E-PORTFOLIO: MORE THAN AN ELECTRONIC RESUME

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Abstract: Paper-source portfolios have become instrumental in measuring learning and promoting one's accomplishments. However, they lack an interactive component and are frequently cumbersome to carry and disseminate. On-line career portfolios overcome many of the difficulties of paper-source portfolios and provide additional benefits. This article discusses these benefits along with the caveats of on-line portfolios and responsibilities of the network administrator and students. Visit the e-portfolio website at www. ferrum.edu/ portfoli.

INTRODUCTION

Paper-source portfolios have become instrumental in measuring learning and promoting one's accomplishments. However, they lack an interactive component and are frequently cumbersome to carry and disseminate. On-line career portfolios or e-portfolios overcome many of the difficulties of paper-source portfolios and provide additional benefits, including flexibility, accessibility, and interactivity. Job candidates can demonstrate a plethora of skills and abilities in an organized, user-friendly electronic environment. At the same time without adequate resources allocated to the process of developing and maintaining an on-line portfolio, it can become a frustrating and unproductive endeavor. Not only does this article discuss concerns specific to e-portfolios, it also illustrates a recently implemented model of an on-line career portfolio.

BENEFITS

Before discussing the benefits of on-line portfolios, a traditional portfolio needs to be defined. "Port" means portable or to move, and "folio" means leaf or page. Typically, it consists of a hard copy in a ring notebook (usually 14" X 17") often with a zippered closing with a handle. Each piece of work is enclosed in a plastic sheet facing the same direction as other works, and eight to 20 pieces are included. In a few instances, this type of portfolio is still the optimal method for representing one's skills, abilities, and competencies. For example, artists need to exhibit their actual work, if possible. However, as previously stated, on-line portfolios overcome many of the difficulties of paper-source portfolios. In addition, an on-line portfolio remains closely tied to the etymology of portfolio. In general, portfolios provide the following benefits:

- ❑ Show achievements
- ❑ Document the quality of academic training and experience
- ❑ Exhibit professionalism in presentation and domain-specific content
- ❑ Demonstrate competencies in foundational and domain-specific areas
- ❑ Illustrate problem-solving and critical thinking abilities

- ❏ Market self to potential employers
- ❏ Display leadership abilities
- ❏ Exhibit interest in community

Although these can be powerful reasons to maintain a portfolio, the bottom line is that employers want to do know what you can do, and being able to demonstrate capabilities is becoming a vital component of the interview process. A portfolio embodies direct indicators of learning experiences. A career portfolio could include academic work (written papers, computer projects and audio/video bites), extracurricular activities (newspaper reporter, tutor, performing arts or sports participant), travel experiences (pictures or written accounts), and community service activities (newspaper articles, journal excerpts, or pictures).

For many seeking employment, an on-line portfolio is an inexpensive way to give their work added portability, to demonstrate critical thinking and problem-solving abilities in an interactive medium, and to provide a link to the potential employer without personal contact. For example, an Access program, developed to be user friendly with a nicely designed interface and nested IF functions for complex calculations, cannot be adequately represented with a typical paper portfolio. To be a useful recruiting tool, the employer needs to be able to navigate and manipulate the program to understand the abilities and competencies that were required to create it. E-portfolios provide the perfect venue for such explorations. By making the files read-only, the investigator can plug in his or her own values and observe the program add records, recalculate financial information, or produce a p-chart for quality control. Yet, these modifications will not be saved to the original file, and it remains intact.

Although students and graduates can have a variety of work on-line displaying an array of abilities and competencies, customization can be produced by indicating in a cover letter which entries are applicable for a particular job. The cover letter can also specify which pieces of work exhibit different abilities and competencies. However, this needs to be limited. Employers do not want to read a long laundry list. Nevertheless, having discussed the on-line career portfolio with employers, they indicate that they would definitely visit the website of an applicant that provided them with the Internet address.

CAVEATS

Although on-line career portfolios provide a clear advantage for students and graduates, potential threats to its usefulness must be addressed or they will consume the benefits. When I started this undertaking, I thought I would have the portfolio on-line in three months. Instead, it has taken a year. There were few references to provide assistance; so I learned as I discovered things that worked and, more frequently than not, things that did not work. Although this article is far from comprehensive, hopefully, it will provide a starting point and prevent users from repeating many of my mistakes.

One of the first tasks that needs attention is discussing the project, especially the resource requirements, with the network administrator. If he or she cannot provide the time, server space, backup of files, and daily updated virus protection, the project should not go forward. However, if these resources seem adequate, it is imperative that information be shared between the portfolio administrator and the network administrator. For example, if a server crashes because the disk is full and the files are moved to another server, the portfolio administrator should be notified immediately. Employers are not going to use an on-line service that is frequently off-line. Periodic

meetings between the network administrator and the portfolio administrator might resolve many of these problems.

