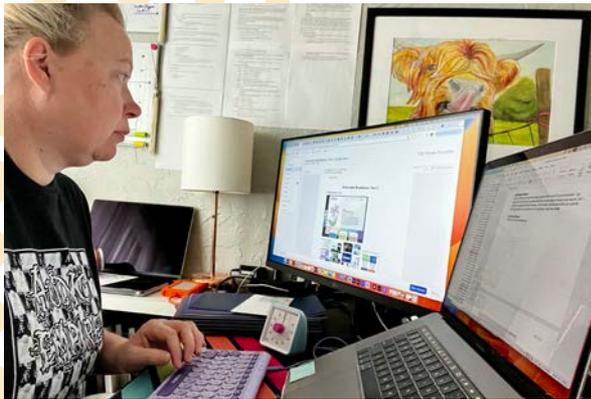
## Issues and Problems

The main issue that arose during the design process for the logo and the website was the color palette selection. The color palette was five muted rainbow colors plus white and black as secondary colors. The color palette worked great up until it had to be plugged into the Wix.com site where the colors became even more muted than expected. Even though the colors selected were web colors, how they were represented in the design software was slightly different than they were in the website environment. The colors were adjusted to work in the website and then edited in the design software so that they all worked together.
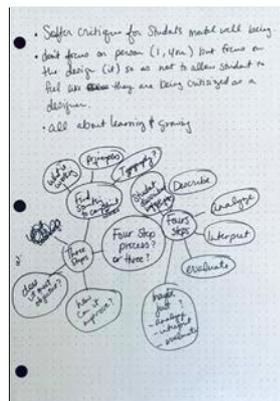
## Poster Visual Research & Brainstorming

For the poster designs, the focus became figuring out what content needed to be on the posters and that would determine how many posters were needed. Through visual exploration (Fig. 24), it became clear that educators thought there were anywhere from four to twelve steps in the critique process. The steps that were used while obtaining my undergraduate degree in graphic design were to allow the student to present the work, everyone look it over and then give feedback. The professor would chime in afterwards to correct anyone they thought were wrong. With this old process still in mind, the brainstorming process consisted of listing out all of the principles of design and the generic steps of art criticism that listed description, analysis, interpretation and then finally judgment (Fig. 25). Through mind mapping (Fig. 26), the idea of dropping the judgment step since it seems implied



Fig. 24



Fig. 25



Fig. 26
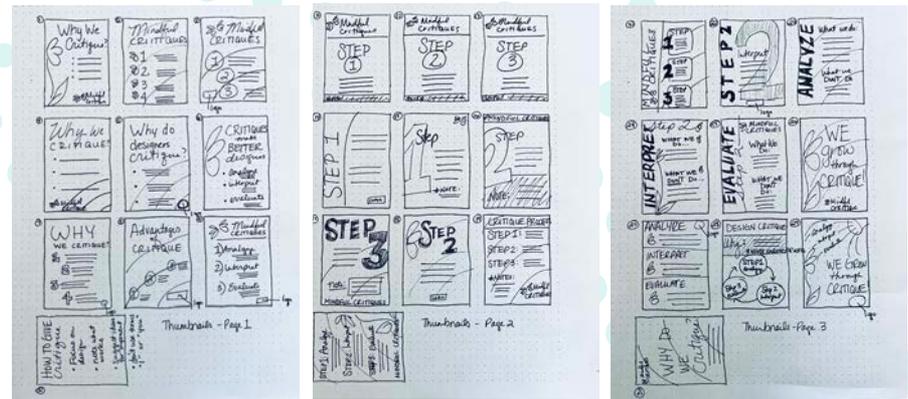
Fig. 27

felt like the best route based on the negative connotation of the word "judgment." Ultimately, the three steps to the process for poster number one were "Analyze," "Interpret," and "Evaluate." Then, for poster number two, it would give students tips on how to keep the critique "mindful."

## Poster Mood Boards
The process of a mood board for the posters ended up being culminating. Each week, new additions got added based on the previous week's design results. The mood board from the website designs was utilized in conjunction with the first draft of the website design as well as a few images from Pinterest and Google.

## Poster Sketches
The sketching process was the same for the poster designs as it was for the website designs. It consisted of thirty thumbnail sketches (to scale) and then narrowing those down to the best four options and making larger, rough sketches of those. During the thumbnail process (Fig. 27), the concept of breaking the steps into individual posters was explored, but ultimately, the sketches that had the best visuals, hierarchy, and readability were the concepts that put the steps all on one poster and then the tips on another. In Figure 28 and 29, the best options are then flushed out again to get a clean view of how these two posters might be designed to interact with one another. The utilization of the rainbow element appears and helps unify the poster designs


Fig. 28


Fig. 29

Fig. 30



Fig. 31



Fig. 32



Fig. 33

with the previously designed website mock up. The rainbow element is mirrored in the two posters making it a matched set of posters when utilized in the classroom/studio. The other element utilized is half of the "flower" element from the logo that would also represent half of a brain to use as bullet points.

## Poster Comps and Iterations

The first designs are seen in Figure 30 and 31. In this iteration, the focus gets jumbled with the large headline, rainbow background, mirrored flowers, text, multiple bullet point flower elements and the logo. Although this was a great first attempt, the focus needed to be clearer and easier to read, while still being on brand.

Edits have been made to Figure 32 and 33 to help with hierarchy and readability. The half flower bullet points have been removed, the steps are easily identified, and the tips poster has more clarity. The Critiques Make Better Designers poster still needs copy written to go under each step but feels closer to being complete. The How to Give Critique TIPS poster has the wrong hierarchy on the words, so that poster needs another round of edits. The individual tips listed below the headline need to start out in the Didot italic serif font on top and the Gotham Light sans serif font to be the bottom text. This would allow for better hierarchy and also mimic the logo.

## Issues and Problems

The main issue that arose during the creation of the posters was how to make the visual hierarchy in the designs match the needs of the content. The posters ended up going through three rounds of edits to line up the content with the design. Ultimately, the answer was found by getting feedback from members of my thesis committee and by also going back to the original sketches for the logo and the website. By basing decisions more on the original thought process and focusing on the end user (the educator) and the subsequent end user (the student), the end result was in line with the research and case studies.

