

Syracuse University

## SURFACE

---

Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects    Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects

---

Spring 5-1-2013

### Suitcase Magazine

Victoria Wolk  
*Syracuse University*

Follow this and additional works at: [https://surface.syr.edu/honors\\_capstone](https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone)



Part of the [Creative Writing Commons](#), [Film and Media Studies Commons](#), and the [Graphic Design Commons](#)

---

#### Recommended Citation

Wolk, Victoria, "Suitcase Magazine" (2013). *Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects*. 9. [https://surface.syr.edu/honors\\_capstone/9](https://surface.syr.edu/honors_capstone/9)

This Honors Capstone Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects at SURFACE. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syracuse University Honors Program Capstone Projects by an authorized administrator of SURFACE. For more information, please contact [surface@syr.edu](mailto:surface@syr.edu).

# Suitcase Magazine

A Capstone Project Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the  
Requirements of the Renée Crown University Honors Program at  
Syracuse University

Victoria Wolk  
Candidate for B.S. Degree  
and Renée Crown University Honors  
May 2013

Honors Capstone Project in Magazine

Capstone Project Advisor: \_\_\_\_\_  
Advisor Title & Name

Capstone Project Reader: \_\_\_\_\_  
Reader Title & Name

Honors Director: \_\_\_\_\_  
Stephen Kuusisto, Director

Date:

## **Abstract**

For my Honors Capstone Project, I chose to create an original magazine. Our campus has many publications, but there is no travel magazine for students to contribute to. I decided to create a campus travel magazine, one that would focus on trips in the general area of Syracuse. I want to be a magazine writer and editor in the future, so this project was a great way for me to gain experience in the field.

I asked friends to help with writing some of the articles, taking photographs, creating original artwork, and helping me to design and layout the magazine in the correct format. I used Adobe InDesign for the design, and created a 32-page publication. I chose to have the magazine printed on glossy paper by the Syracuse University printing department.

A travel magazine is something that the Syracuse University campus could actually use. There are a lot of travel and culture magazines out there, but not many of them are aimed at the college demographic. Many travel magazines have a wealthier target audience, so I decided to include stories on ways to save money while traveling, such as free applications for smart phones and day trips to save lodging expenses. Many students never leave campus, and although the university encourages us to explore the downtown area, it is equally important to explore the areas outside of the city. Central New York has many interesting sights, and I wanted to use this project to encourage students to leave campus for a weekend and see the rest of the area.

## **Table of Contents**

<b>Abstract.....</b>	<b>x</b>
<b>Reflective Essay.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Summary of Capstone Project.....</b>	<b>16</b>

## Reflective Essay

When I began to think about different ideas for my Capstone project, I kept coming back to the same idea: creating a magazine. I am studying magazine journalism and plan on working as a writer or editor for a magazine in the future, so it seemed obvious that creating a magazine would be the perfect way to gain experience in the field. I also thought it would be impressive to be able to bring my own original magazine into a future job interview as a portfolio of my work.

Although I knew I wanted to create a magazine, it was not as easy for me to decide what type of magazine. I have always toyed around with the idea of working at a health publication, especially one aimed toward women, but our campus already has a successful health magazine, which I have worked on for the past two years. I thought it might be more beneficial to work on a type of magazine that I didn't yet have experience with, so I decided instead to create a travel magazine.

Travel is a luxury, something that the average person does not get to do every day or even every month. Something that I like about magazines is that they, too, are a luxury. People read magazines to relax, to escape. This is apparent when you look at fashion magazines with crazy, creative fashion spreads; most people are not trying to dress like the models, but enjoy putting themselves into the fantasy world that magazines create. Travel writing engages in the same type of fantasy.

Readers can learn about different destinations, most of which they may never see, and plan their dream vacations in their imaginations. Even if an individual does not have the luxury of traveling, there is no harm in escaping to another place through the words and pictures of the magazine. When you travel, you are not just going to stay at a fancy hotel or buy souvenirs for friends and family; you are going to try new food, meet new people, and experience a new culture. Travel writing, for me, is just another way to explore different cultures. Even in a world where print media does not have the most promising future, people will always want to read pieces that help them escape and to explore. Travel magazines, to me, do not seem like they are in any danger.

