

## **Collaboration in the Center: A Librarian and Faculty Member Explore Eportfolio Development**

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Collaboration between faculty members and librarians has the potential to enrich the work of both Communication Centers and campus libraries. A collaborative, ePortfolio development project that a library instructional technologist and rhetoric faculty member facilitated in an upper-level public speaking course at a small liberal arts college demonstrates this potential. The collaborative ePortfolio project allowed students to showcase their rhetorical skills across multiple modalities: written, digital, visual—and for this particular project—oral. Through a series of hands-on workshops and a reliance on the services of the communication center, facilitators guided students through the processes of developing their ePortfolios and incorporating videos of their own oral presentations within them.

### **Introduction**

Communication center directors and faculty members are likely familiar with the National Communication Association's "Learning Outcomes in Communication," a compilation of what graduates with a degree in communication should "know, understand, and be able to do" (2015). The fourth outcome, "Create messages appropriate to the audience, purpose, and context" reminds teachers and communication center directors that communication is a complex endeavor. In a typical public speaking classroom, for example, we teach students to learn to speak confidently and cogently in traditional "face to face" contexts with audience members. Yet, it is imperative that in our technologically-driven culture students possess the skills to craft and deliver messages in digital modes as well. The authors discuss the semester-long, collaborative, ePortfolio development project that they facilitated in an upper level public speaking course at a small liberal arts college located in rural Virginia. Project leaders worked together to help students

create ePortfolios that showcased their rhetorical skills across multiple modalities: written, digital, visual, and oral. Facilitators addressed the challenge of incorporating videos in the ePortfolio through a series of workshops and a reliance on the services of the Communication Center.

Similar in some ways to a traditional résumé, an ePortfolio is "a multimodal project, incorporating visual, oral, and written communication modes" that is "intended to show the value of students' educational experiences in ways that are interactive, engaging, and creative" (Fairchild & Carpenter, 2015, p.63). Further, it serves as "a collection of experience-based artifacts, presented digitally (usually online), that may contain elements of a student's reflections on their experiences, goals and philosophy, as well as artifacts of experiences, output, and work; it is commonly used for the purposes of reflection, development, assessment, and/or showcasing their best work" (University of Michigan MPortfolio, 2018). In the reflective processes that lead to ePortfolio development, students learn to

identify connections between knowledge gained from life experiences and that from academic courses; document learning that has occurred both within and beyond the classroom, making it explicit and visible; develop an understanding of how knowledge and skills gained in one context can be applied to others; assess and determine common themes and goals from the combination of values, knowledge, and experiences; and present the synthesis of learning across contexts to multiple and varied audiences. (University of Michigan MPortfolio, 2018)

The authors explain the process that led both to the students' successful completion of their ePortfolio projects and to the presentations of their ePortfolios to the campus community. They found, as Norander and Rouse (2017) attest, that "collaborating with campus partners engaged in ePortfolio work can position Communication Centers as a leading resource for faculty and students and further the connections between oral communication, critical thinking, and student learning" (p. 125).

Students and facilitators relied on the resources of the Ferguson Center for Public Speaking (FCPS), including student and faculty consultants' expertise, as well as its media equipment and editing software. Throughout the collaboration, the FCPS served as a second classroom, with about one-fourth of class time spent there and the remainder in the primary classroom and presentation venues on campus and in the community. In addition, students relied on the Center outside of class time, working with consultants who assisted them in designing their ePortfolios, creating content (including textual and oral presentations), trouble-shooting technology issues,

rehearsing and recording speeches, and critiquing and editing ePortfolios prior to a public "ePortfolio Showcase" at the end of the semester.