## Guidebook Visual Research & Brainstorming

While doing the visual research for the guidebook, it became apparent that there were not many teaching guides out there for graphic design educators. Most everything was a book of some sort and definitely not free to use. The guide needed to be easy to use, easy to download/print, and last but not least, informative. The concept was to make it a four page guide that could be printed on tabloid sized paper (11×17), front to back, and then simply folded down the middle. It would need a cover, a page of information about the process, the tips from the poster, some sort of worksheet that could be handed out to students during the critique process, and information about where to find the rest of the resources available to them. For the mood boards, I just utilized the ones from the website and posters to continue on with the overall brand of these products.


Fig. 34


Fig. 35

Fig. 36


Fig. 37


Fig. 38
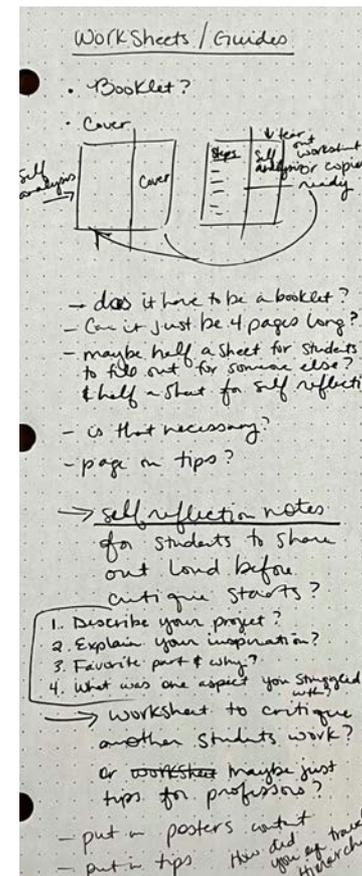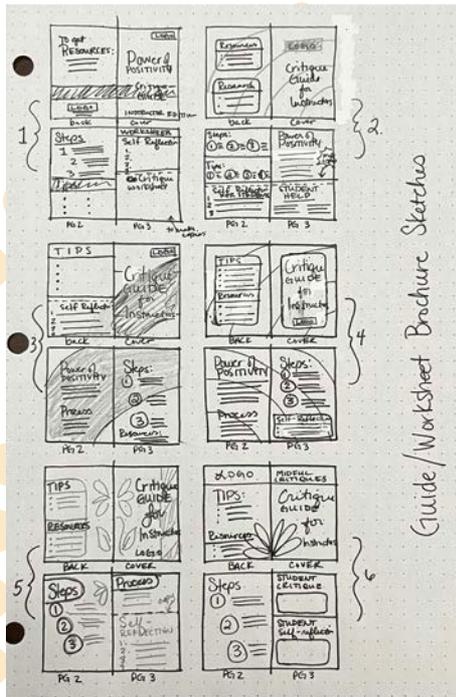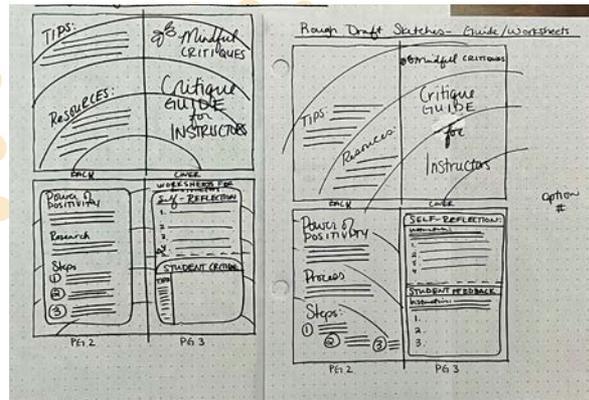
## Guidebook Sketches

After the visual research and brainstorming ideas on paper, the next step was moving on to the thumbnail sketches for the guidebook (Fig. 36). The sketches went through as many design layouts and elements as possible. The thumbnails also helped determine what content would go where in the book. There were six variations of a four-page layout. Then the thumbnails were narrowed to two different rough drawings of all four pages in the guidebook (Fig. 37). The rainbow art element was utilized for consistency and branding while the worksheets for students were sketched out for ease of use. The content would be based on the posters, the website, and the three-step process.

## Guidebook Comps and Iterations

The guidebook design came together quickly simply for the fact that all of the design elements had already been created in previous weeks. The rainbow background was modified from the poster design to run across three of the four pages. This allowed for good flow of information and visual hierarchy. To calm down the colors in the rainbow, slightly transparent white boxes where placed over the inner portion of each page that was full of important content (Fig. 38). This allowed for the overall calmness that the rainbow element brought to the design to be present but still perfectly legible.
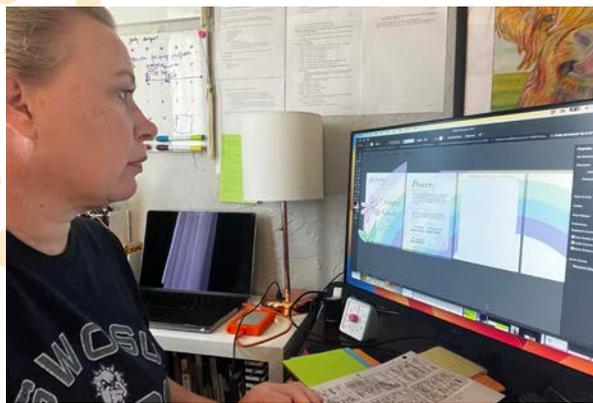
## Issues and Problems

The only issue with the guidebook was that once it was done, the idea to expand the worksheets page into more downloadable options for educators came to mind. This made the process take a bit longer. The worksheets had to be separated from how they were in the guidebook, turned into two more files, modified to be black and white prints for cost efficiency, made to have no bleed, and be on letter-sized paper so that educators in the United States could download and print without any problems.

## Making the Worksheets into Printables

Once the worksheets were incorporated into the guidebook, there needed to be a way for educators to print off just the worksheets for classroom use. There were two different worksheets, and many educators would have varying levels of printing capability, so that was the number one priority. Also, making the worksheets black and white and two copies per page made the worksheet highly cost effective. As shown in Fig. 40 & 41, the two different worksheets are able to be printed and then sliced horizontally across the middle on the dotted lines to make better use of each print.

