

Chapter 10

ePortfolios for Learning, Assessment, and Professional Development

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ABSTRACT

ePortfolios are becoming increasingly popular as a means to address a variety of challenges in higher education, such as academic assessment requirements, specific teaching and learning goals, and emerging student professional development needs. This chapter explores these three applications of ePortfolios to provide administrators and faculty the information they need to make informed decisions regarding ePortfolios in academic settings. The relevant history of portfolios, assessment, and associated pedagogies sets a context for this discussion. Current trends in ePortfolio usage are outlined, including a survey of available technologies. This chapter concludes with a primer regarding the management of ePortfolio campus implementations as well as a brief examination of the key questions regarding the future of ePortfolios.

INTRODUCTION

Drawing on literature from the areas of pedagogy, assessment, and portfolio practice, this chapter provides a comprehensive narrative regarding best practices of ePortfolios application in higher education. This chapter provides an overview of

ePortfolio applications and usage to help faculty, staff, and administrators make informed decisions regarding the adoption and implementation of these technologies to meet specific learning, assessment, and professional development goals.

While there exist as many definitions of electronic portfolios as there do uses, an ePortfolio can generally be described as an electronic means for students to collect artifacts and examples of their

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academic, co-curricular, and professional accomplishments, to reflect upon their work over time, to select materials highlighting specific strengths and interests, and to share these sub-collections with others via the web or other interactive forms of media. Because portfolios often employ processes of reflection, electronic portfolios have much in common with their print-based counterparts: for example, both incorporate reflection into the collection, selection, and demonstration of student experiences and achievements.

Portfolios bring together visibility, process, and reflection as students chart and interpret their own learning. Students are responsible ... for explaining what they did and did not learn, for assessing their own strengths and weaknesses as learners, for evaluating their products and performances, for showing how that learning connects with other kinds of learning (in the classroom and without), and for using the review of the past to think about paths for future learning. (Yancey, 2001, p. 19)

Further, portfolios encourage the inclusion of a variety of learning materials that help students, teachers and reviewers alike see patterns in learning that might otherwise go unnoticed. This inclusion of various materials also contributes to richer forms of formative and summative assessment. When ePortfolios are approached from a perspective that values student responsibility, reflection, and growth over time, they hold much of the value intrinsic to traditional portfolios. Additionally, they can potentially offer much more to their various constituents. As Yancey (2001) suggests, the main difference between print-based and electronic portfolios is ‘the interactivity both of the digital medium and of social interaction’ (p. 20), and it is from this perspective that this chapter is grounded.

ePortfolios also provide a unique means for addressing several student learning needs, including course-level challenges regarding the facilitation of learning, the transfer of knowledge from one

learning event to the next, and the synthesis of content over time. Due to easily accessible online storage, ePortfolios provide a streamlined method for students and faculty to keep past assignments and projects active, potentially beyond graduation. Pedagogies that require students to reconsider past work and reflect upon its place in the current project foster meaning-making and help students synthesise their educational experience as a whole. This chapter describes these pedagogies, including how to structure capstone ePortfolio experiences to foster student learning and the mastery of programmatic learning goals.

While student-learning goals help to support an interest in ePortfolios, often the most powerful drivers in institutional adoption are assessment and accreditation pressures. These processes are currently evolving, but the overarching trend is toward continuous data-driven improvement and accountability. Colleges and universities are no longer simply being asked to describe what students learn in their programmes. They must now provide evidence, and the holistic and customisable nature of ePortfolios makes them more attractive than other assessment options, such as standardised tests. This chapter provides an overview of the assessment, accreditation, and accountability pressures facing institutions and includes case studies from higher education where ePortfolios are being implemented to provide evidence of student learning. These cases offer models that can be implemented at various types of institutions.

In addition to these student learning and institutional assessment needs, ePortfolios are also being used to assist students as they make the transition from undergraduate to graduate school and from higher education to career positions. Students can easily share their best work and greatest accomplishments with any audience, including admissions specialists and potential employers. Descriptive statistics and case studies from academic departments and career services units

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