

# Introduction

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A life accumulates a collection: of people, work, and perplexities.

We are all our own curators.

—Richard Fortey

This volume is a book of essays about teachers wrangling with ePortfolios. It's not about large theories of ePortfolios or broad trends, but rather a sampler of close instructional encounters that seeks to look at what those large trends mean at the course, program, and institutional levels. Representing four countries on as many continents, the authors identify challenges associated with different phases of program development and provide theory-informed, experience-based advice to administrators, program directors, and instructors at institutions of all sizes.

Multiple publications already on the market advance theory, research, and pedagogical approaches in the multiple facets of ePortfolios in higher education. We do not intend or even suggest that our book could replace any of them; rather, our aim is to complement the existing literature. While we share the same audience in general, the purpose of this book and our colleagues' publications vary discernibly from one to another. A critical collection such as ePortfolios@edu cannot offer the wealth of empirical evidence that Bret Eynon and Laura Gambino include in their book *High-Impact ePortfolio Practice: A Catalyst for Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning* (2017). Nor can it replicate the scope of Field Guide to ePortfolio (AACU and AAEEBL, 2018), supported and created collaboratively by four professional organizations. Similarly, the purpose of this book differs from those publications and other more targeted studies ranging from the *meta-assessment*<sup>1</sup> of international models (Cambridge, 2012) to integrative practices in the classroom (Reynolds & Patton, 2014).

The main portion of the book is divided into three sections: Getting Started, Implementation, and Assessing Performance. Having designed the volume as a go-to manual for ePortfolio novices, seasoned practitioners, and curious explorers alike, we want readers to close the book and immediately be able to apply whatever information they found most appropriate for their course, program, and/or institution. Towards that end, authors embed screenshots and diagrams

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1. We use *bold italic font* for terminology included in the glossary.

within their essays, and addend their chapters with relevant timelines, prompts, and *rubrics*.<sup>2</sup>

The essays in *ePortfolios@edu* center on qualitative evidence, although authors offer empirical evidence to support staked claims. Most importantly, however, readers will find that *ePortfolios@edu* mirrors ePortfolio publication in its presentation. We purposely use the active voice and include meaningful screenshots from students' ePortfolios as meta-evidence; the companion website ensures relevance and connections, both hallmarks of ePortfolio publication.

## Part I. Getting Started/Lessons Learned

In Chapter 1, Ron Balthazor, Elizabeth Davis, and their co-authors discuss the strategies that they have used—and even been forced to use—for almost a decade in order to sustain two related ePortfolio capstone projects within the Department of English at the University of Georgia: First-Year Composition and the Writing Certificate Program. The authors discuss challenges in getting started with ePortfolio implementation on a large scale, beginning with software development and pedagogy. In addition, this chapter addresses a different set of challenges that arise at the other end of the historical process, including forming a succession plan as the original team of developers moves on; adjusting to changes in administrative policies at higher levels; moving away from open-source to proprietary platforms on an institutional level; and centralizing technological resources.

Expanding on the all-important question of ePortfolio software, Chapter 2 discusses the course and course corrections in the implementation of an ePortfolio program at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. The authors relate the step-by-step process from choosing a platform to launching and assessing the program, dedicating most of their chapter to the planning/pre-implementation phase, in particular the membership, role, and impact of an “ePortfolio Selection Committee.” Throughout the chapter, the authors underscore the all-important concept that, as with any instructional technology, the platform must fit the pedagogy, not the other way around.

## Part II. Implementation

In Chapter 3, Daniel Terry and David Whillock explain how Texas Christian University (TCU) created a large-scale, system-wide, sustainable ePortfolio initiative in a relatively short time via a unique first-year seminar course in which receiving

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2. We understand that screenshots and instructional materials quickly become obsolete, due to the dynamics of instructional technology and growth rate of human knowledge. For this reason, our companion website aims to provide updated information from the authors and editors of *ePortfolios@edu* as well as revised and new materials for immediate use.

and building an ePortfolio is nested within larger conversations about the nature of college learning. The authors detail why and how TCU came to offer this first-year seminar in its present form, including the unique faculty/staff co-teaching model they adopted, the role of faculty/staff mentoring in promoting *folio thinking*, the use of peer coaches, and the adoption of a template portfolio to structure *reflection* and *artifact* collection.