## Social Media Carousel Visual Research & Brainstorming

During the visual research phase for the social media carousel, it became clear that a carousel consists of four to six screens that are animated to move at a certain time. There needed to be a cover screen, a screen for each step in the critique
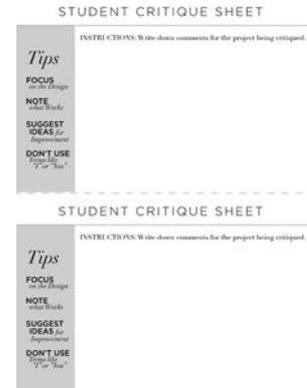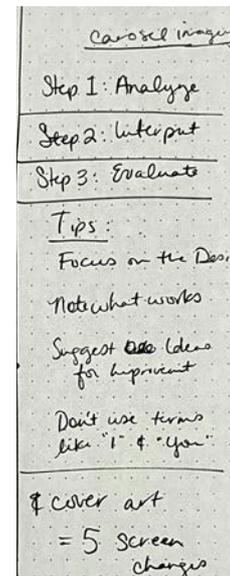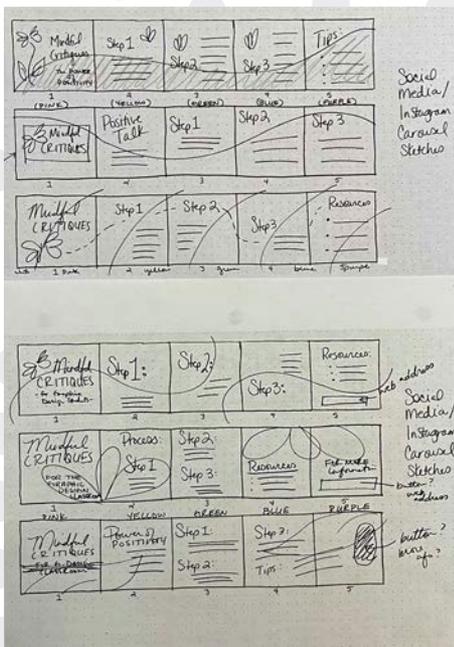


Fig. 40
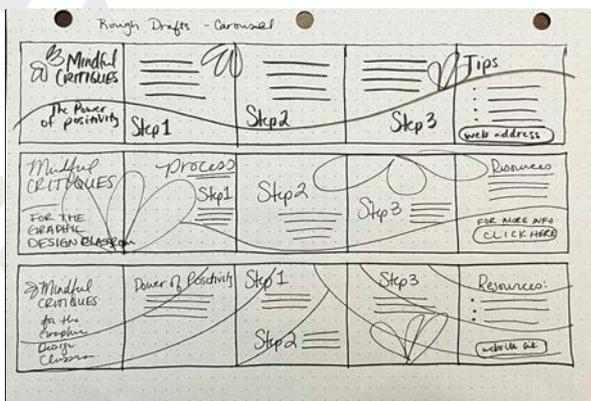


Fig. 41



Fig. 42

Fig. 43



Fig. 44

process, potentially a screen for the tips for a good critique, and then a call to action. This would end up being six designed screens, which seemed too long to keep the viewers attention. At this point, the decision was made to keep it to five screens for two reasons. First, five screens is a good odd number, and second, the design is now not too long and not too short (See Fig. 42).

## Social Media Carousel Mood Boards

The mood boards for the social media carousel simply consisted of the previous mood boards for the website and poster designs. When searching for examples of social media carousels online, there were few actual examples and page after page of designed templates for download, so the focus stayed on the branding already set forth.

## Social Media Carousel Sketches

Since there would be five screens for this carousel, the thumbnail sketches and the rough draft sketches were all laid out in a row so that the transition from one screen to the next would feel seamless (Fig. 43). The background needed to feel as if it was one larger design chopped into five smaller segments. There were multiple variations attempted, and multiple design elements were used in different ways. The last screen shifted between being tips with a button at the bottom that would direct viewers to the website or being a list of resources that could be found on the website. Since the social media carousel would be mainly used in advertising, the last page ended up being a resources page with a link to the website to direct viewers there (Fig. 44).
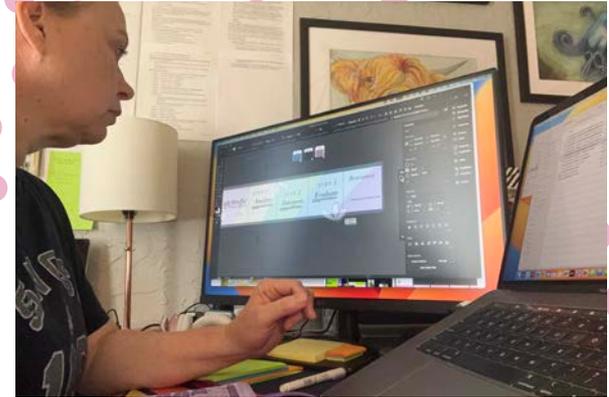
Fig. 45

## Social Media Carousel Comps and Iterations

As shown in Figure 45, the final background chosen was the arching rainbow design element to match the website, posters, and guidebook. For the first comp, as seen in Figure 46, the first screen is just the logo and a quick phrase stating that the advertisement is for the graphic design classroom. Then the steps are introduced as they will appear to move up and down on the screen, so the carousel appears more animated. The final screen is a resources list with a link to the website. The feedback from my peers inspired me to adjust the location of the steps to be more of a sweeping movement to help with readability. The resources list was turned into a short paragraph and the website name was updated to the Wix.com site that was built.

## How Problems were Addressed

The only issues with the carousel designs were keeping the content consistent with revisions to the other design deliverables and making sure not to put too much information into each screen since these would be seen on a phone screen. Also, the headline fonts in the "Step 1," "Step 2," and "Step 3" were modified for consistency.

## Writing Content and Revisions

Once this last comp went to my peers, all that was left was writing content and making any needed revisions to the designs. The content had missing body copy, such as the text under each step explaining what analyze, interpret, and evaluate meant in the critique process and some paragraphs of text in the guidebook and website.


Fig. 46

# CHAPTER 4 - FINAL SOLUTIONS

# FINAL SOLUTIONS

## Completed Design Deliverables

The completed design deliverables have gone through a rigorous design process to ensure that they not only fulfill a need in the graphic design studio but also extend the tool kit available to graphic design educators. This set of tools not only assists the educators in how to conduct a design critique with a focus on the power of positivity but also gives that educator print materials to reinforce the process to students. The care and thought that went into the selection of design deliverables was based on two main factors. First, it became quickly apparent while completing the research process that there was a definite need for a set critique process. The other factor that formed these choices was the research done on the higher education student and their mental well-being needs.

