A Statewide Analysis of Student Web Portfolios in New York Colleges and Universities

John DiMarco, St. John’s University, USA

ABSTRACT

This survey research project investigated the existence of Web portfolios on academic Web sites in New York State. The goal of this project was to promote Web portfolios and the main objective was to provide interpretation of the current level of student Web portfolio usage and activity within all New York colleges and universities. Major findings were that there is a low quantity of Web portfolios in relation to overall student enrollment, thus providing impetus to study a new phenomenon, lack of Web portfolios. The study yielded data providing a breakdown of where and how many Web portfolios were found. This study provides a basis for further research by scholars into Web portfolios within academic settings.

Keywords: e-portfolios; electronic media; new media; Web design; Web portfolios; student Web sites

BACKGROUND

Understanding what a Web portfolio is and is not is sometimes not easy. Is a Web portfolio a course Web site? No, it is not. Is a Web portfolio a nonprofessional personal Web site used for posting personal data related to social outcomes? No, it is not. A Web portfolio is a personal Web site that provides evidence of your skills and expertise in the form of artifacts (photos, professional documents, artwork, and multimedia content, including audio, video, and animation) from any discipline or field. The ideas behind the Web portfolio as a tool for assessment, lifelong learning, and skill building have not been proven nor have they been embraced by society or academia, at large. Those who exude confidence and passion for the notion of universal access to Web portfolios and Web portfolio skills cannot yet say that the Web portfolio has become an accepted, professional cyber identity. This paper yields conclusions that uncover some intriguing dialogue surrounding Web portfolios. There are not very many student Web portfolios found through college and university Web sites. The new phenomenon that has emerged from this research is the lack of Web portfolios.

Goldsby and Fazal (2001) note that student created portfolios are:

[Commonly] used in teacher preparation programs to demonstrate teaching skills and expertise. This practice was introduced as test scores alone lack the comprehensive scope needed for
effective assessment and evaluation, portfolios can be implemented to interpret/make decisions regarding learning of teaching competencies. (pp. 607-608)

The case for the student portfolio in any discipline can be made on the same basis; electronic portfolios provide a new level of assessment that cannot be measured by traditional methods, such as standardized tests, applications, and resumes. Electronic portfolios and Web portfolios provide assessment of competency within a discipline as well as a marketable tool for graduates. The Web portfolio has promise as a tool, platform, and impetus for worldwide learning and growth in technological skills. The objective of this research project is to provide an accurate interpretation of the level of Web portfolio usage within the colleges and universities of New York State.

As we move towards more fluent, ubiquitous platforms for Web media, such as Internet-ready phones, Web-based television, and wireless personal digital devices, the Web portfolio and its place as an assessment tool, a learning tool, and a vehicle for lifelong learning has been recently scrutinized by scholars. Scholarly definitions of the electronic portfolio (e-portfolio) vary from discipline to discipline. To define the Web portfolio, we must first define the e-portfolio. DiMarco (2005) put forth this definition:

The electronic portfolio is a collection of artifacts, project samples, cases, and focused content presenting the messages and professional and public appearance of an individual or a company through electronic media (Web, DVD, CD-ROM). The e-portfolio provides evidence of skills, experience, and learning. I define the Web portfolio as: an electronic portfolio that is an internet delivered, interactive, mass communication used to persuade users. (p. 13)

Greenberg (2004) writes:

Ideally, all work in an electronic portfolio not only is digital but also is available on the Internet. Yet even though materials may be visible on the Web, the ePortfolio is not simply a personal home page with links to examples of work. In addition, unlike a typical application program, such as word processing, an ePortfolio is a network application that provides the author with administrative functions for managing and organizing work (files) created with different applications and for controlling who can see the work and who can discuss the work (access). (pp. 28-29)

This definition presents several items for closer analysis. First, Greenberg (2004) makes a distinction that the e-portfolio is not only digital but also available on the Internet. Development of the e-portfolio and delivery are typically centered on using the Web. By using the Internet for delivery, e-portfolios become less effective and more prone to failure. Also, an e-portfolio is not just a home page. Any portfolio needs to be filled with work samples and evidence of growth and learning throughout a career, an amount of information that cannot be delivered effectively in only one page. An e-portfolio must be a narrative that gives perspective to the viewer. The perspective of the viewer is shaped by the content and structure of the Web portfolio. Greenberg also describes the e-portfolio as having a network function. The Web portfolio specifically is a content container that allows dynamic storage capabilities as well as obvious delivery features. Content management is the concept that is essential to bringing Web portfolios into use across jobs and disciplines. The creator of a Web portfolio will gain technical skills by acting as an administrator for his or her own Web site, which will be an e-portfolio. The e-portfolio allows a student to manage his or her work throughout an academic and a professional career.

Either creation of an e-portfolio is fostered within a learning environment, or the skills are gained through self learning. The e-portfolio provides opportunity for both. The e-portfolio is a tool for lifelong learning and will be part of learning and growing throughout a person’s college and professional life. Gathering materi-
A Methodology for Developing Learning Objects for Web Course Delivery
www.igi-global.com/article/methodology-developing-learning-objects-web/1729?camid=4v1a