

# Using the ePortfolio for Advising, First-Year Programs, and Writing Assessment

A Handbook for [www.ePortfolio.org](http://www.ePortfolio.org)

By Bonnie Riedinger

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## Introduction

This manual provides a brief overview of the mechanics of using [www.ePortfolio.org](http://www.ePortfolio.org), but focuses primarily on ways to enhance online advising and the pedagogical considerations of using ePortfolios in first-year and writing programs. A brief review of several institution-wide portfolio programs also has been included to illustrate how such holistic programs can facilitate individual and departmental portfolio use. For detailed instructions on the technical aspects of setting up an ePortfolio, consult the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium's manual at: <http://www.eportfolio.org/eportfoliomannual.pdf>. CTDL also provides separate manuals on using the ePortfolio for career counseling and program assessment.

The appendix of this manual includes several handouts for students that detail the benefits of using ePortfolio and the types of information students should include in ePortfolio. Links to writing assessment rubrics, portfolio implementation plans, tips on encouraging reflection, suggestions for effective online communication, examples of student portfolios, and a variety of portfolio programs also are included in the appendix.

Not all examples will be practical or desirable for every institution, but we hope institutions will use and adapt those methods and approaches that best fit their needs.

## What is an ePortfolio?

On the surface, an ePortfolio may appear to be little more than an electronic filing system—an efficient way for students to keep track of their grades, goals, and academic work without the bulk and clutter of paper. But ePortfolios can be more than Web-based data warehouses or even mirrors of their paper progenitors.

Advances in technology and pedagogical outlooks have led to the evolution of electronic portfolios that operate on the metacognitive as well as the practical level in ways that have the potential to surpass even the best reflective paper portfolios. Like its paper counterpart, the ePortfolio provides a space for students to organize, assess, and reflect upon their work. The ePortfolio also can fulfill the traditional role of final assessment tool for a course. But unlike hard copy, the ePortfolio can be a permanent yet organic system that grows with the student, preserving a record of the past, establishing links in the present, and helping plan for the future. It creates what Paul Treuer and Jill D. Jenson term a “virtual identity, {which} undergoes continuous change and is shared with others—though not always under its owner’s direction.” (1-2). This evolving self-portrait, painted by the student and carried with him/her from the first-year experience through graduate school and/or on to a career, can be a lifelong, student-centered learning tool.

During the college years, advisors as well as faculty can use ePortfolio to guide students in the development of their real and virtual selves. This guidance is essential if students are to realize the long-term and global advantages ePortfolio offers. Although electronic portfolios are “owner-centric” (EPortConsortium11) students, often arriving on campus as passive learners, may be unaccustomed to taking charge of their information and planning. At first, they may view an ePortfolio as a hoop to jump through rather than a tool for empowerment. It will be up to advising and administrative staff and faculty to help students understand the long range as well as the day-to-day advantages of using an ePortfolio.

Organized institutional support can facilitate this understanding. Although individual faculty members, departments, or advisors can certainly use ePortfolio without a formal institutional plan, a systemic and systematic approach will provide more developmental support than isolated interactions with students. A strong and well-organized portfolio program can provide the framework for student appreciation of ePortfolio benefits. This approach also can help develop the critical analysis and thinking skills necessary for the reflective process. These skills require time and practice. Many established ePortfolio programs are introduced during the first-year experience and cultivated through the entire educational experience. These programs often include specific year-by-year requirements that are tailored to students’ growing awareness of their intellectual development. Depending on the institution or program, assessment may take place at the end of a semester, the end of a year, or before graduation. Institutions that use holistic portfolio programs include Kalamazoo College, LaGuardia Community College, Evergreen State College, Truman State University, and Olivet College. Other institutions, such as Teikyo Post University, the University of Wisconsin, The Ohio State University, and George Mason University, have made electronic portfolios part of the first-year experience. Links to many of these programs are provided in the last section of this handbook.

Advising through ePortfolio probably is easiest to implement within the context of such a program. Students will be accustomed to thinking reflectively and will have received the necessary technical training. However, advising staff can use ePortfolio effectively even in the absence of an institutional plan. Pennsylvania State University and Connecticut College are just two of the institutions whose departmental electronic portfolio projects operate independently.

## Advising Benefits

EPortfolio advising has short- and long-term benefits for the student, the advisor, and the institution. The short-term benefits are practical, more measurable, and perhaps easier for students as well as faculty to appreciate. They include:

- **Accessibility.** Students and advisors can use the portfolio anytime, anywhere. If a student thinks of a question while studying at 2 a.m., she/he can send an electronic query to an advisor while the subject is fresh. (Of course advisors will want to set rules on response time).
- **Time management.** Student access to information and the ability to communicate with faculty and advisors online may reduce the number of meetings required, freeing up student as well as advisor time.
- **Cost.** According to a report filed by Penn State University, implementation of Web-based advising has saved the university about \$1 million by reducing transaction time (“Cost Effectiveness”).
- **Showcase for student work.** Electronic preservation and organization of student work and records in a variety of media including text, sound, hyperlinks, graphics, and video enrich student presentations and provide a fuller picture of the student’s skills and talents.
- **Context.** Faculty, students, and advisors can view the body of work and how the pieces fit together. This one-stop organization makes it easier for students and advisors to track progress and identify areas that need attention.
- **Planning.** Easy access to faculty and advisors and to an organized view of past work, plans of study, and academic records enhance a student’s ability to select courses, choose a major, and set goals.
- **Portability and preservation.** Students can take their information with them from school to school and job to job, making it easy for advisors to track a student’s academic history and patterns. Information stored in the ePortfolio won’t disappear into packing cartons or under the bed.
- **Interactivity.** Online comment features and synchronous chat expand the opportunity for more frequent and more fruitful student/advisor/faculty communications.
- **Organization and record-keeping.** All student work and records can be centralized. In addition, comments and communications between students, faculty, and advisors are archived for future reference, creating a history of the exchanges.

Long-term benefits include:

- **Development of reflective thinking.** EPortfolios encourage students to think about their growth and become active and self-reliant learners, assessors, and planners.
- **Creation of a record of growth and accomplishment over time.**
- **Formation of student identity that is directed by the student with guidance from faculty and advisors.**

## ePortfolio.org

The ePortfolio developed by the Connecticut Distance Learning Consortium can contain many different portfolios for a student's academic or personal work and reflection. There also are separate sections for advising and career planning. All material in the ePortfolio remains private until students invite others to view it by sending an e-mail with an access code. Students can create a variety of customized "views" for different audiences. Each view requires a separate access code. One view might display a student's artwork and music files and be accessible only to friends and family. Another view could display coursework that demonstrates writing and critical thinking skills. This view could be used by faculty as part of assessment. The Advising section of ePortfolio contains basic information about coursework and academic planning, but students may also create views for their advisors that include coursework, journals, or other items that they may want to discuss with their advisor. The invitation for the Advising section will arrive by e-mail and look like this:

**You have been invited to view Bonnie Riedinger's ePortfolio Goals & Plan Of Study.**

**Please visit:**

**<http://www.eportfolio.org/advisor.cfm?ak=D6DDB85C67FE0986CF986B87B20DEB03>**

**If the link is not clickable, please copy the entire link into your browser.**

**Bonnie has added the following message:**

**Dear Prof. Smith. Please take a look at my plan of study. I'm not sure if I should take ENG 110 or ENG 110L. My placement score was on the border and the person at the testing center said it was up to me. What should I do?**

An invitation to the advising section allows the advisor to view the student's Goals and Plan of Study. The Plan of Study and other sections of the advising section are not visible on the Guest Page. The advising invitation does not provide access to other portfolios or sections of the ePortfolio. Any guest, including an advisor, may leave private comments on a section or an individual piece of work that the student has allowed the guest to view. These general comments are stored in the Communication section. Advising comments are stored in the Advising section. Students also may initiate one-to-one or group synchronous chat through ePortfolio.


The Advising portion of ePortfolio has five sections: Advisors, Plan of Study, Advisor View, Technology Literacy Testing, and Advising Glossary. Students may invite any number of people to the Advising section. Each advisor can view the student's goals and the unofficial transcript and leave comments for the student. Comments are archived, so advisors can see comments they left previously.

## The Advising Page


This is where students enter information about their majors and minors, the names of their advisors, their e-mail addresses and any comments they would like to add about their plan of study and goals. Students **must** complete this page in order to send invitations to their advisors. If a student decides to remove an advisor from the Advising Page, that advisor will no longer have access to the student's ePortfolio. CTDLC's technical manual contains complete instructions on setting up the ePortfolio.

## The Advisor View

This is the page advisors will see when they are invited to the student's ePortfolio Advising section. Advisors may view the student's educational, career and course goals by clicking on the links. If a student has taken CTDLC's computer literacy assessment, the results can be viewed through a link on this page. Advisors may enter comments on any work, plan, or goal in the text box at the bottom of the page.



# Welcome to ePortfolio.org



[Home](#) | [About](#) | [Contact Us](#) | [Downloads](#)

[Advising Summary](#) | [Technical Literacy Testing](#)

### Advising Summary for Bonnie Riedinger

**Goals:**

Goal	Type	Area
<a href="#">Alpha Centuri</a>	Study Abroad	Outer Space Exploration
<a href="#">Master of the Universe</a>	Education	MBA
<a href="#">To show my mastery of EPortfolio skills</a>	Course	EPortfolio 101

**Unofficial Transcript/Plan Of Study:**

Institution	Course	Credits	Semester & Year	Grade	Type
Gordon Gecko University	102 : Greed is Good	4.0	Fall 2004	A	Major Requirement
Gordon Gecko University	201 : Only Little People Pay Taxes	4.0	Fall 2004	A	Major Requirement

**Computer Literacy Assessment:**  
[View Assessment Results](#)

## Comments:

Date	From	Subject	Comment
05/05/2004	Mentor	Educational Goal	This is very impressive. I know the Donald personally and I'll put in a good word for you!


Please fill out the form below and click the "Save" button.