Design critiques are a vital aspect of the design process, and the sooner we pass this knowledge on to our students, the more resilient they will become as they move on to their careers in design. And the sooner these students understand how vital this aspect is, the sooner they understand that the process is not meant to be a shot at their self-esteem and mental health but a way to make them the best designers possible.
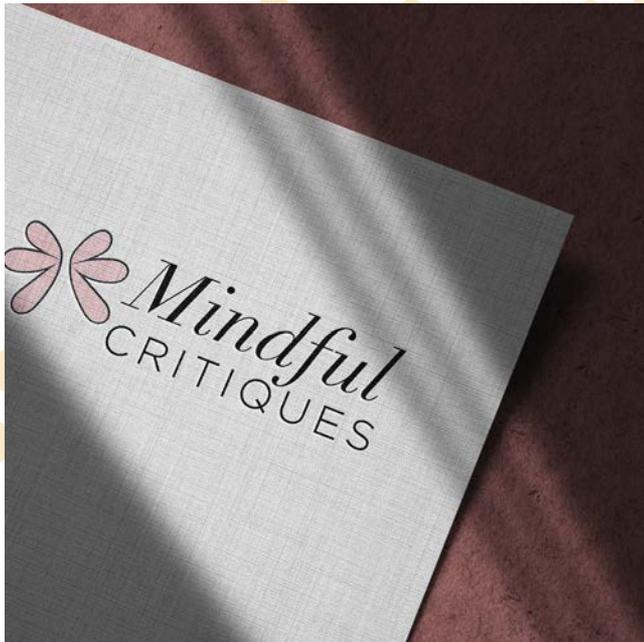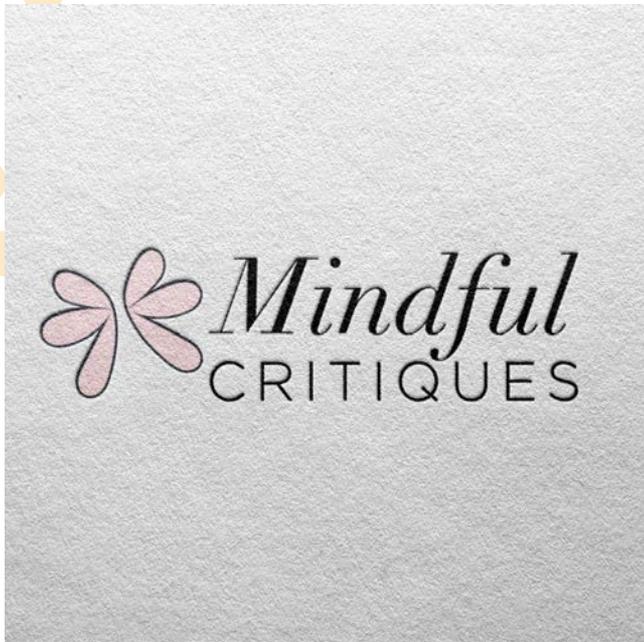
Fig. 47


Fig. 49


Fig. 48

## *Completed Logo Design*
### Mindful Critiques

The completed logo for Mindful Critiques can be seen in Fig. 47-49. The logo is clean, simple, and easy to read. It needed to be impactful without being too bold. The whole point is to give a sense of ease. The typography combines a traditional serif font, Didot Italics with the modern sans serif font, Gotham Light. This combination is meant to represent bringing traditional critiques into the modern world where the mental health of artists is a focus. The imagery is a distorted representation of two sides of the brain, but when combined, they form a flower that is meant to represent growth, which is the broad focus of this thesis.

## Usage

In the case of the logo design, the purpose is to give all design deliverables a uniform branding for both usage categories. The two categories consist of design classroom use and social media marketing strategy. To be able to deliver these steps and subsequent materials to the world of design education, there needed to be a marketing strategy for distribution and a strategy for classroom usage. The logo falls under both of these categories for advertising and branding purposes. The logo also needed to be simple, elegant, and calming (see Fig. 5), so that both design educators and design students would eventually be able to recognize the brand in use and either learn the process or recognize the process later on if used in multiple classrooms.

## Implementation

The logo implementation is quite simple. All materials for the design educator as well as the design student are branded with this logo. The only printed pieces that are not branded with the logo are the worksheets since space is precious for the two-up worksheets. The logo could eventually be used on branded materials for educators such as T-shirts, coffee mugs, or other memorabilia down the road.

Fig. 50

# *Completed Website Design*
## Power of Positivity

The completed website design focuses on the needs of the educator. It is simple and easy to use while also supplying a tool kit of resources. The Home page is calming with the soothing pastel rainbow color scheme. This calming color palette is similar in tone to the visual analysis found on page 31-32 (Fig. 1-5) of this thesis that focuses on the mental well-being of teenagers. The addition of white helps keep the pages clean and crisp with high contrast (Fig. 4). As you scroll down on the home page, there are "Resources for the Classroom," which have an image of the print materials and what each one is used for. The About page focuses on the process and shows imagery from the poster that breaks down the steps. The last page is the Print Materials page, which gives more links to downloadables. There is also a page titled Research where a shortened version of this thesis document along with images will be housed. The need for the consistent critique process is explained on the home page while keeping with