I wanted my magazine to be campus-focused. It made more sense to me to come up with story ideas aimed at a smaller audience than those for a national publication, so I decided to make the magazine especially for Syracuse University students. The travel magazines that are published on a national scale often focus on a wealthier demographic, on adults with more income to spend on expensive vacations. To make my magazine more accessible to college students, I decided to make sure everything I included would be affordable for the average college student.

I also wanted the stories in the magazine to appeal to all SU students, not just one section of the student body. Many travel magazines focus on one type of trip, but I wanted to include stories about many different kinds of travel experiences, like a

hiking trip, a relaxing trip to a lake, or a food and wine tour. I also wanted the travel experiences to be accessible to every student, so I included places that you can drive to if you have a car, and also places that you can get to by train or bus if you are willing to spend the money on a ticket.

My advisor and I spent a lot of time discussing the focus of the magazine and the types of stories that I would include. Because I could only produce one issue, I wanted to include a lot of stories about spring break, summer vacation, and other travel experiences that occur at different times throughout the year. My advisor pointed out, though, that it would be best for me to pick a specific time of year to focus on instead of trying to fit everything into one issue. It was hard for me to be as specific as he suggested, but I knew that in the end my magazine would be more realistic if I followed his suggestions. I decided to make it the Spring 2013 issue, meaning that every story I included would have to be relevant to this time of year.

My advisor and I also went back and forth about what kind of locations I would include in this magazine. I wanted to talk about students' travel abroad experiences; I studied in London a few summers ago and enjoyed my time there, and I know many students who feel the same way about their time abroad. I knew there would be a lot to say about studying abroad, and that students who haven't yet gone abroad are always looking for more information about the experience. I also knew that people would be more than happy to write stories about their time

abroad, and I was thinking ahead to when I would have to find writers. But my advisor suggested that we keep the stories more focused on the areas around Syracuse. He was right, I needed to be more specific, but this was a hard decision to make because it limited the kinds of stories I could include in my magazine. I couldn't mention study abroad, spring break, or a number of other topics that I had already come up with as story ideas. In the end, I realized that my advisor knew more about magazines than I do, and I decided to take his advice.

As soon as I came up with story ideas, I began looking for writers. I work on two magazines on campus, *The Student Voice* and *What the Health*, and sent out emails asking my fellow staff members if they would be willing to help me out and get a writing clip of their own in the process. Absolutely no one responded to these emails. It was really disheartening when none of these people, all good writers, all interested in magazines, were willing to help me out. I then reached out to my sorority sisters, knowing that many of them are involved with various publications on campus. I announced that I would be holding a meeting for anyone interested, where I would hand out story assignments and make sure each writer knew what was expected of him or her. I anticipated a handful of people showing up to this meeting, but only two people came. One, a friend of mine named Laura who I have actually known for the past 10 years, is a newspaper journalism major and I knew that she would help me out. The other was a girl named Rachel who I knew but did not know well. I was so grateful to her for



offering to write a story for my magazine, especially considering she is a photojournalism major and I had no idea she was interested in writing.

It was decided that Laura would write a feature story on couchsurfing, because I knew she would do a good job on a story with a news aspect to it — there would be a lot of research involved, and it seemed like a good fit for her background. I knew that Rachel had taken a year off after high school to work on a charity somewhere in Africa, so I asked her to write a personal essay about her experience. I had no idea what exactly she did while she was in Africa, but I crossed my fingers and hoped that it would make for an interesting story. As I said, travel writing is all about exploring new cultures, and Rachel's essay reflects that. Readers can learn about the culture of Malawi, a small country in southeast Africa, without ever having to travel there themselves.