Another important issue is ensuring that the division chair or supervisor understands the resource requirements, especially that release time will be needed from divisional duties, such as teaching and committee work. Certainly one of the primary reasons the on-line career portfolio was delayed in my undertaking was because I was detained by teaching and committee duties. Release time and/or clerical support is essential if the on-line portfolio is to be updated and maintained in a manner that adequately represents the skills and competencies of the students and gradates. One way of focusing on these activities is to submit a budget for maintenance and audit functions. Keep a log of the time requirements of the on-line portfolio, and submit it with the annual budget.

The network administrator, department chair, and portfolio administrator should determine the level of security that will be imposed on the e-portfolio. Some schools maintaining electronic resumes require employers to obtain a password. However, this restricts its accessibility and may deter its use while increasing time requirements for its maintenance. At the very least, all the files posted on the portfolio should be read-only so that they remain intact even if manipulated by employers. Consent forms should be signed so that students and graduates understand that personal information may be widely disseminated and that their work runs the risk of being plagiarized. Recommend to them that personal information, such as home address, should be kept to a minimum.

The on-line career portfolio should be outcomes-oriented and exhibit work that represents one's ability to meet both general and specific job requirements. Its purpose is not to show improvement or display personal information not related to pursuing employment. It should demonstrate abilities, skills, and competencies sought after by employers, and maintain a high level of professionalism.

Establish an evaluation process and criteria to determine which pieces of work should be posted to the on-line career portfolio. This will vary depending on the student population the portfolio will represent. For college graduates, only work that has been corrected and is error-free should be considered for inclusion on the website. However, students with special needs may have their best work included even if it is only of average quality. Regardless of the quality issue, all posted work should demonstrate identified skills and competencies, especially critical thinking. Limit the number of works that represent similar proficiencies so as not to overwhelm employers as they attempt to determine what students/graduates can do. A few well-selected pieces can adequately depict one's foundational competencies and well as domain-specific knowledge. Above all else, remember that this portfolio represents the school to a wide audience.

The on-line career portfolio should be easy to navigate, allow employers to become quickly oriented to the information provided, and should not upstage the individual work of students. The format for introducing each work should be succinct, yet clearly describe each posting. The background should be black, the font style clear, and the text color bold against the dark background. Please refer to Figure 1 and Figure 2 for an example of the portfolio homepage and an individual website.

Students should be encouraged early in their schooling career to develop quality work for inclusion in the on-line career portfolio. When they graduate, their individual portfolio is complete. Too frequently, they scramble to locate their work as graduation approaches and expect the portfolio administrator to get it on-line yesterday. This creates a difficult situation. If possible, include a portfolio requirement in the syllabus and encourage your colleagues to do the same. Another way to limit this problem is to maintain contact with the students in order that exceptional pieces of work are posted in a timely manner.

The on-line career portfolio must be manageable, otherwise it will be a nightmare to administer. After deciding its purpose, do not stray from it. Do not link to other websites regardless of how useful they might be. Since URLs frequently change, links on the website must be frequently updated increasing the time needed for maintenance. Establish a time period for posting work after graduation. The longer the work is maintained, the more expansive the website becomes. Two years seems to be a reasonable period of time where graduates should be able to build a credible work history that should replace the need for the portfolio. Current contact information, i.e. e-mail address, is essential post-graduation and must be updated on the individual websites as needed.

In order for the on-line portfolio to be successful and meet its purpose, other stakeholders should be brought into the process early. These may not be the same for all institutions but could include career services, admissions, employers, parents, and public relations. These are in addition to the network administrator, department chair, and students. Consider developing an Advisory Board consisting of several of the stakeholders, especially employers for they know what skills and competencies are needed in the workplace and how best to showcase them.

Finally, the on-line career portfolio should have flexibility. Develop a system of managing folders and files that is readily identifiable, easy to link, and can handle a wide variety of file types. This requires some planning, but it is essential. Remember the portfolio will consist of literally hundreds, and perhaps thousands, of files and without proper organization will be unmanageable. In addition, employers should be able to manipulate, observe, print, and download the students' and graduates' files in order to examine them for content, skills, and competencies. At the same time, the files should remain intact and unchanged after the manipulations.

PORTFOLIO ADMINISTRATOR RESPONSIBILITIES

Many of the responsibilities of portfolio administrators were discussed previously. For this reason, this section is more or less a summary listing duties.