Fig. 51
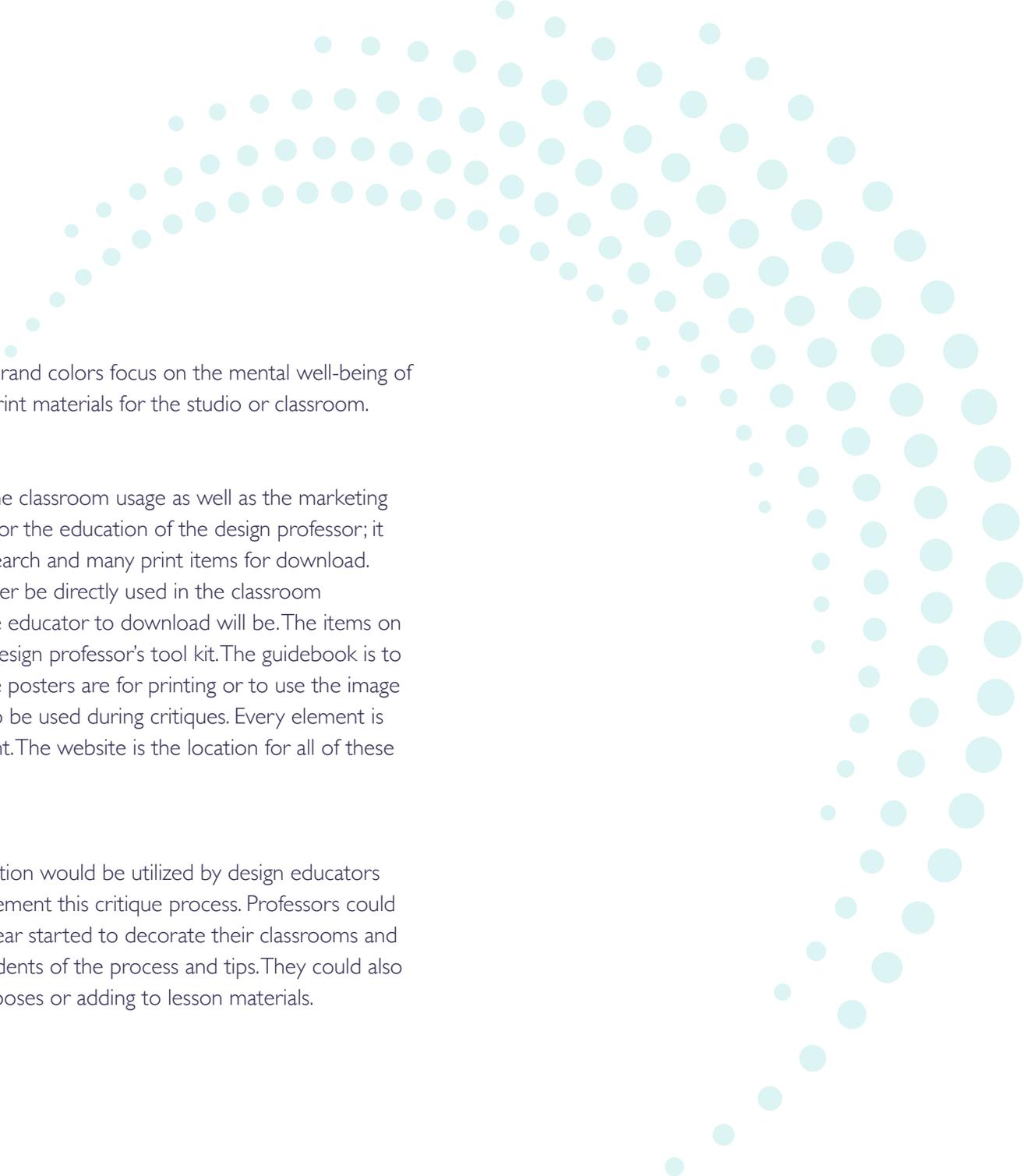
the brand colors and typography. The brand colors focus on the mental well-being of the educator and helps reinforce the print materials for the studio or classroom.

## Usage

The website is categorized into both the classroom usage as well as the marketing strategy. The website is not only there for the education of the design professor; it also backs up the process with the research and many print items for download. Although the website will probably never be directly used in the classroom environment, the items available for the educator to download will be. The items on the website are the main tools in the design professor's tool kit. The guidebook is to be used as a digital copy or printed, the posters are for printing or to use the image with lessons, and the worksheets are to be used during critiques. Every element is necessary in the classroom environment. The website is the location for all of these materials.

## Implementation

Hypothetically, the website implementation would be utilized by design educators anytime they needed materials to implement this critique process. Professors could access the posters before the school year started to decorate their classrooms and also as educational tools to remind students of the process and tips. They could also access the worksheets for printing purposes or adding to lesson materials.
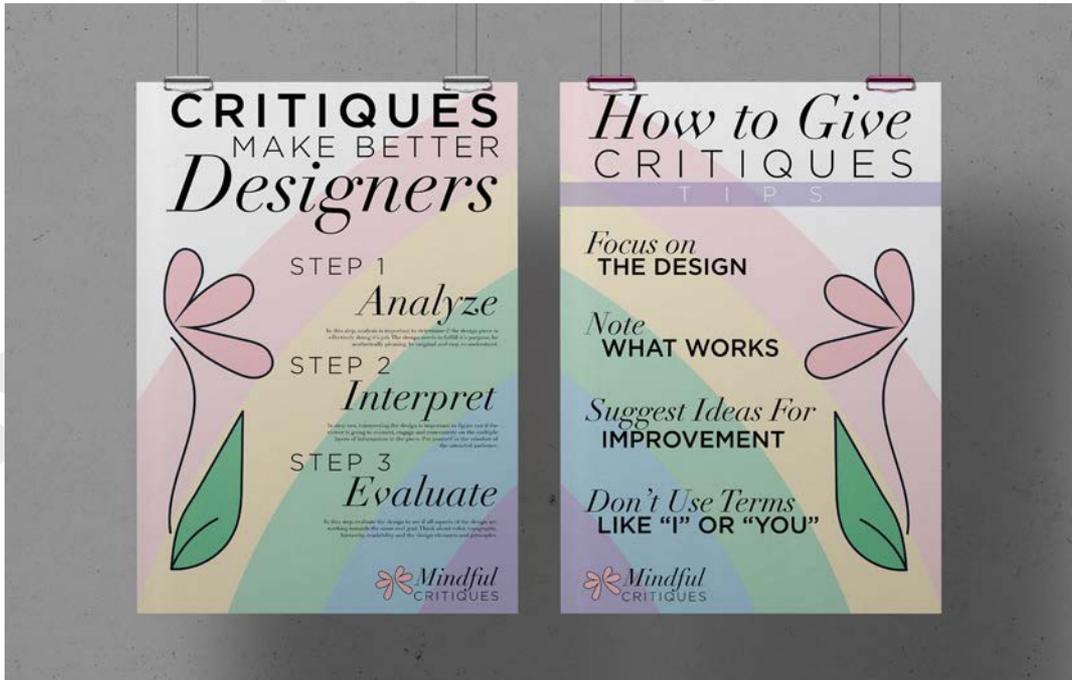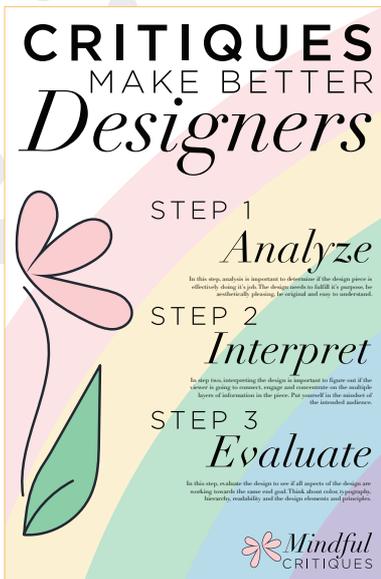
Fig. 52


Fig. 53


Fig. 54

## *Completed Poster Designs*
### Poster Set

The main purpose of the posters is two-fold. First, the posters are used to reinforce the critique steps in the graphic design classroom. That is the focus of poster one (Fig. 53). Secondly, the posters are also meant to help the graphic design educator give tips to students on how to focus on the work being critiqued and not on the student that designed the piece (Fig. 54). This separation between the design and the designer is a main goal of the whole process so that the student can come to understand that the critique is just a tool to sharpen their skills on, not a personal attack. The use of cool and warm colors as well as good legibility links back to the visual analysis found on page 31 in Fig. 3-5. The completed and printed designs can be seen in Fig. 52.