Subject:


Comments:

Send me a copy

## Educational Goal View



Welcome to  
ePortfolio.org



[Main Menu](#) | [Biography](#) | [Career](#) | [Goals](#) | [Portfolios](#) | [Advising](#) | [Preview](#) | [Tools](#) | [Logout](#)

[Back to Bonnie Riedinger's Advisor View](#)

### Goal Information

<b>Goal Title:</b>	<b>Master of the Universe</b>
<b>Type:</b>	Education
<b>Area:</b>	MBA
<b>Reflection:</b>	In order to achieve my goal of world domination, I must study hard and arrange internships for my junior and senior years at Gordon Gecko University.
<b>Comments:</b>	This semester I will make a video tape to send to Donald Trump in hopes of landing a spot as a contestant on The Apprentice.
<b>Other Information:</b>	If I can't make it on The Apprentice, Survivor will be my fallback plan.

## What Should Students Include in the EPortfolio?

Although ownership of the ePortfolio rests with the student and selection of material is each student's responsibility, advisors, faculty, and other staff should provide guidelines about material to include in the ePortfolios. The checklist of factual information included in the appendix can help students begin ePortfolio construction, but students also will need guidance in the selection of coursework and other materials that will be included for reflection or to demonstrate skills and achievements. Students also should be encouraged to keep information up to date.

According to a survey conducted by the University of Washington, "e-portfolios facilitate learning when students are encouraged to take a series of steps, such as selecting relevant artifacts for inclusion, selecting artifacts for a specific purpose, taking time to reflect, designing the e-portfolio for a particular audience or purpose, and receiving feedback. Similarly, surveyors found that teaching with electronic portfolios becomes learner centered when instructors assign and/or give clear guidelines for artifact selection, give examples of relevant or good reflection, give examples of good design, and give feedback on quality, reflection, and design" (Cambridge).

A good place to start is LaGuardia Community College's portfolio instructions for students. This site at <http://www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/csrc.html> provides a four-step structure: collect, select, reflect, and connect. This simple format demonstrates to students the difference between merely collecting all their work and selecting and assessing their work.

Information on effective reflection and the requirements of several portfolio programs across the country are included in the Reflection portion of this manual and in the appendix.

Multimedia projects, video and audio files, photographs, graphics, and hyperlinks are supported by ePortfolio and can enrich the student's portfolios. In addition, links to sites such as the university's catalog serve the practical purpose of consolidating information students need for academic planning.

## Goal-setting, Planning, Reflection, and Lifelong Learning

Although the consolidation of student information is in itself an enormous aid to planning and advising, students who do not take advantage of the reflective aspects of the ePortfolio leverage only a portion of ePortfolio's potential.

The long-term and incremental benefits of the ePortfolio stem from its effectiveness as a planning and reflection tool that students can use to critically assess themselves and their goals. The Stanford Center for Innovations in Learning calls this approach "Folio Thinking, a reflective practice that situates and guides the effective use of learning portfolios . . . Folio Thinking aims to:

- Encourage students to integrate discrete learning experiences
- Enhance students' self-understanding
- Promote students' taking responsibility for their own learning
- Support students in developing an intellectual identity"(Chen and Mazow 2).

Helen L. Chen, a research scientist at the Stanford center and Cynthia Mazow, the center's learning designer, write that "The Folio Thinking approach represents a different perspective in this emphasis on formative assessment during the process of portfolio creation. In other words, we value the artifacts within the portfolio as tangible points of entry into conversations that might otherwise be too abstract to be effective" (2).

As students collect their work and transcripts (the "artifacts") they create an arena for discussion and planning in which they and their advisors can easily access and refer to information. The ePortfolio tools, including e-mail and asynchronous and synchronous chat, also can facilitate deeper and more timely communications between advisor and student.

The challenge for advisors who plan to use ePortfolio outside of an institutional portfolio program will be helping students to learn how to reflect, plan, and even enter into meaningful virtual conversations about academic planning.

## Communicating at a Distance

Although most advisors now use a variety of technologies to communicate with students and are aware of the constraints as well as the advantages of virtual communication, it is important never to lose sight of the differences between Web-based and face-to-face or telephone advising. Stripped of the visual and audio clues and personal observation available in an office meeting, online advising must rely on other methods to establish rapport with students. However, in one important area the online advisor has an advantage over the on-ground advisor: access to the student's view of him/herself as presented through the ePortfolio. A review of the work selected by the student as well as the stated goals, plans, and transcripts available in the ePortfolio provide advisors with a good sense of a student's hopes and priorities even before discussions begin. Referring to and commenting on items in the portfolio as well as answering a student's questions can help show students that the advisor is paying attention to the student's work and is interested in the student as a person rather than a problem to be solved.

Much of the current pedagogy about online learning can be applied to online advising. The "distance" in distance communication can be cut down by establishing a trustworthy and **human** virtual persona. This can be accomplished through some simple housekeeping rules and by creating a writing style that projects humanity as well as professionalism.

