Chapter VIII

ePortfolios as Learning Construction Zones: Provost’s Perspective

Kathleen O’Brien
Alverno College, USA

ABSTRACT

ePortfolios can be more than storage devices of the learner’s best work when faculty develop a curriculum that integrates them across each student’s academic career. This chapter describes how one version of an ePortfolio, designed using faculty-held learning principles and assumptions, helps students explore and extend their learning in a developmental manner. It also describes how a provost sees the ePortfolio system fulfilling an often neglected CAO responsibility: improving the educational effectiveness of faculty. The author also outlines other educational goals that can be met with a developmental ePortfolio system. Finally, the author comments on the downside of using such a system, but suggests that the benefits outweigh the deficits.

INTRODUCTION

Of the many uses of ePortfolios, optimizing and making available in an anytime, anywhere format faculty judgment and student self-assessment—critical elements of the teaching, learning, and assessment equation—are among the most useful, efficacious, and cost-effective purposes of these Web-enabled tools. Despite current and potential limitations, ePortfolios configured to capture the content, process, and expert judgments of faculty assessors and the reflections of students across the boundaries of the disciplines and their learning experiences hold promise for a new era of teaching, of student-directed learning, and curriculum development.
TYPES AND USES OF ePORTFOLIOS

ePortfolios, as this volume attests, are blossoming throughout K-16 education. As Ehley (2004) points out however, most are showcase portfolios in which students select evidence they believe demonstrate how they meet specific learning outcomes, outcomes that at times they themselves design rather than those the institution requires as part of the baccalaureate. As worthy and creative as these are, they are often supplements to the educational process, adding a new dimension to faculty pedagogical and student reflective practice, but adding costs as well. Integration into the everyday teaching-learning process is achieved in only a few variants of this type of ePortfolio.

Love, McKean, and Gathercoal (2004) have described five levels of maturation of portfolio development in educational institutions, citing the following as key qualities: type of portfolio, its organization, whether the portfolio must include student artifacts, feedback and standards, nature of content, heuristics involved, context, and delivery mode. Using these qualities, they have developed a five-level taxonomy in which portfolios are described as moving from scrapbook (level 1), curriculum vitae (level 2), curriculum collaboration between student and faculty (level 3), mentoring leading to mastery (level 4), and authentic evidence as the authoritative evidence for assessment and reporting (level 5). The authors point out that Web-enabled portfolios are the only type that are robust enough to support all five levels of the taxonomy, weaving all the qualities identified into their structure in a dynamic way. But being Web-enabled is not enough.

One of the reasons for the number of ePortfolios at the showcase, scrapbook, or curriculum vitae levels is that as educators we have failed to infuse into the portfolio design process explicit educational principles that we know should undergird any effective teaching, learning, and assessment process. Failure to do so relegates many of these otherwise creative uses of technology to be mostly add-ons to the educational process that also add costs over and above the necessary technology infrastructure. At my institution, we have attempted to integrate ePortfolios into the teaching and learning process across the college in a way that is integral to every course and that support our core educational beliefs, helping realize them more effectively and efficiently. What follows is one example of a tool that though still in its infancy, may come to be a major educational lever, poised to ratchet up both student and faculty learning. I set it forth here, not as the example of a student learning-centered ePortfolio, but an example of its potential.

AN EXAMPLE OF A LEARNING-CENTERED ePORTFOLIO: THE DIAGNOSTIC DIGITAL PORTFOLIO

Technology use is not new to my college. Over 25 years ago Alverno faculty began to record the development of each student’s speaking and interaction abilities, creating what we call a video portfolio, containing samples of each student’s growing communication and team skills. Similarly, faculty created a writing portfolio for each student that contains samples of each student’s writing from first semester through last. Since samples of speaking, group work, and writing are kept from general education courses and the student’s major and minor, each graduate can take to his or her employer or graduate school a developmental profile of what he or she had achieved. Selection of samples for the video and paper portfolios is guided by Alverno College faculty’s educa-
Related Content

Beacon of Hope: Award-Winning Program Redesign for Post-Traditional Students
[www.igi-global.com/article/beacon-of-hope/202373?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/beacon-of-hope/202373?camid=4v1a)

Initial Stages to Create Online Graduate Communities: Assessment and Development
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/initial-stages-create-online-graduate/46617?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/initial-stages-create-online-graduate/46617?camid=4v1a)

ePortfolios: Constructing Meaning Across Time, Space, and Curriculum
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/eportfolios-constructing-meaning-across-time/20298?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/eportfolios-constructing-meaning-across-time/20298?camid=4v1a)

A Case Study of an Intervention to Support Ed.D. Students in Dissertation Writing
Beth Kania-Gosche and Lynda Leavitt (2013). *Technological Applications in Adult and Vocational Education Advancement* (pp. 132-142).
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/case-study-intervention-support-students/69446?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/case-study-intervention-support-students/69446?camid=4v1a)