## Usage

The step-by-step poster and the tips poster are meant to be used in the classroom or design studio environment. The website houses these materials in multiple sizes to fit every possible need the graphic design professor might have. The posters have many options for use. The large scale posters (24 × 36 in.) are meant to be printed large and hung side-by-side on the design lab walls (Fig. 55). This allows educators to reference them at any time after the first initial instruction to the process. There is also a medium size (11 × 17 in.) poster that would allow professors that don't have access to a large format printer to use them. The smaller posters (8.5 × 11 in.) could be used for display on the wall, though may be harder to read, used to print copies for students to use as handouts for students or could be used as images embedded into presentations for instruction by the design professor.

## Implementation

As seen in fig. 55, the posters are utilized best toward the front of the design classroom where they can be easily seen by all students and in a location that can be referenced by the educator. The larger prints are used for easier readability, and this allows for students to reference the steps silently without having to ask multiple times and increasing their anxiety.
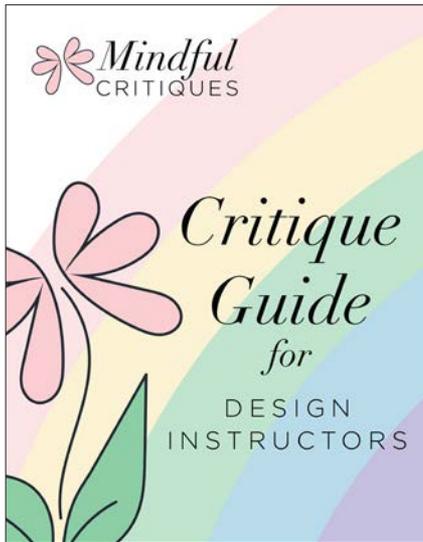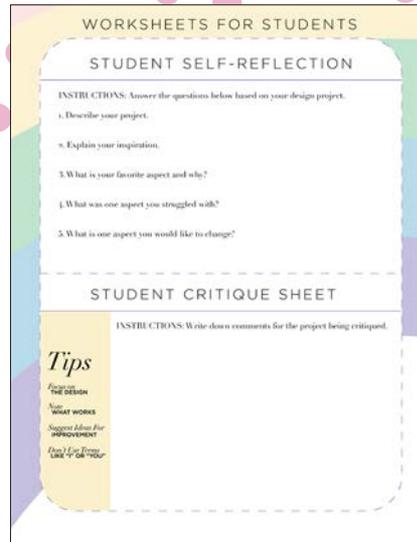
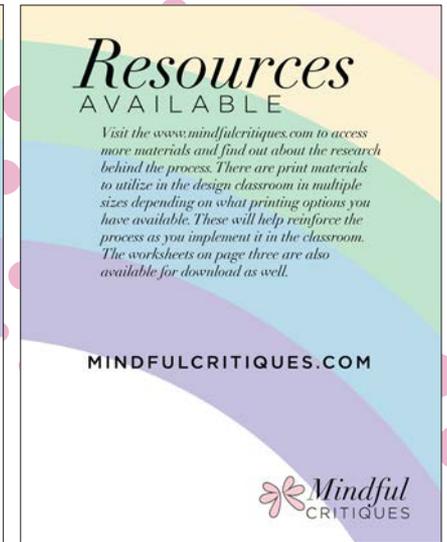Fig. 55

Fig. 56



Fig. 57



Fig. 58



Fig. 59

# *Completed Guidebook*

## Guidebook for Educators

The completed guidebook designs are all about the design educator. When folded, this piece is a standard letter bi-fold brochure. There are several goals that this guidebook meets. First, it educates the design professor or instructor on the reasoning behind the process, the research that backs it up, and the steps of the critique (Fig. 57). Secondly, it provides the educator worksheets that can be copied or printed to utilize during the critique process. The "Student Self-Reflection" worksheet helps students organize their thoughts before presenting so that they don't get flustered in front of the class. The "Student Critique Sheet" is meant to be used by the students who are critiquing another student's design and reinforces the positive tips from the posters (Fig. 58). The last page of the guidebook (Fig. 59) redirects the educator back to the website for more resources and the research that goes with it. The finished and mocked up design can be found in Figure 60.



Fig. 60

## Usage

The guidebook is used by the design professor to understand the reasoning and research behind this process, learn the three main steps of the process, see the worksheets that are available for download on the website, as well as direct them to the website to get more in-depth information and downloadable items for implementing the process. This guidebook can be read digitally for individual design educators that find the process online or printed for a takeaway when the process is presented to design educators at any conference for graphic design professors or instructors. The guidebook was kept simple and easy to read based on the visual analysis found on pages 37-39 (Fig. 6-7) that was more focused on the design professional.

## Implementation

The guidebook implementation is meant to be used as an educational tool for graphic design professors and instructors (Fig. 61). It walks educators through the process and leads them to other resources so that they can teach the critique process to their students. With the posters on the wall, imagery imbedded the online classroom environment, and the worksheets handed to each student, the critique process will become like second nature to students and help students understand the importance of the critique while also learning to be more aware of how they phrase feedback to keep students' mental health in tact.
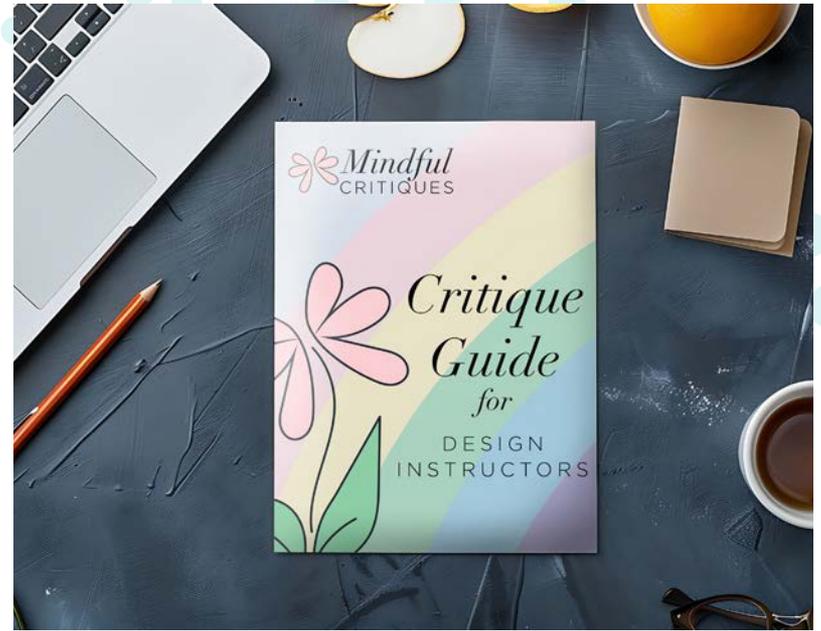