### Housekeeping

- Respond to students promptly. Even if you don't have time to respond completely when you receive your advising invitation, make sure you acknowledge the invitation as soon as possible. It only takes a few seconds to respond briefly with a message like this: "Hi Jane, I just received the invitation to your ePortfolio and I'm really looking forward to seeing it! I'll get back to you by tomorrow morning at the latest. Hope your classes are going well. John Advisor." Although advising workloads are often heavy, it is detrimental to the advising relationship if students are made to wait more than 24 hours for acknowledgement of a question. If a student that feels her questions and concerns disappear into cyberspace, she isn't likely to continue using ePortfolio for communication and may decide her advisor doesn't care about her. If the student has a question that you need to research, do not make her/him wait for acknowledgement of the e-mail. Reply with a message like this: "Hi Juan, I'm checking with the Registrar's Office about your transfer credit for English 101. I'll get back to you this afternoon. Hope you're having good weather there—it's a blizzard here. John Advisor." **This type of response includes several important elements: acknowledgement of the question or problem; a specific plan of action to address the problem/question; a time frame for an answer; and a touch of humanity.**
- If you are on vacation or out of the office make sure your e-mail is set to send an automatic response telling the student when you will return and providing a contact person in case of emergencies.
- Provide students with links to resources such as your institution's online catalog, graduation requirements, etc.
- Provide the url to your own Web site as well so students can get to know you. Students may feel more comfortable if they can see your photo and read your bio on a Web site.

**You also can set up your own ePortfolio with a customized page for advisees. See appendix for a description.**

- Communicate with your advisees as often as your schedule and advising load permit. Even a quick “hello” will encourage students to come to you when they do need help.
- Use your spell checker and proofread for accuracy before you send comments.
- Follow the FERPA rules carefully. The e-Portfolio site is available only by student invitation, but sensitive issues such as probation and dismissal are best handled through formal channels rather than ePortfolio.

## **Creating a Written Persona**

Are your advisees adult online students or traditional on-ground students? How computer literate are they? Do they need handholding or quick answers? Just as in an office meeting, online advisors will tailor their tone and writing style to the individual advisee, but there are several methods that enhance communication regardless of student age or experience. An e-mail response or ePortfolio comment that consists of “just the facts” may get the job done, but does little to encourage the kind of reflection and trust that will lead to optimum use of the ePortfolio and the advising relationship. These recommendations take only seconds, but can help bridge the digital distance.

- Use the student’s name
- Use a salutation
- Ask open-ended questions
- Include *brief* comments about the weather, sports, family, or general interests.
- End your comment with “all the best” or “good luck” or another appropriate sign off. Then write your name.
- Let your personality come through in your writing, but beware of humor or sarcasm which can be misunderstood. Emoticons, used *sparingly*, can be helpful.
- Do not use all capital letters. This is virtual screaming at another person. If you want to emphasize a word or phrase put it between two asterisks.
- Make sure all instructions are clear and detailed. It is easy to leave out steps in writing.

## **Reflective Responding**

Online advisors can take a page from some of the best teaching practices when responding to students. These “reflective responses” can help establish rapport and encourage the reflective thinking and writing practices ePortfolios are designed to support.

This list of ways to support learning compiled by Tom Drummond at North Seattle Community College can help set the tone for meaningful dialogues with advisees. “These three reflective responses, when used in sequence, constitute a ‘responding convention,’ a standard way to develop habits of talking that release the potentialities of the learner and promote mutually significant sharing.” Drummond also recommends the following:

- Paraphrase what students have written about. Rephrase what the student is saying in your own words without ‘parrotting’ the student.
- Make a parallel personal comment. Share feelings or experiences that correspond to what the student has written.

- Ask for clarification with responses such as “I don’t understand this part. Could you elaborate or give an example?”

Drummond’s best practices also emphasize sending positive messages while avoiding “external approval” phrasing (praise). Examples include:

- Enjoyment—“That was fun!”
- Competence—“You did it!”
- Cleverness—“Creative.”
- Growth—“You’ve taken a step forward.”

The following articles, although written for online instructors, contain some useful recommendations for online communication:

- “Building a Sense of Community at a Distance,” by Alfred P. Rovai is at <http://www.irrodl.org/content/v3.1/rovai.html>.
- "Assessing Social Presence in Asynchronous Text-based Computer Conferencing" by Liam Rourke, Terry Anderson, D. Randy Garrison and Walter Archer includes a helpful table with 12 indicators for social presence and can be found at [http://cade.athabascau.ca/vol14.2/rourke\\_et\\_al.html](http://cade.athabascau.ca/vol14.2/rourke_et_al.html). This site also includes examples of different types of written comments and their social effects.

## Just Because You Built it Doesn't Mean They'll Come

In every instructor's academic field of dreams there is a college filled with eager students ready to learn, reflect, and take advantage of every opportunity offered. But in reality, many students resist taking responsibility for their own learning and view new technologies and pedagogies with suspicion.