- Develop and maintain portfolio website
- Maintain contact with network administrator on such issues as security, disk space, and server changes
- Submit annual budget--including needed release time or clerical assistance
- Disseminate information to students, employers, and other stakeholders
- Allocate time for meetings with students, either as a group or individually
- Inform students of their responsibilities
- Obtain signed consent form
- Take possession of files--encourage students to e-mail the files rather than having numerous disks
- Evaluate quality and appropriateness of work
- Check files for viruses or other forms of corruption
- Make backup copies
- Make files read only
- Maintain contact with other professors concerning corrected work
- Modify individual websites as needed with additions and deletions
- Check modifications

- ❑ Maintain updated contact Information
- ❑ Delete graduates' work two years post graduation
- ❑ Make sure that website is online and URL functioning properly
- ❑ Hold periodic meetings with other stakeholders such as admissions personnel, career services, employers
- ❑ Seek feedback from students, employers, career services personnel, etc. on ways to maximize the use of on-line career portfolio

STUDENT RESPONSIBILITIES

Since the on-line career portfolio is for the purpose of advancing the career aspirations of students, their responsibilities should be clearly delineated and rules concerning them enforced. Each school needs to define what is appropriate for their student body and graduates. However, a limited list of responsibilities follows.

- ❑ Schedule appointment with portfolio administrator
- ❑ Determine competencies to be showcased
- ❑ Provide current resume
- ❑ Provide files of projects--preferably via e-mail
- ❑ Sign consent form
- ❑ Include only work that has been corrected and of high quality
- ❑ Keep portfolio current
- ❑ Provide current contact information
- ❑ Monitor website for accuracy
- ❑ Inform potential employers of website--include URL on resume and cover letter
- ❑ Maintain familiarity with each posted project

Although most of these responsibilities seem self-explanatory, maintaining familiarity with each work needs particular emphasis. Employers seriously considering hiring an applicant will download projects and papers, and study them. During the interview, the candidate should be prepared to answer very specific questions about any portfolio entry. The consequences of not being able to respond appropriately to such inquiries could be unfavorable for the applicant as well as the school.

CONCLUSION

The career e-portfolio is not where I had envisioned it a year ago. Without release time from teaching responsibilities and with significant demands from divisional and committee duties, I continue to struggle to maintain the portfolio with current information and projects. This is a labor-intensive task. Nevertheless, the on-line career portfolio is providing our graduates with an advantage over graduates from more high profile schools because employers can not only observe what they have created, they can interact with their programs and projects. If you have questions or comments, please e-mail them to me at fangel @ ferrum.edu. Please visit the on-line portfolio website at www.ferrrum.edu / portfolio/
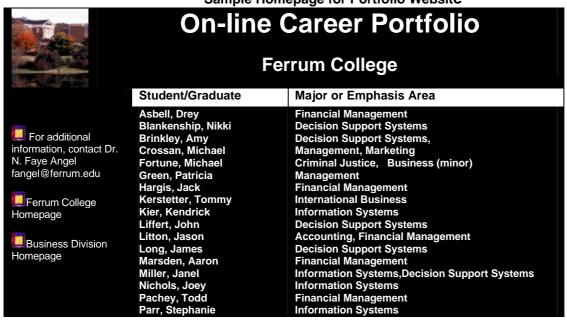
Figure 1
Sample Homepage for Portfolio Website

On-line Career Portfolio

Ferrum College

For additional information, contact Dr. N. Faye Angel
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Ferrum College Homepage

Business Division Homepage

Student/Graduate	Major or Emphasis Area
Asbell, Drey	Financial Management
Blankenship, Nikki	Decision Support Systems
Brinkley, Amy	Decision Support Systems, Management, Marketing
Crossan, Michael	
Fortune, Michael	Criminal Justice, Business (minor)
Green, Patricia	Management
Hargis, Jack	Financial Management
Kerstetter, Tommy	International Business
Kier, Kendrick	Information Systems
Liffert, John	Decision Support Systems
Litton, Jason	Accounting, Financial Management
Long, James	Decision Support Systems
Marsden, Aaron	Financial Management
Miller, Janel	Information Systems,Decision Support Systems
Nichols, Joey	Information Systems
Pachey, Todd	Financial Management
Parr, Stephanie	Information Systems

FIGURE 2
Sample Individual Portfolio Webpage

Nikki Blankenship

Graduation Date: May 2001

Portfolio Information

email **nblankenship@ferrum.edu**

Resume

PowerPoint Project--Exercise

Access Project--Car Rental, Inc.

Excel Project--Muscle Elite, Inc

Desktop Publishing Project--Bank Newsletter

Quality Control Project Always Ready Appliances, Inc.	Excel Spreadsheet
	Analysis Paper

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