Fig. 61

Fig. 61



Fig. 62



Fig. 62

# *Completed Worksheets*
## Printable Worksheets

During the creation of the guidebook, it became clear that the worksheets on page three of the guidebook would be an excellent addition to the printables section of the website (Fig. 58). If they were going to be printables, they needed to take the educator into account. So the colorful background from the guidebook was removed to help bring down costs of printing, and each worksheet became two copies of the same worksheet. This allows the educator to pick which worksheet that they need to use and how many copies they want to print as well. The simplicity of the design also follows along with the case study and visual analysis for "How Braintree Cut Time Spent on Design Critiques by 50%." This can be found on pages 37-39 (Fig. 6-7). The final designs can be seen in Fig. 61-62 while a mock-up of the student critique sheet is seen in Fig. 63.

## Usage

The worksheets are found in the guidbook, but they are also found separately for download and printing. These download files are printed in black and white or copies can be made as well, sliced and then distributed to students before the critique process starts. The student self-reflection worksheet helps focus the student on what to say about their project before presenting it to the class. This allows students the chance to write down notes and not get overwhelmed in front of the class. This keeps their mental state calmer and allows them to fully participate. The student critique-sheet allows other students to write down suggestions for the designer presenting their work. This allows for students that are not comfortable speaking in the classroom environment a chance to voice their opinion without being mentally overloaded. That sheet is then passed to the presenting student for reference when edits are made.

## Implementation

Hypothetically, a classroom critique can start with the professor instructing the students the process (steps 1-3) and referencing the posters on the wall. Then the educator would hand out the self-reflection worksheet for students to fill out about their project. They would be instructed to use that for when they present their work. Then, the design educator would pass out the student critique sheet each time another student gets up to present. At the end of each presentation, those papers would be passed to the presenter and then new, blank critique sheets would be passed out again. This makes the process less stressful on students and allows time to be utilized properly.

Fig. 63

## *Completed Social Media Carousel*

### Advertise the Process

Once all of the other design pieces were in place, the need to advertise these resources became abundantly clear. There needed to be a way to let educators know that an improved way of hosting critiques was available for use and completely free of charge. The social media carousel became the best choice for advertising because it combined the ease of flat design creation with an automatically animated post that would go through the screens and appear as though animated. The fully finished carousel can be seen in Fig. 63, which shows the varying steps of the finished design. When laid out side-by-side, the rainbow is very obvious, but as the screens are shifting and moving through the carousel, the steps will move from warmer tones to cooler tones for a calming effect. The last screen will be able to be house a link to take the viewer to the website, but it is listed out as well.

## Usage

The social media carousel is a marketing tool and best utilized on one or more social media accounts, such as Facebook and Instagram, to help push graphic design instructors and professors to the website and to peak interest for the process. The social media carousel could also be broken apart into still images and used to tease the steps as well. The purpose of this piece is to push educators to the website where the research and the deliverables are housed.. The use of animation, soothing colors and good contrast will catch the eye of the graphic design professor based on the visual analysis in Fig. 2 and 3. This will start the education process of this new critique process.

## Research and Implementation

With the help of the case studies and visual analysis, the use of soothing pastel colors helps with the mental health of students (Fig. 1-4). Even though the carousel is marketed towards the educator, it is still effective in drawing attention. The calming colors also help soothe design educators, as well, while also being well-designed to catch their attention. Imagine a graphic design educator scrolling through a social media site and coming across this imagery. They click on the link at the end, and it takes them to the website where they can educate themselves even more. This is the first element that educators see if finding the process via social media.

## Overcoming Issues

Spreading the word and advertising this process is the only sizeable issue that has come to light so far. Also, because all of these items are available at no charge to the public, there potentially need to be some sort of investment registering the work.

# CHAPTER 5 - CONCLUSION

# CONCLUSION

## *Research Problem*

Many design students struggle with understanding the purpose and the importance of feedback and critique in the design classroom, resulting in a perceived attack on their character and skills, which may lead to a detrimental effect on their mental health.

### Design Pedagogy

In the world of graphic design, when a graphic designers gets their undergraduate degree, they will go through countless hours of design classes, studio classes, art and graphic design history courses alongside their general education classes. Once they graduate, they are ready to tackle the world of graphic design as a professional. For those who decide to take that education further and pursue a career in graphic design education, a Master's in Fine Art (M.F.A.) with a focus on graphic design is the next step. It is at this point that their graphic design

knowledge gets put under a microscope and they start taking their graphic design to the next level. While there are MANY different M.F.A. programs out there, the basically consist of the same types of classes as the undergraduate degree did, just minus the general education classes. This means that once the M.F.A. is achieved and they get hired at an institution for higher education, they are expected to teach and adopt pedagogy for themselves and try to figure out what makes an effective graphic design professor, most of the time through trial and error.

Most graphic design professors start teaching graphic design without ever being taught how to be an educator. If someone gets a teaching degree as an undergraduate, they will have had multiple classes on how to teach that subject and so much more. As graphic design educators, we can use all the help we can get when it comes to design pedagogy, so that is the origin from which this concept was born.

## The Design Critique

Over the last seven months, the graphic design critique has been at the forefront of my research. Almost every graphic design professor has a variation of the critique process that they learned and possibly adapted over time or from experience. Some may use a technique they learned from design school while getting their undergraduate degree, or maybe they picked up a better way during graduate school. Because of this passing down and modifying of the critique process, there are so many variations of the critique that it can easily become overwhelming. The research stated in Chapter 2 looks at the critique process in graphic design classrooms, architecture design classrooms, video and animation classrooms, and even the critique process in a professional environment. Throughout all of that research, there wasn't any specific way that educators are conducting these critiques. It is through that research that a pattern emerged, but I wanted to take it even further.