One advisor from a consortium school tried sending out e-mails to his advisees inviting them to try ePortfolio. Several instructors at another consortium school made ePortfolio use an optional part of their classes. Students ignored all these invitations. There is little doubt that individual instructors can use ePortfolios effectively as part of their course requirements, but how can advisors encourage students to use ePortfolios? How can students be encouraged to use ePortfolio outside of class? How can students be convinced of the benefits of long-term ePortfolio use?

The answer will differ from one institution to another, but most established electronic portfolio programs incorporate some or all of the following:

- Cooperation among departments across the curriculum
- Well-defined goals for portfolio use and assessment
- Structured formats for portfolio design
- Awareness campaigns
- Training and technological and pedagogical support for students, faculty, and staff.

### It Takes a Village or at Least Some Partners

Electronic portfolio programs across the country range from extensive four-year, across the curriculum programs such as those at Kalamzoo College to isolated use by individual faculty or staff members. Not surprisingly, student use is commensurate with institutional commitment.

According to a 2001 study on student Web use conducted at Penn State University "fewer than one in ten undergraduates at University Park has posted examples of his or her academic work on-line (DiBiase)" The study attributes lack of participation to low instructor expectations and "suggests that **increased faculty expectations in even a few large-enrollment courses can have a substantial impact** in encouraging students to play more active roles in planning and portraying their academic careers in on-line forms" (DiBiase).

Penn State has no institutional electronic portfolio plan, although there are pockets of individual and departmental use. In the absence of an institutional plan, the school's study recommends cultivating the work already begun. The recommendations include:

- Encouraging first-year seminar instructors to require students to use Web space accounts and develop resumes.
- Offering "practicum courses in professional e-portfolio development for second-, third-, and fourth-year students."

- Encouraging “instructors to request Technology Learning Assistants to help instructors develop and test e-portfolio-related assignments and to recruit undergraduate Teaching Interns to provide peer technical support.”
- Encouraging “academic advisors to consult advisees’ Personal Web space accounts, and to advise that students use their accounts to document and reflect upon their university experiences” (DiBiase).

## First-year Programs

First-year programs can provide an ideal introduction to ePortfolio. At Teikyo Post University, students set up their ePortfolio accounts during placement testing. All new first-year students are required to take CTDLC's computer literacy assessment. Registration for the assessment automatically establishes an ePortfolio account for the student. (Contact CTDLC for information on the assessment project). TPU's online academic services staff assigns a username and password for each account. Students are asked to keep the assigned password until they receive ePortfolio training during the First Year Foundation class. This eliminates the problem of forgotten usernames and passwords during training. Passwords may be changed after the completion of training.

Over the course of the first several weeks of the fall semester, online academic services staff members take students in each of the 12 sections of the FYF course into the computer lab for ePortfolio training. Students are shown how to enter biographical information, load photos, and set up portfolios. They receive written technical instructions and handouts on the benefits of electronic portfolios, guidelines for reflection and goal setting and links to examples of other students' electronic portfolios. To foster a sense of ownership, students are encouraged to include photos and other personal items. Although this information may be of negligible academic or career value, it is a painless way to introduce the technology and create a personal investment in the ePortfolio. Each student is required to send an invitation to his or her faculty advisor and the two staff advisors. Workshops for faculty also will be offered. Peer advisors (sophomore students) assigned to each FYF section also receive ePortfolio training and are available to assist with technical questions.

Although portfolio use is encouraged in the FYF program, each instructor's use may vary. During the 2003 pilot of ePortfolio, one instructor used the ePortfolio for structured journal entries and a reflective final essay that showed how coursework in the portfolio had contributed to the student's first semester development. Students also were required to write about their academic goals and plan strategies for success in future semesters.

The Success Center at The Ohio State University has developed detailed assignments and rubrics for ten different portfolios that explore the first-year experience. They can be viewed at [http://all.successcenter.ohio-state.edu/FIPSE\\_Page/portfolio\\_directions.htm](http://all.successcenter.ohio-state.edu/FIPSE_Page/portfolio_directions.htm) Another useful type of essay that encourages reflection, particularly in first-year courses, is the identity essay. Natalie Herdman, a former OSU instructor, presents a list of factors (family, traumatic events, cultural background, religious beliefs, physical, athletic, academic, and artistic abilities, political beliefs, etc.) that may have influenced a student's identity and assigns an essay that explores how students see themselves, how others see them, and how students represent themselves. Students are asked to discuss factors from the list. At least three hyperlinks must be included in the essay (Ulman, Mathis, and Herdman 57).

Links to other schools that use electronic portfolios in first-year programs are included in the appendix of this manual as are examples of first-year assignments and requirements.

## Institutional Initiatives

Penn State's study also recommends institution-wide information and training that can be implemented at any level of electronic portfolio commitment. These recommendations include a showcase of good student portfolios and online tutorials on file management, resume writing, reflective writing, privacy and free speech (DiBiase).

A number of colleges and universities have formal graduation portfolio requirements that include the completion of year-by-year portfolio assignments. Kalamazoo College's Portfolio Office oversees that school's portfolio project, which includes a first-year essay that relates the student's high school experiences to study at Kalamazoo, a writing self assessment, reflections on best course work, a study abroad essay, and a senior essay.