It is not surprising to me that the only two people willing to help me out with this project were my friends. Still, looking back, I probably should have tried to find writers that I was not as close with. Working with friends can be difficult, and it definitely was in this situation. Throughout the process I gave my writers deadlines and it was often hard to keep them on track. This was an extracurricular activity, so, understandably, they put schoolwork first. They also did not care as much about the finished product as I did, and probably did not understand the large amount of work I had to do. It was very frustrating when I didn't receive stories on deadline, and it was hard to ask these girls to step it up when they were

already doing me a favor. If they had been total strangers, I might have felt less guilty about asking them to be more punctual. It was also hard to deal with friends when it came time to edit their stories. They are both good writers, but I wanted the stories to be a certain way. As their editor, I am entitled to make any changes I see necessary in order to make the pieces work in my magazine. Still, it was hard to be critical of these stories. It was hard to ask the couchsurfing writer to do even more research and get back to me with a second draft, or to tell the personal essay author to be more clear and concise. I know it will not be like this in the real world; I definitely hope to be friends with my coworkers, but we will be coworkers first and friends second, and it will hopefully be much easier to work with them.

I assigned the stories in the spring of 2012, thinking that I would have the stories in plenty of time to meet my spring 2013 deadline. As I explained, though, the writers were not especially good at meeting deadlines, and it ended up taking much longer than I thought to get to the final drafts of their stories. As for the other stories, I ended up deciding to write them myself instead of searching in vain for additional writers to help me out. It was a large undertaking, but I am proud of the different kinds of stories I managed to incorporate. I spent four or five months coming up with all of the different story ideas, doing preliminary research on each one, and composing a first draft. I started working on each story one at a time, thinking it would be easier to concentrate on one topic at a time before moving on to the next. It turned out that this actually made things harder,

as I got bored with one topic and my writing would become stale. Toward the middle of the process, though, I began working on several stories at the same time. This approach had its downside, too; I would often get confused about what exactly still needed to be done. I made countless lists and charts of each story and its progress, but it was still not a perfect strategy.

Throughout this process, I discovered that travel writing does not come easily to me. I am not very good at writing critical reviews, so it was difficult for me to come up with things like strong restaurant listings or accommodation recommendations. I had not thought about it before, but a large amount of travel writing deals with food, as food is a huge part of culture. I don't know much about cooking or what makes a food truly notable; if it tastes good, that's enough for me. Also, I am, admittedly, a very picky eater, so maybe food writing is not for me. Besides the food, travel writing also involves a lot of service writing. This includes pieces that aim to provide a service to readers, such as tips on how to pack more practically or smart phone apps to use when you travel (two examples from my magazine). This means that as a writer, you have to be extremely knowledgeable about your subject. It would be easy to just pick five phone apps from the Internet, but that does not mean that those are truly the best phone apps; it requires a lot of research and background knowledge. Another aspect of travel writing that was difficult for me was writing about specific destinations. It is obviously best to travel to all of the places that you are writing about, and to experience the experiences that you are suggesting to your readers. Writers at

professional travel magazines are flown all over the world to write about exotic locations, but this was not possible for me to do when it came to my magazine. Even though I chose to focus on destinations within a few hours of Syracuse, it was not possible for me to travel to each of these places. To make things harder, I would have had to go during the spring or summer, because that is the time period I would be writing about. I had a lot of free time to travel on weekends over the winter, but it would not make much sense to try out skiing in Canandaigua when I would be writing about going there during the springtime. Due to these constraints, I had to settle on a lot of online research instead of physically traveling to the places I was writing about. Not only is traveling the most exciting part of being a travel writer, but also writing becomes a lot more difficult when you are just going off of what you hear from others. I tried to be as accurate as I could when describing the Adirondacks or the Canandaigua Wine Trail, but I had never been to these places. In hindsight, it might have been a good idea to request funds to travel to all of these places. In the end, though, I did the best I could with the resources I had available, and I think my descriptions of the destinations sound as if I actually had visited each one of them myself.

The part I was most looking forward to in this project came after the writing: editing. Editing is what I actually want to do when I start my career, and I find that it comes more easily to me than writing does. I worked with my advisor throughout the editing process, going through multiple drafts of each story until it was perfect. It was difficult at times, especially considering that most of the work

I was editing was my own, but it gave me a lot of practice. I had to think back to all of the things I had learned earlier in my college career, and it was definitely a nice refresher for when I actually enter the industry. The editing process took less time than I thought it would, so I was able to begin designing in early March.