The discussion is divided into three sections: (1) overview of the advanced public speaking course; (2) facilitators' expectations of the collaboration and pre-semester planning; and (3) implementation of the ePortfolio project

### **Overview of the Advanced Public Speaking Course**

Hampden-Sydney College's public speaking courses are housed in our Rhetoric Program; in all of the Rhetoric Program's courses, including basic and advanced writing and speaking courses as well as upper division courses in the Rhetoric Minor, faculty stress the importance of crafting intelligent and compelling arguments that unite—rather than divide—one's audience. Following the tenets of invitational rhetoric and presentational speaking (Foss & Foss, 2012), students engage in public presentations with a variety of interactional goals: asserting individuality, discovering knowledge and belief, building community, articulating a perspective, and seeking adherence (Foss & Foss, 2012, 22-38). (See Appendix for the oral presentations required in the ePortfolio.)

The advanced public speaking course has an experiential learning component as well: Students identify a campus or community concern and work with stakeholders to address it. The overarching course objective is for students to present ethically sound and well-reasoned arguments and to invite others to engage in civil discussion, thus demonstrating the skills that are the hallmark of a liberal arts education.

There are three major requirements in the course:

- community-based research project (small group)
- preparation and delivery of five oral presentations (of varying sorts)
- creation of a “showcase ePortfolio,” a portfolio geared to specific audiences (employers, educators, and peers) with the purpose of integrating course content (including, in this case, oral presentations) with personal interests and goals, civic engagement experiences, and professional aspirations and experiences to date (Reynolds & Patton, 2014)

As noted above, ePortfolio development requires students to combine the critical thinking, rhetorical concepts, and presentation skills explored in the course with digital literacy skills and the technological know-how necessary to create a professional looking product. For the ePortfolio to successfully “make explicit the relationship between critical thinking and communication” (Norander & Rouse, 2018, p. 126), students needed a wide range of skills. Carpenter, Apostel, and Hyndman’s (2012) studio model for ePortfolio development and concomitant evaluation rubric separates these skills into seven dimensions that reflect the skills students develop in their work: envisioning an original concept for the ePortfolio, making aesthetic decisions about the design, acquiring the necessary digital presentation skills for the ePortfolio development platform, demonstrating proficiency in using written text to accomplish the rhetorical goal or purpose, properly formatting the ePortfolio, seamlessly integrating sources and citations, and designing the site to make it easy for viewers to access. To these dimensions, we added an eighth important dimension: crafting and delivering compelling oral presentations. It was the

inclusion of the oral presentation dimension that necessitated the faculty member and librarian’s collaboration as well as students’ reliance on the campus Communication Center.

### **Expectations of the Collaboration & Pre-semester Planning**

The faculty member and library technologist approached the project with several expectations. First, they agreed that flexibility and a willingness to “go with the flow” were critical to a successful collaboration. Second, they anticipated needing to adjust the course calendar to adapt to students’ varying technological skill. Third, they expected the Ferguson Center for Public Speaking staff to provide support for students as they prepared their oral presentations and developed their ePortfolios. And, fourth, they agreed it was important that students view the ePortfolio as a way to build a “malleable” digital identity that they could edit and adapt for various audiences (such as potential employers). With these caveats in mind, the facilitators set intermittent deadlines for the completion of each section of the ePortfolio, discussed in section three, and venues and dates for students’ required oral presentations.

Each facilitator also had individual expectations for the project. Because the faculty member acknowledged that students might be somewhat resistant to the idea of creating an ePortfolio in addition to completing required coursework, she created her own ePortfolio to use as an example for the students. The model demonstrated that the ePortfolio would allow students to reach a wide audience where they could assert their individuality by integrating their personal, professional, civic, and academic selves in a format that would showcase their

skills in writing, speaking, critical thinking, design, and digital literacies.

Anticipating that students and faculty would have a wide range of digital literacy and technological skill, the librarian's additional expectation was that he would provide both the technical support the faculty member would need prior to the semester as well as the instructional support students would need during the semester. The librarian's work prior to the semester involved researching the hardware and software needed for the project, choosing and ordering the equipment, and preparing materials for the ePortfolio development workshops.