The portfolios are reviewed by advisors and first-year seminar faculty during the first year; by course and internship faculty during the sophomore and junior years; and by the major department assessment committee, the Portfolio office or advisor during the senior year.

Portfolios are reviewed for evidence of "lifelong learning, career readiness, leadership, intercultural understanding, social responsibility, information literacy, quantitative reasoning, writing and oral communication." Students are asked to include "outstanding papers, lab reports, oral presentations, and other course work, photos from study abroad, internships, and other pivotal experiences, reflections on important relationships and experiences, symposia, conference . . . presentations, experiential education activities (service learning, campus organizations, etc.), Integrative Cultural Research Project; application essays for leadership positions { . . . } and resume" (The New Kalamazoo College Portfolio Framework).

Links to this and other portfolio projects may be found in the appendix.

## Mirror, Mirror: Reflection and the Writing Portfolio

Reflection is essential for good writing, but it also is the key to a successful portfolio, critical thinking, and goal setting. Although there are many definitions of reflection, it can be summed up simply for students. Summary explains who, what, and where. Reflection explains how and why, provides supporting examples, and shows connections between different subjects and experiences.

Of course we all want our students to become familiar with academic discourse, but many first-year students struggle with the basics. How many times has an instructor asked for analysis and received summary? How many students really understand what critical thinking is? Whether you are an instructor in a writing class or an advisor, you will probably need to guide students through the reflective process, explaining why it is important as well as how to accomplish it. The words that fall so easily from the lips of a Ph.D must be explained and demonstrated for many first-year students.

Good sources for materials about reflection can be found at many English department Web sites and at the Campus Compact site at <http://www.compact.org/disciplines/reflection/index.html> This site focuses on reflection and service learning, which is sometimes included in graduation or program portfolio requirements.

Traditional writing portfolios address the writing process as well as the end result (the final draft or drafts). Sometimes the portfolios include all of the student's work and a reflective essay that analyzes how the work has evolved and how the student has changed as a writer. Other portfolios may require the student to select work as evidence of skills and concepts he or she has mastered. The reflective essay or cover letter for this type of portfolio analyzes how each example of work demonstrates the required skill. Students are often asked to discuss their weaknesses as well as their accomplishments and to set goals for improvement.

Questions for reflection might include:

- How has your writing changed? How do these changes affect your perception of yourself as writer?
- What have you learned about your writing process?
- How has your reading or other coursework affected your writing?
- If you are not satisfied with an essay, explain why. How would you revise this essay?

The best prompts for reflective writing portfolio essays provide the students with clear expectations and guidelines. Some essays are personal narratives, some are more formal and may include research, but all require analysis and examples. An example of a reflective cover letter prompt for an introductory English class the Marion campus of The Ohio State University can be viewed at <http://mrs-pock.marion.ohio-state.edu/behav/110ReflectiveLtr.htm>

Reflective essays at Tidewater Community College in Virginia take full advantage of technology with Webfolio, an instructional portfolio used by some writing and humanities classes. The final project in these classes is a reflective hypertext essay, which requires students to reflect on the course content, demonstrate what they have learned show their learning connections with hypertext links and multimedia. A sample can be viewed at <http://www.wordsworth2.net/webfolio/refhypertext.htm>. Links to more examples of reflective writing prompts are listed in the appendix.

## Appendix 1: Student Advising Scenario

*The following scenario tells the story of a fictional student who faces a variety of challenges during her four years of college and post-graduate life. The scenario presents some of the ways advisors might use ePortfolio and could be given to students as a handout to provide them with concrete examples of how they could benefit from starting and maintaining an ePortfolio.*

- **First Year:** LaToya Jones is an 18-year-old on-ground student. She learned how to use her ePortfolio in her First-Year Seminar. She has entered her biographical information and uploaded a picture of herself as well as a link to her personal Web site. During her First-Year Seminar, she is required to upload an example of work from each of her classes and to write a reflective essay about her first semester and plans for the future. She also is required to post her mid-term grades in her ePortfolio. When it is time to register for spring classes, LaToya's seminar instructor requires her to invite her advisor to view her portfolio and to solicit advice about spring classes. Her advisor sees that as of midterm, LaToya is doing well in her introductory science and math classes, but is struggling in English. She writes in her reflective essay about how difficult it is to be an ESL student. Her advisor notes that LaToya has a good grasp of organization in her writing, but needs help with grammar. LaToya also writes in her reflective essay that she is having second thoughts about becoming a doctor. The advisor begins a series of online discussions with LaToya about her concerns and after a few exchanges, determines that she still wants to become a doctor, but is afraid her language skills will prevent her from communicating with patients. Her advisor puts LaToya in touch with the university's speech and writing center and helps her plan her spring schedule. He also notes that she writes about homesickness and the difficulty of making friends in the United States. He tells her about the International House and urges her to join one of the clubs there. During her second semester, LaToya continues to receive tutoring and writes about her progress in her portfolio. LaToya contacts her advisor twice during the spring semester to obtain help with financial aid questions and to discuss problems she is having with the TA in her biology class. Her grades and one paper for this class have been posted in her ePortfolio. She also has written about her problems in a journal she has begun in ePortfolio. Her advisor uses this information to help her resolve these problems. She has begun to make friends, her English is improving, and she registers for her third semester.
- **Sophomore:** LaToya has enrolled in the university's job shadowing program and is using her ePortfolio to construct a resume. She is still keeping her journal and is adding information about her volunteer work through the International House at Habitat for Humanity. At the end of the fall semester, she contacts her advisor about changing her major to social work. Her advisor notices that she has been writing in her journal about how concerned she is about being able to pay for medical school. He asks if this is why she wants to change her major. After several exchanges, LaToya visits the financial aid office and works out a financial plan and goals for summer and part-time employment that will enable her to continue her original plans to become a doctor.
- **Junior:** LaToya's mother dies and she sends her advisor an e-mail saying she will have to quit school to take care of her young siblings. She has maintained a 3.5 GPA and her advisor encourages her to take classes through the university's online program and her