I took an introductory graphic design course during my freshman year, but I must admit that I was not very good at it. The computer programs were completely foreign to me, and although I like to think I'm creative, I don't have an artistic bone in my body. The one part of graphics that I really enjoyed was when we had to design a spread for a magazine. Coincidentally, I chose to do a spread for a travel magazine for this assignment. I had a lot of ideas on how I wanted the spread to turn out, but it was difficult for me to pay attention to all of the small details that are included in a magazine layout, such as the tiny page numbers at the bottom of every page and the spacing of each paragraph. My graphics project looked nice at a glance, but when you looked at it more closely, it was full of mistakes.

Over the past three years I have used Adobe InDesign many more times, and I felt fairly confident going into the design of this project. I have another friend, Jess, who works as a design director at *The Student Voice*. I originally planned on doing most of the design work myself, so I asked her just to help me polish up the finished product to make it look more professional. It turned out, though, that I had to recruit her as the creative director about a week after I started the design. I

knew exactly how I wanted each page to look, but I didn't always know how to execute these ideas. I also found out that my idea of good design isn't necessarily what a graphic designer would do. I decided to let Jess have more of a hand in my project. I designed each page the way I thought it should look, and Jess would go back and fix anything that didn't quite look right. She also helped me pick out the color scheme and typeface for the magazine, an important part of branding. I chose an orange and blue color scheme because I wanted it to be obvious that this was a Syracuse University publication, though I chose to use tangerine and turquoise instead of the traditional SU shades, just to make it look a bit more modern.

I had discussed with my advisor using stock images for the majority of the magazine's artwork, because as I mentioned before I could not possibly visit all of the places I would be writing about. It soon became apparent, though, that some of the stories needed original artwork, because nothing I could take off of the Internet would work. I asked yet another friend, MacKenzie, to help me create some illustrations for a few of the pages. MacKenzie is a graphic design major, but she often creates artwork to go alongside stories in *The Student Voice* and I knew she would do a great job. I told her exactly what I wanted for each story, and she got the images back to me within a matter of days. If I had thought of using original artwork earlier in the process, and if I had been able to recruit a few more artists to help with the task, I would definitely have used original artwork throughout the publication. The original images complemented the stories much

better than a stock photo could ever do, and the pages with MacKenzie's artwork are my favorite in the entire issue. The other original artwork in the magazine is the photo essay, which includes photographs taken by my roommate Liz. One of the places I was actually able to travel to was Ithaca, so I brought her with me to take photos of Cornell University's nature preserve. I really like that I was able to showcase the work of my talented peers in my magazine, rather than just showing off my own work. A magazine has to be a collaboration of many different talents, not just strong writing.

Somewhere in the middle of the design process, I realized that my magazine needed a name. I had gone through a few different titles earlier in the project, but the focus of the publication had shifted since then and I desperately needed something to reflect that. Laura, one of my writers, was the one to come up with the title. She sent me a text one day, telling me that she had come up with a title I could use as a backup if I couldn't come up with anything better. The idea was to call it "Suitcase," because obviously it is about travel, but to highlight the "SU" because of the focus on Syracuse University students. As soon as I read her idea, I knew that this absolutely had to be the title of my magazine, and not just as a backup.

Once all of the pieces were edited and the pages were all designed, it all came down to the small details. I found myself reading every page multiple times, hoping to catch every little mistake that I might have made. If you read something

enough times that it becomes familiar, it becomes hard to recognize that something is wrong or out of place. I actually had to send multiple drafts of the project to the printer, because I would send one draft off after it was perfect but then realize there was a typo or a graphic out of place. With student publications like *The Student Voice*, multiple editors look at the final product before it is published, and therefore are much more likely to catch small errors. With this project, however, there was really only one set of eyes to look it over. I sent the final copy to my advisor and he pointed out some mistakes, but I would often change things around on the page and I couldn't possibly send him all the dozens of drafts I went to. Jess, my creative director, could point out the design elements that needed slight adjusting, but she wasn't really reading the words on the page. I also had some really bad luck with the computers I used throughout the process, and some drafts would get deleted or not save correctly, and I would scramble to put things back together. Under deadline pressure, it was easy to make a small mistake. To make things harder, right before I had to send the final draft to the printer I was out of town for a family emergency, with no access to the software I needed to make necessary edits. It was very stressful, and the final copy is not perfect, but I am still proud of everything I managed to get right.