During the pre-planning phase, the facilitators addressed three technology concerns: (1) which web-based platform was best for creating the ePortfolios while restricting general public access; (2) what hardware and software would best enable students to record, edit, and upload oral presentations; and (3) what format was best for a final concluding "ePortfolio Showcase" for the college community. Locating technology that balanced functionality with usability was paramount, considering that the project was limited by the short period of time required for students to design and build their ePortfolios while simultaneously doing the "regular" coursework required in the advanced public speaking course.

Making these decisions in advance was quite helpful as it meant during the course the facilitators could focus on teaching course content and assisting students with their oral presentations and ePortfolio development. The technologist selected Wix.com as the ePortfolio platform, a cloud-based web development platform that allows users to create professional websites easily and seamlessly. Two factors guided his choice: First, Wix.com provides hundreds of design templates that are easily

adaptable to ePortfolio creation. Second, the service is free unless a user decides to publish the site.

The technologist selected Apple's QuickTime and YouTube as the software for recording and uploading video. Consultants in the FCPS routinely used QuickTime (QT) to create videos of student oral presentations, an easily accessible basic program that lacks the distracting "bells and whistles" that more robust systems such as iMovie provide. An added benefit is that videos created in QT can be uploaded directly to YouTube.

To streamline the process of recording students' speeches, project directors opted to use the Ferguson Center for Public Speaking's iMac computer with its built in video camera and Apple's QuickTime software. An essential element for students' success was access not only to the faculty member and library technologist during working hours, but also to faculty and peer consultants in the Ferguson Center for Public Speaking in the afternoons and evenings. The project directors quickly realized during the implementation phase that not all the consultants had the advanced technology skills needed to address every concern, so they incorporated additional consultant training sessions specifically geared toward assisting students with multimodal projects.

Wix.com worked well for the project in terms of incorporating visual and textual content, but difficulties arose with incorporating video content: Students were unable to upload videos of their presentations directly to Wix.com. The librarian found an easy solution: students used YouTube to upload videos of their oral presentations as YouTube allows videos to be stored and linked to Wix.com. To maintain privacy, students set their video's privacy level to *unlisted*, enabling them to

embed their videos in the E-Portfolio sites on Wix.com while limiting public access.

### Implementing the ePortfolio Project

The implementation stage of the ePortfolio project began apace at the start of the semester and generated both excitement and trepidation in the students. Students were excited about their primary coursework: Learning the rhetorical skills needed to develop the presentations required for the advanced public speaking course, those that would comprise the eighth dimension the facilitators added to Carpenter, Apostel, and Hyndman's (2012) studio model for ePortfolio development, "crafting and delivering compelling oral presentations."

Several students also expressed their concerns about developing content for the ePortfolio. To address this concern, the faculty member facilitated class activities that required students to mindfully reflect upon who they are, how they think, and what they value, critical steps in building self-awareness, an integral component of ePortfolio development. She relied on Peet's comprehensive manual, *The Integrative Knowledge Portfolio Process: A Guide for Educating Reflective Practitioners and Lifelong Learners* (2010), for activities to help students integrate knowledge gained from experiences in their academic, personal, civic, and professional journeys. Over time, the majority of the students were able to integrate these experiences in thoughtful, compelling, and often surprising ways.

The reflective process informed the students' choice of a community partner for their community experiential learning project and influenced their ePortfolio design choices in terms of both the Wix.com template and theme. For example, during the reflection activities, one student, whose

sister adopted several children with severe physical and developmental disabilities, observed that in helping care for his nieces and nephews, he had become an advocate for differently-abled people of all ages. This realization led him to serve as a volunteer for Special Olympics and Habitat for Humanity. He also recognized that what he most enjoyed as an English major was studying literature as it allowed him to examine the human condition across time and place—the joys and challenges all humans encounter. He chose a community project working with children at a therapeutic horse backing riding program in a neighboring town. The frame for his ePortfolio centered on inclusiveness and empathy and his commitment to advocating for children and adults with physical, mental, and emotional challenges.