local college. This is a difficult year for LaToya and she corresponds with her advisor regularly.

- Senior: LaToya is able to combine on-ground and online courses and finish her degree only a year late. Some questions arise about her transfer credits, but a check of her ePortfolio Plan of Study provides the answers. As she applies to medical schools, her advisor and members of the faculty refer to her ePortfolio materials when they write her letters of recommendation. The record of her early challenges makes it easy for the writers to illustrate her determination.
- Post-graduate: Illness prevents LaToya from entering medical school. Five years later, she decides to reapply. Her advisor has left the university, but he can still access LaToya's ePortfolio and write an updated letter of recommendation. LaToya is accepted at a medical school in California and moves across the country. She loses two cartons of her belongings during the move, but the information in her ePortfolio is preserved for her continued use.

## Appendix 2: Setting Up An Advisor's ePortfolio

Advisors, particularly those who do not have a student information system that gives them ready access to electronic student records may want to consider setting up their own ePortfolio. This Advisor ePortfolio could be used:

- To provide a view for all advisees who need easy access to information about registration, deadlines, etc.
- To provide answers to frequently asked questions.
- To set up an electronic filing system with portfolios for each advisee. Information about coursework, plans of study and all correspondence could be kept in the portfolios and accessed by advisor and advisee. Information could be linked to the institution's data base or entered by the advisor. This provides an accurate, though unofficial record of the student's academic progress (much like the paper checklists still used at some institutions) as well as a record of interactions between advisor and advisee.

## **Appendix 3: Student Handout: Why Should I Have an ePortfolio?**

### **Why Should I Have an ePortfolio?**

1. You can use your ePortfolio anytime, anywhere. Depending on the level of institutional involvement, you can use your ePortfolio for academic planning, advising, career planning, and general goal setting.
2. You can show off your accomplishments in your ePortfolio when applying for jobs, internships, scholarships, grants, and awards as well as to graduate schools.
3. Your ePortfolio helps you see where you've been and plan where you are going. An ePortfolio puts your work in context. You can look at all your work in one place and see how different classes and experiences relate to your development as a student and as an individual. You can measure how much progress you've made and what you need to do in the future.
4. Your records are safe. There are no papers to spill coffee on, or disks or folders to lose. The ePortfolio is stored on the Web, so even if your hard drive crashes and burns all your academic information, projects, resume, goals and plans are preserved.
5. The ePortfolio is a showcase for your work and accomplishments. You can create different views to show prospective employers, graduate schools, and even family and friends.
6. Multi-media features allow you to display all facets of your work and creativity in a dynamic format.
7. You can use your ePortfolio to communicate with your advisor and career counselor. Instead of waiting for an appointment, save time by using ePortfolio. Your advisors will be able to see your plan of study in your ePortfolio and discuss your plans quickly and knowledgeably.

## Appendix 4: Student Handout—What Should I Include in My ePortfolio?

### What Should I Include in My ePortfolio?

This ePortfolio is your space. You may use it to store information about your academic, personal, and career accomplishments and goals. You may also use this space to reflect on your accomplishments, assess your progress, and make plans for the future.

You may create different views of your work for different audiences. You could have one portfolio in your ePortfolio devoted to your hobbies or favorite sport. You could invite your family and friends to view this portfolio. Another portfolio might contain coursework and information about internships or summer jobs that you would want to show a potential employer. Yet another portfolio could contain examples of your best coursework (including writing samples, graphics, audio and video files). This portfolio could be used for applications for graduate school, internships and other positions. Your instructors might also want you to create portfolios for your classes. Your career counselor can help you select material for the Career section of your ePortfolio.

No matter how many customized portfolios you create within your ePortfolio, be sure to include the following basic information.