Chapter 4 also addresses implementation of an institutional-wide ePortfolio program, offers a series of suggestions to colleges in the initial stages of program development, and presents a model for *back-end/front-end collaboration* designed to separate pedagogical questions from technical issues in order to better troubleshoot the latter, especially during the first years. As reflective as it is informational, this chapter centers on the “what we know” with examples of how perceptions of ownership can hinder the success of an ePortfolio program even before it is implemented.

Moving to program-level implementation in Chapter 5, Deidre Anne Evans Garriott considers the intersection of writing centers and ePortfolio pedagogy. Garriott discusses the successes and challenges of training undergraduate writing consultants to provide students and professors with ePortfolio technical know-how as well as “global” considerations regarding content, layout, and organization of the ePortfolios. In addition, Garriott ponders the implications of undergraduate writing consultants as ePortfolio “ambassadors.”

Chapter 6 considers the role of ePortfolios in Deakin University’s (Australia) recent course/program enhancement initiative, designed to offer anywhere, anytime learning to students. Detailing the course enhancement process, this chapter describes how the authors employed backward design in order to align course learning outcomes with evidence-based assessment and also facilitated learning through the development of related structures to scaffold instruction and better support learners.

Building on the foundational concepts of goal setting and reflection discussed in the previous chapter, Chapter 7 focuses on the explicit modelling and *scaffolding* of folio thinking skills: curation, composition, and creativity. The authors discuss the *outcome-based* learning and assessment design that they and their colleagues implemented in various medical science courses, in which they integrated both reflective practice and career development learning (CDL) as part of their ePortfolio pedagogy.

Chapter 8 proposes an ePortfolio model based on Diana Laurillard’s theory of teaching and learning as design, specifically the principles of pedagogical patterns and the conversational framework. This chapter also describes common challenges in fostering students’ “folio” skills (see Polly et al., this collection) towards meaningful documentation of both classroom and independent learning.

Within the context of pre-service teacher education, authors Ximena Castaño Sánchez and María Teresa Novo Molinero offer a complex but valuable model for capturing the relationships between teaching methods and learners’ activity.

## Part III. Assessing Performance

Chapter 9 addresses the necessity of scaling implementation and sustaining support for pedagogy and technological innovation after the successful adoption of an ePortfolio program. This chapter combines the perspectives and experiences of administrators, faculty, and students to demonstrate the importance of administrative advocacy and support; faculty programming and support; and meaningful, *authentic* purposes for students developing their ePortfolios.

Addressing the crucial issues of purpose and cohesiveness in student ePortfolios, Chapter 10 discusses the role of structured, scheduled reflective activities as part of a course for which students are asked to create a summative ePortfolio to demonstrate their learning. Like other authors in the collection, Howard Sanborn and Jenny Ramirez note that students are often unprepared to link artifacts, assignments, or other learning experiences as part of the case they make about their learning. Therefore, Sanborn and Ramirez argue in favor of structured reflection, required at discrete moments of the semester and aimed at encouraging students to think deeply about a specific assignment or artifact as both process and product.

In Chapter 11, Rowanna Carpenter and Yves Labissiere present research findings focused on five aspects of the ePortfolio assessment process and examine the pros and cons of national rubrics and other tools and approaches that have emerged in response to questions raised about the validity and reliability of ePortfolio-based assessment. The authors compare three different approaches to assessing digital portfolios at the program level in order to illustrate their ensuing discussion about the benefits and challenges of each approach as well as how programs might weigh the five factors when selecting an ePortfolio-assessment strategy.

In the final chapter, Michael Day describes the process and outcomes of Northern Illinois University's first-year composition electronic portfolio and discusses the intra-university consensus-building and stakeholder analysis needed to move to the next level: a longitudinal general education electronic portfolio. Further, he explains how intra-institutional work led to the creation of a regional inter-institutional partnership focused on using ePortfolios for articulation and transfer.

In the collaborative spirit of ePortfolio development and the targeted synergy between creator and author, ePortfolios@edu represents a contribution to the current scholarship in electronic portfolio research, building on parts of published research, complementing other work, and including experiences from other faculty and staff stakeholders who to date remain underrepresented in electronic portfolio research. We hope you, our reader, will find it useful, no matter where you fall on the what-we-know/what we-don't-know continuum.

## References

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