About three weeks into the semester, the library technologist began working with the students, teaching four workshops over the course of the semester. Each session was broken down into two parts: (1) instruction with demonstration and (2) studio time for students to work on their projects. In preparation for each of the workshops, students worked with the faculty member and student consultants in the Center on developing their oral presentations and generating content for their ePortfolios.

In the first workshop the faculty member presented her model ePortfolio and discussed the value of the ePortfolio for establishing one's ethos as a professional and citizen. She also outlined the ePortfolio sections that students would develop over the course of the semester: "Home," "About," "Current Research," "Personal Philosophy," and "Résumé." (See appendix for the content required in each section.) The librarian provided an introduction to Wix.com and taught students how to use the program. Students then explored the site and

its templates, eventually selecting a template based on personal preference and its suitability for their individual topics and community projects.

In the second workshop the library technologist taught students to record their oral presentations using the center's large iMac computer. He discussed lighting, camera angle, and the effective placement and use of presentation aids. Students began working with center consultants that week to refine and record their first oral presentations.

During the third workshop, the librarian taught students to edit their recorded presentations in QuickTime and to upload the videos into Wix.com via YouTube. This session required the faculty member's input to help students edit specific portions of their speeches and community project interactions to best demonstrate their effectiveness as rhetors and engaged citizens. Students tended to need much more one-to-one instruction in these processes and frequently sought the assistance of Center consultants.

The fourth workshop served as a "dress rehearsal" for students' presentations of the ePortfolios to the college community and proved quite useful in addressing unexpected kinks in the technology and students' use of it. For example, a number of students had forgotten to properly set the privacy settings in YouTube for the video to be viewable outside of the YouTube environment and within Wix.com, something that was easily remedied.

The semester culminated with the "ePortfolio Showcase," one of many events during the College's Undergraduate Research Week; the mid-day event was held in the lobby of the campus dining hall, providing a readymade audience as people entered the lobby on their way to lunch. Students presented their ePortfolios in a poster session format, using iPads displayed

on acrylic stands for easy viewing instead of posters. Attendees circulated around the venue, picking up the iPads and navigating through the students' ePortfolios on their own while talking individually with students about both the process of creating their ePortfolio as well as its content.

Showcasing students' ePortfolios during undergraduate research week provided the students and facilitators the opportunity "to advocate for the centrality of communication in integrative learning" (Norander & Rouse, 2017, p. 129). Faculty colleagues who attended the "ePortfolio Showcase" were enthusiastic about the project and many indicated their desire to do a similar exercise in their own classes, particularly at the Capstone level.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

The project facilitators found that the ePortfolio project benefitted students, the Center, and the library. The principal beneficiaries of the collaborative ePortfolio project were, of course, the advanced public speaking students. By working together, the faculty member, instructional technologist, and peer consultants offered students the opportunity to expand both their rhetorical and digital/technology skills beyond those taught in a typical public speaking course. Not only did students grow as rhetors with skills in audience analysis, critical thinking, group facilitation, professional writing, and various forms of presentational speaking, they also created a "digital identity" that showcased other important skills: research methods, design, creativity, community engagement, and technology and digital literacy. Further, in developing their ePortfolios, students used technologies required for both future study and the workplace. Peet (2010) explains that college graduates need to be able "to reflect on and learn from their experiences, keep pace with

the rapidly changing demands of new information, and adapt to emerging work roles and changing environments” (2010, p. 4); ePortfolio creation directly addresses these needs, as well.

In course evaluations and follow up discussions, several students offered that the ePortfolio project was worthwhile, both in the discoveries they made about themselves through the process and in their acquisition of technology and digital literacy skills. While many of the students had little experience creating online content in any form prior to the course, they all reported afterward that they felt more confident to pursue multimodal projects in both academic and professional settings. In fact, two students accepted an invitation to join the faculty member and library technologist on a panel at the Georgia International Conference on Information Literacy to present their ePortfolios to an audience of librarians, faculty members, fellow students, and administrators.