- Biographical information
- The names of your advisors
- Unofficial transcripts, including listing of major and minor. (Advising and Career sections)
- Educational goals and plan of study (Advising section)
- Career goals, plan, and resume (Career section)
- Interest and skills assessments such as Myers-Briggs and the Kolb Learning Style Inventory, offered through the advising office, learning center, or career services office (Career section)
- Honors, grants, scholarships, and awards (Career and Advising sections)
- Co-curricular activities (Career and Advising sections)
- Portfolios of coursework and supporting reflections

## Resources—Links to Institutions Using Electronic Portfolios

Many of these Web sites include detailed portfolio assignments, reflection prompts, rubrics and examples of student writing. Some sites also explain how electronic portfolio projects were introduced.

### Scaffolding and content advice for electronic portfolios

- LaGuardia Community College. Collect, Select, Reflect, Connect. Steps for structuring an electronic portfolio. <http://www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/csdc.html>

### Institutions using electronic portfolios for advising

- Connecticut College. <http://eportfolio.conncoll.edu>
- University of Minnesota Advisor Portfolio Manual [http://eportfolio.d.umn.edu/documents/Portfolio\\_manual.pdf](http://eportfolio.d.umn.edu/documents/Portfolio_manual.pdf)
- Alverno College. The diagnostic Digital Portfolio <http://www.ddp.alverno.edu/facultyuse.html>

### First-year programs

- Foundations Essay: The First Portfolio Entry. Kalamzaoo College. <http://www.kzoo.edu/pfolio/foundations.html>
- Albion College. Self-assessment exercises and goal setting for first-year portfolios. <http://www.albion.edu/digitalportfolio/fy.asp>
- Valdosta State University <http://www.valdosta.edu/~winglee/Sample%201/index.htm>
- New Century College at George Mason University. Sample portfolio essay for first-year students and graduation portfolio requirements. <http://www.ncc.gmu.edu/intsgadport2002.html>
- Sample student essay: Transition to College. Kalamazoo College. <http://www.kzoo.edu/pfolio/example/bothell/transition1.html>

### Multi-year and graduation portfolios

- Truman State University. Work to include in graduation portfolio: Guidelines for students. <http://assessment.truman.edu/components/portfolio/prompts.htm>
- Olivet College [http://www.olivetcollege.edu/about/p\\_portfolio.htm](http://www.olivetcollege.edu/about/p_portfolio.htm)
- Evergreen College Portfolio. <http://www.evergreen.edu/studenthandbook/portfolio.htm>

- Baccalaureate Portfolio Project at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire  
<http://www.uwec.edu/acadaff/policies/Assessment/FAQ-faculty.htm>
- Kalamazoo college Portfolio Framework (4-year plan)  
<http://www.kzoo.edu/pfolio/frameform.html>
- University of Minnesota, Duluth  
<http://www.d.umn.edu/~sadams/Portfolio/Summary.html>

### **Reflections and Writing**

- What is a Reflection? The Success Center at The Ohio State University. Portfolio Writing Assignments and grading rubric for first-year students.  
[http://all.successcenter.ohio-state.edu/epl259d-au03/portfolio\\_directions.htm](http://all.successcenter.ohio-state.edu/epl259d-au03/portfolio_directions.htm)
- Writing portfolios at University of Minnesota, Duluth.  
<http://www.d.umn.edu/~sadams/Portfolio/Welcome.html>
- Reflective cover letter for English 110 portfolio. The Ohio State University Marion campus. <http://mrspock.marion.ohio-state.edu/behan/110ReflectiveLtr.htm>
- Example of reflective hypertext essay from the Webfolio project.  
<http://www.wordsworth2.net/webfolio/refhypertext.htm>

### **Examples of student portfolios**

- Penn State ePortfolio Gallery. <http://portfolio.psu.edu/gallery/index.shtml>
- Example of student portfolio at Kalamazoo College. Many others are available at the Kalamazoo site. <http://www.kzoo.edu/pfolio/example/bizorek/>
- University of Minnesota, Duluth <http://eportfolio.d.umn.edu/demo.html>
- California State University, Los Angeles <http://www.calstatela.edu/academic/webfolio>

### **Advice and Plans for Setting up Electronic Portfolio Programs**

- “Using Formative Evaluation to Help Eportfolio Initiatives to Succeed.” Advice from Stephen C. Ehrmann, director of the Flashlight Program of the TLT Group.  
[http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/Flashlight/FL\\_Handbook/ePort\\_Strat.htm](http://www.tltgroup.org/programs/Flashlight/FL_Handbook/ePort_Strat.htm)
- “History of the Portfolio System” at the University of Florida’s College of Education.  
<http://www.coe.ufl.edu/school/portfolio/history.htm>
- “Developing Student Electronic Portfolios: From an Idea to an Internet Website.” Valdosta State University, Valdosta, Georgia  
<http://chiron.valdosta.edu/djudd/portfolio.html>

- “A History of ePortfolio at LaGuardia Community College.”  
<http://www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/history.html>
- “Portfolios to Webfolios and Beyond: Level of Maturation” by Douglas Love, Gerry McKean, and Paul Gathercoal <http://www.educause.edu/pub/eq/eqm04/eqm0423.asp>
- “The 'Sticky' ePortfolio System: Tackling Challenges and Identifying Attributes” by Ali Jafari <http://www.educause.edu/pub/er/erm04/erm0442.asp>

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