## The Mental Health of Our Students

Twenty years ago, the mental health of the young and old was not something that was spoken of often. If you knew of someone who was in therapy, they either had something really critical going on or they had enough money to afford therapy. That is not the case anymore. How the world looks at therapy since the COVID pandemic seems to have come full circle. The world has modified its way of thinking since almost the whole world had to deal with being locked down and alone or only with the people living in the household. There was anxiety and stress and what felt like sickness all around. Our younger generations had to figure out how to go to school virtually and keep up with classes in a whole different environment than anyone was even used to. The world turned into one large home school in what seemed like a matter of days. These stressors and a new environment sent our youth into a tailspin. These young people that are being expected to act and be

young adults in the higher education system are truly not prepared like the generations of years past. This is the second reason that this concept came to mind.

## A Whole New World

As a graphic design instructor teaching since COVID hit, the current teaching environment is all that I know. The mental health of our youth has become more important than ever before. Even before COVID became an issue, the research shows that students, in general, at universities across the nation and the world, are struggling mentally to keep up. There is even some evidence that fine art students struggle even more than a student with a different degree. This need for mental awareness in our classrooms paired with a hunt for consistent pedagogy for teaching graphic design classes allowed me to come up with this concept and develop it based on research.

As someone who has stood up in front of many graphic design classes and students, educating the professors and instructors while also using those materials to help educate the students AND also taking their mental health

needs into account was the path forward.

## My Solution

Even though my graphic design education background is only five years old, my professional graphic design career has lasted since mid-2001. Also taking into account that I decided in 2018 to go back to school for my Masters in Education with an emphasis is art and then decided on getting my Masters in Fine Arts in graphic design in 2021, the ability to put on many hats when contemplating this solution came easy to me.

My intentions were to be able to create a solution that helped the educator, the students, and the eventually the professional environment. I could speak on all three of those because I have been each one at some point in the last five years.

Being able to explain the reasoning behind the need for this process, the simple three-step solution, and the addition of the tips to keep the focus on the design and not the student themselves comprise the core of

this solution. The design tools and other resources just reinforce the idea. Through brainstorming and ideation, the delivery method needed to be simple to find, easy to use, and somewhat self-explanatory.

### The Tool Kit

When imagining a solution for design educators, the concept would be a virtual tool kit that professors and instructors could metaphorically "reach" into and take out whatever they might need to tackle their design classroom or studio. This is how each solution came to be. Did the solution solve a problem? Did the solution fill a need? Was the solution flexible and beneficial for educators and students alike? Armed with those questions and years of solving design problems for my clients, I went about tackling the project like any other client-based problem.

### The Website

The first question that had to be addressed was how do you inform designers across the country about a way to solve the graphic design critique process? Well, that was an easy one. The website creation was the easiest and most logical solution to communicate to a wide range of people.

### The Posters

The decision to create posters had a dual purpose. The first purpose was a way to educate the educators on the process and the tips. The second purpose was to help reinforce the process with students by utilizing the poster physically in the studio and classroom spaces and then virtually being able to use the poster artwork to post to whatever online teaching resource the university used.

## The Guidebook

The guidebook was also a relatively easy choice in solutions. There needed to be some sort of instruction manual to be able to hand out physically when presenting this to educators but also to download and scroll through. It also needed to include some sort of worksheets for the classroom because a worksheet becomes a permanent record of the thoughts and discussions had during the critique process.

## The Worksheets

Since the worksheets were already somewhat built in the guidebook, expanding them into printable options became the best option for educators to customize their critique process with what works best for their students.

## The Social Media Carousel

And lastly, the social media carousel was chosen simply because there needed to be an advertising and marketing aspect for the process to get the attention of educators.

This carousel would not only advertise the steps, but push people to the website to take advantage of these free resources.

Overall, these resources hit upon almost every aspect that an graphic design professor or instructor could potentially ask for. With that in mind, these solutions fill a void that has been needed in the critique process and will hopefully be utilized well into the future.

## Future Vision

My future vision for this process would include varying adaptations. There would be different color variations so that a design educator could select deliverables that fit best in their studio environment. The deliverables could be adapted for different age groups such as middle school and high school ages to start the education process early. There is also the potential to create versions that help educate non-designers such as marketers, communication staff and even CEOs on how to effectively communnicate and give critique to designers in the workforce.

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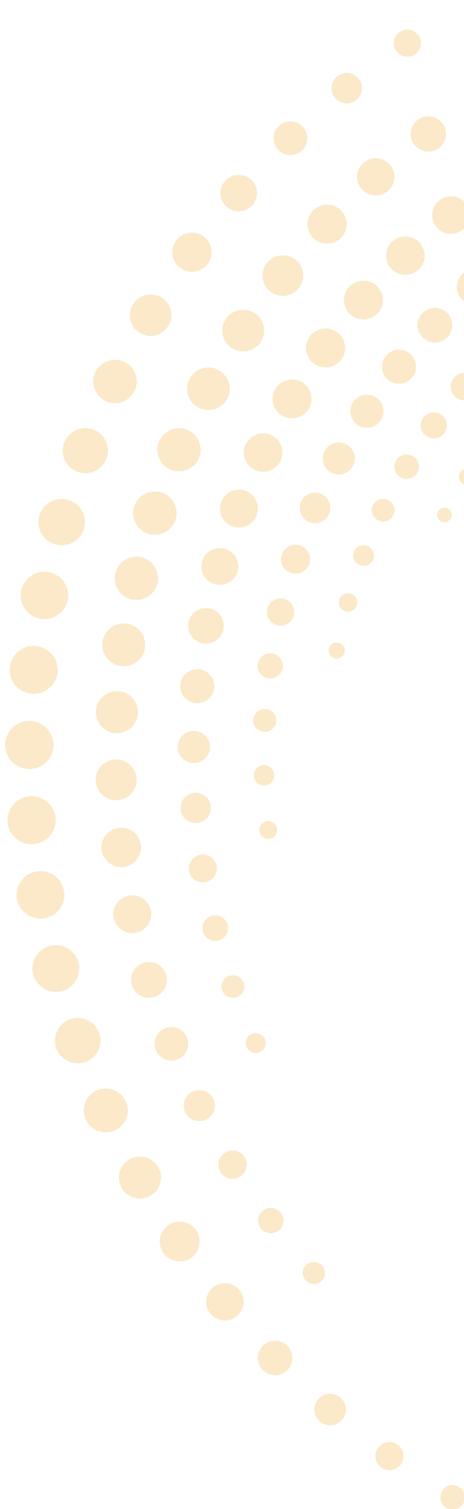
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