The project also benefitted the Ferguson Center for Public Speaking, in particular the Center’s student consultants, who, by necessity, had to increase their own skills in order to assist clients. Too, the “ePortfolio Showcase” provided visibility for both the Center and the Bortz Library and generated interest in the services and resources that both provide.

In future ePortfolio collaborations, project facilitators plan to decrease the number of required sections in the ePortfolio, perhaps focusing solely on students’ community engagement projects and their oral presentations related to those projects. Doing so would allow more time for project facilitators, students, and Center consultants to work individually with students as they develop content and build their ePortfolios, an aspect of the project that required more time than the facilitators anticipated.

The faculty member and librarian are planning their next collaboration: Working to establish a Faculty Fellows initiative for colleagues who want to incorporate ePortfolios and other multimodal projects in their curriculum. FCPS student consultants will partner with faculty members in individual classes, serving as peer tutors for their students working on developing ePortfolios. As the College’s Rhetoric Program looks forward to the opening of a new Rhetoric Studio that will combine writing, speaking, and digital consulting services, the new Studio is poised through the Faculty Fellows initiative to welcome colleagues from across campus who want to integrate similar multimodal projects in their curricula as well.

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## Appendix

### ePortfolio Sections

(see presentation requirements below)

- 1) Home page
  - a. Text: Brief “teaser” paragraphs
  - b. Images: your choice
  - c. Links from top tool bar to the following pages/sections: “About,” “Current Research,” “Personal Philosophy,” and “Résumé”
- 2) “About” Section
  - a. Text: Paragraph or two about yourself – interests, activities, major, strengths as a communicator, etc.
  - b. Presentation: Speech of introduction
  - c. Images: your choice
- 3) “Current Research” Section
  - a. Text: Paragraph about your project that explains the “wicked problem”
  - b. Text: Paragraph about your project design, including who, what, when, where, why, and the timeline
  - c. Presentation: Problem statement/literature review presentation
  - d. Presentation: Field work demonstration

- e. Images: your choice
- 4) “Personal Philosophy” Section
    - a. Text: Transcription of your speech in the “This I Believe” format
    - b. Presentation: “This I Believe” speech that somehow incorporates what you’ve discovered about yourself during your research project that influences your personal philosophy
    - c. Images: your choice
  - 5) “Résumé” Section
    - a. Text: Résumé to include contact information as well as social media links, if applicable
    - b. Images: your choice

### Presentation Requirements:

*Presentation 1: Speech of Introduction in “About” Section: Asserting Individuality*

Format: Individual speeches of 3 – 5mins

Focus: Include narrative to establish ethos and a discussion of “wicked problem”

*Presentation 2: Literature Review in “Current Research” section: Discovering Knowledge*

Format: Individual speeches (5 – 6 minutes) presented as a part of 20-minute panel

Focus: Establish a problem and identify possible solutions gleaned from your research

*Presentation 3: Field Work Exercise in “Current Research” section: Interactional goal varies*

Format: Varies, depending on the field work experience (5 – 7 minutes). The excerpt you include should, ideally, feature you! (Other group members may be included in the demonstration, as well.)

Focus: Engage campus constituents in an activity that will address the wicked problem that your group is addressing. Your video excerpt of the field work experience recording should



enable the viewer to identify the interactional goal of the project as well as get a sense of your strengths as a communicator.

*Presentation 4: "This I Believe" in "Personal Philosophy" section: Articulating a Perspective*

Format: Individual speeches (5–7 minutes) presented from a manuscript with or extemporaneously

Focus: Articulate a guiding principle or core belief that informs the

way(s) in which you are finding your place in the world and forging your path forward. You might explain how this principle leads you – or led you – to address the wicked problem you examined this semester. You are “inviting” the audience to listen to and ultimately respect and understand your viewpoint.