I believe that the true mission of my project is best expressed in one of the short pieces in the back of my magazine. I interviewed a handful of students about their best travel memories and asked them where else they're dying to go. In just a few sentences those students expressed all of the great things that travel can



accomplish. One answer was, “The best trip I ever took was to the Galapagos Islands off the coast of Ecuador. It was more beautiful than I ever could have imagined. Swimming with sharks and giant tortoises made me feel like I was inside a real-life aquarium.” This student enjoyed experiencing the natural beauty of a new destination. Traveling to different places allows us to explore all of the wonderful sights the world has to offer, and travel magazines allow even those without the resources to travel to these places the chance to enjoy them. Another student said, “My significant other and I are in the same year at college, but she goes to school in Ithaca, NY. The times we’ve spent exploring both Syracuse and Ithaca are some of the most memorable travel experiences I’ve had while at school. Neither of us is native to either city, so when we visit each other we make a point of getting to know the area around us. Four years is a lot of getting-to-know-you time for any city, and I feel like I now have two more places that I’m connected to.” Travel does not have to be limited to exotic locations; travel can be a tool for exploring the areas close to home. He went on to say, “Understand and appreciate the places you go. The more you try to, the more you’ll enjoy the time you’ve spent in them.” Another purpose of this magazine was to encourage students to leave campus and get to know the surrounding area. Getting to know a city makes it feel more like home, and most college students will admit that they could use some of that feeling.

Overall, I am proud of the finished product. It looks like it could actually be distributed around campus, and I really think students would pick it up and read it.

It was hard to create so much of the content myself, especially since in a real magazine there would be many more contributing writers, but in the end I am proud of the stories I wrote and will be able to use them as examples of my work. It was hard at times to coordinate with the writers, designer, and artists, though it definitely helped me learn to manage a team. It was hard relying on my friends, since they didn't always take the project as seriously as I did, and it was hard to be firm or strict with people I am so close with.

I hoped that this publication would encourage students to venture off campus, out of Syracuse, and into the rest of New York and even beyond. I hoped they would take to heart my advice about unplugging from technology and just experiencing travel, something I touch upon in the magazine itself.

The biggest compliment I could receive would be to have a fellow magazine student relate to this magazine and its mission and decide to create a travel magazine for Syracuse University students, one that would actually be published and distributed around campus.

Working on this magazine was probably the best experience I could have gone through as I prepare to graduate and enter the magazine industry. My advisors have taught me so much about what makes a good magazine, and I cannot thank them enough for sharing these insights with me. I truly believe that all of the

writing, editing, and designing that I have completed for this project has helped me polish my skills and will be beneficial to my future endeavors.

### Summary of Capstone Project

For my Honors Capstone Project, I decided to create my own magazine. I plan on going into the magazine industry after graduation, as either a writer or an editor, and I thought this would be the perfect time to gain experience in the field. I thought about the different types of magazines students already produce on this campus, which cover everything from food to fashion to women's interests. One topic I saw missing was travel and culture. There are many popular travel magazines, such as *Condé Nast Traveler* and *Travel + Leisure*. These are great publications, but they tend to be targeted toward a much older, wealthier audience than Syracuse University students. I felt students would benefit from a travel magazine aimed at their interests and their budgets.

The Syracuse University campus could truly benefit from a travel magazine. There are a lot of travel and culture magazines out there, but not many of them are aimed at the college demographic. I decided to aim my magazine toward college students, by including stories on ways to save money while traveling, such as free applications for smart phones and day trips to save lodging expenses. Many students never leave campus, and although the university encourages us to explore the downtown area, students could also benefit by exploring the areas outside of the city. Central New York features many unique locations, and I wanted to use this project to encourage students to leave campus for a weekend and see the area.

I wanted to include a number of front-of-book stories, the smaller pieces located toward the beginning of the magazine, as well as feature stories, the longer pieces that go into more detail about a particular topic. I enlisted the help of fellow journalism students to help me create these pieces, and ended up writing the rest of it myself. I also asked a graphic designer friend to help me come up with the design, and also to help me maneuver the Adobe InDesign software I decided to use. Another friend offered to shoot photos for a photo essay, and another created art to use alongside some of the stories.

I started the project by researching travel opportunities in the area. There are the obvious attractions, such as Niagara Falls and the Ithaca Gorges, and I definitely wanted to include those. But I also wanted to include places students often don't know about, like the Canandaigua Wine Trail. Besides offering trip suggestions, I also wanted to highlight the aspects of travel particular to college students, like couchsurfing. Couchsurfing.com lets travelers set up homestays with strangers in their destination city. The homestays are completely free, making them appealing to students, and can often give an insider's perspective on a new place.

The issue of affordability kept coming up in my research. I wanted to include a list of restaurants, both in and around the city of Syracuse, recommended by SU students. A lot of the restaurants that I found were too expensive to include in this magazine. Instead, I tried to find a balance of both affordable and slightly higher-end restaurants to provide options for all budgets.

After the research stage of my project was completed, I moved on to writing. I found writers for two of the feature stories, but ended up having to write the rest of the content myself. I tried starting with the longer stories to get the bulk of the project done, and then focused on the shorter pieces, some of which didn't take much research at all. I used my advisor as a second set of eyes on the stories, and we probably went through four or five different drafts of each story as we edited back and forth. First we worked on macro-editing, which involves looking at the overall concept and structure of the story, and then moved on to micro-editing, which focuses more on the small details, such as grammar and word choice.

Once the stories were nearly complete, I worked with the designer friend to create a template for the magazine. We decided to include 24 pages of content and eight pages of advertisements, which she would create especially for the project. We went through a few names for the publication and finally decided on *suitcase*, which was a clever way of incorporating Syracuse University into the title. I wanted anyone looking at the magazine to know it was a campus magazine for students, so I used orange and blue as the main colors. I referenced a number of other magazines to decide on typefaces for the stories, and also to determine where exactly the ads should be placed.

I designed each page one at a time. I would place the text, headline, and artwork on the page, , and then my friend would go back and polish it up to make it look

more professional,. After watching her work on the first few pages, I began to feel more comfortable using the InDesign software. I took a graphic design class freshman year, but I was not very good at design. It was refreshing to focus specifically on design for magazines, because that is what I find most interesting. The last step was placing the photos, artwork, and ads. One story was a photo essay depicting the Cornell Plantations in Ithaca, NY, with original photos taken by a friend. The other photos were, for the most part, taken from the Internet. My advisor and I decided that since the magazine would not really be published and distributed, it would be fine to use other people's photos. Another friend created the illustrated artwork.

Overall, I am proud of the finished product. It looks like it could actually be distributed around campus, and I really think students would pick it up and read it. It was hard to create so much of the content myself, especially since in a real magazine there would be many more contributing writers, but in the end I am proud of the stories I wrote and will be able to use them as examples of my work. It was hard at times to coordinate with the writers, designer, and artists, though it definitely helped me learn to manage a team. It was hard relying on my friends, since they didn't always take the project as seriously as I did, and it was hard to be firm or strict with people I am so close with.

The project could not have been completed without the help of my Newhouse professors, especially my advisor and reader. They both have so much experience

in the business, and really helped make my magazine as realistic as possible. Without their input, the magazine would not have been nearly as successful.

I hoped that this publication would encourage students to venture off campus, out of Syracuse, and into the rest of New York and even beyond. I hoped it would inspire students to take these trips, and maybe even inspire a fellow magazine lover to create a future issue of the publication and distribute it around campus.