

Preface

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Over the last two decades, the ePortfolio has progressed from being just another educational technology fad into a dedicated field of study. The ePortfolios@edu collection illustrates how the research and the practice of ePortfolios in higher education have become more nuanced, more rigorous, and more generalizable as a result of the evolution of pedagogical approaches, assessment methodologies, and the technology platforms underpinning these efforts.

Pedagogy

While it's easy to focus on the ePortfolio product, innovations in pedagogy incentivize and propel the creation of new features and technology platforms. Portfolios continue to have a strong presence in the traditional disciplines of writing and rhetoric, first-year composition, and teacher education. Yet, as a learner-centered orientation that incorporates reflective practice and integrative learning, ePortfolios have gained followers in academic areas ranging from international studies and language learning to undergraduate medical science and politics. The incorporation of ePortfolios as a key component of Texas Christian University's first-year seminar "Introduction to University Life" and in the School of Medical Sciences' honors program at the University of New South Wales (Australia) demonstrates its value as a mechanism to document growth over time and facilitate academic exploration through the formation of students' intellectual identities. Innovations in teaching and learning initiatives from individual course enhancements to programmatic, departmental, and institution-wide efforts have been introduced at multiple levels with varying levels of success, but with many insights gained and recommendations for what should be repeated and also what could be done differently in future iterations.

Assessment

One of the areas of greatest change is the emergence of ePortfolios as a focused area of research. This is seen in the *International Journal of ePortfolios* and the peer-reviewed research articles documented in the *Publications on ePortfolio: Archives of the Research Landscape* (PEARL) database sponsored by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U). Evidence of the impact of ePortfolios has moved beyond anecdotal, one-off stories to detailed observations and findings that are contextualized within a cross-disciplinary body of

literature. The design of curricular and programmatic ePortfolio programs have been informed by a backward design approach at the Virginia Military Institute (VMI). Deakin University (Australia) has incorporated a standards-based assessment framework that relies on career development theories and other models to determine how graduate employability skills and work-related learning are measured. The adaptation of relevant theoretical traditions from other fields such as mapping of the conversational framework as a strategy to map pedagogical patterns in ePortfolios (Castaño & Novo, this collection) is an illustrative example of how the ePortfolio researchers are referencing the disciplinary traditions of other fields to create new applications and conceptualizations that are unique to ePortfolios.

The rising interest in and engagement with ePortfolio research are linked to a corresponding increase in rigor in study designs and data collection and analysis methodology which in turn, has improved teaching and learning practices and assessment strategies. The design and thoughtful implementation of rubrics with clearly articulated criteria at San Francisco State is one illustration. Carpenter and Labissiere's structured comparison of ePortfolio assessment practices at Portland State describes a research direction and a process that is generalizable on multiple levels and can be adapted to different types of institutions, student populations, and disciplines.

Technology

Today, we take the format of the electronic or digital “e” in ePortfolio as a given and as a result, the affordances of ePortfolio technology have moved beyond simply being online to features that provide greater security, interoperability with learning management systems, fine grained permissions, accessibility, personalization, and a more sophisticated user experience. We recognize that ePortfolio tools are not “one size fits all” and specific requirements vary depending on who the stakeholders are and what goals they have for their students. Our search for the minimally viable feature set for an ePortfolio is influenced by the feedback and perspectives of three critical stakeholders: individual learners who are incentivized by the portfolio's value beyond the specific experience or course; institutions and programs' emphasis on assessment and evaluation and desire to effectively demonstrate how learning outcomes are being met, and the faculty and instructors who prioritize instructional and pedagogical needs.

For example, EMMA, the University of Georgia's homegrown writing environment, was initially adapted for ePortfolios and is now potentially being transitioned to a vendor-hosted solution to address the changing demands of the campus. The process of ePortfolio platform selection at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University identifies both challenges and opportunities that are emblematic of the broader political, financial, leadership, and cultural considerations related to supporting the teaching and learning ecosystem on campuses.

Sustainability

Our aspirations for long-term sustainability and stability for our ePortfolio initiatives require more than just funding and timing (or *Kairos*) as identified in San Francisco State University's framework for assessing institutional readiness for ePortfolio adoption, growth, and support. The historical perspective of Northern Illinois' ePortfolio initiative highlights personal qualities of persistence and a willingness to collaborate as necessary for scalability. Yet, increasing the number of ePortfolio users requires a parallel effort to reinforce the infrastructure and networks to assist students, staff, faculty, and instructors. Students who join VMI's Writing Center in a teacher-learner role and serve as peer consultants and portfolio ambassadors may come to think about ePortfolios differently due to their position of advocacy. At the same time, these students are well-situated to provide a meaningful perspective on the design and value of ePortfolios to key stakeholders, namely other students and faculty.

Connecting to a community of researchers and practitioners is essential to a strong infrastructure and the well-being of ePortfolio advocates and leaders, some of whom may be part of a small cohort of ePortfolio enthusiasts on their campus (or the only one). At some institutions, individuals appointed as ePortfolio directors and coordinators often involve colleagues in academic technology, centers for teaching and learning, and departments, programs, schools across campus such as the Electronic Portfolio Interest Group at the University of Georgia and regional networks such as the Illinois Regional ePortfolio Partnership. Nationally and internationally, conferences and thought leadership promoted by the Association of American Colleges and Universities, ePortfolios Australia, and the Association of Authentic, Experiential Evidence-Based Learning via in-person and online events, webinars, and Twitter chats provide engagement and networking opportunities to join a diverse and inclusive community of practice.

Looking to the Future

As we look to the future, the ePortfolios@edu collection highlights the maturation of ePortfolio research and practice in three areas. The first is a greater awareness and understanding of the needs and interests of the ePortfolio creator and their intended purpose and audience. The process of curation and the selection of relevant artifacts and evidence are guided by purpose and audience, especially as they relate to the formation of an online identity, demonstration of competencies and skills, or meeting the requirements of a project, course, or program. Similar to tailoring a resume or cover letter for a specific position, new platforms allow easy duplication and personalization of ePortfolios, expanding the possibility of a more expansive use of portfolios for different situations and contexts. With this mind, while "scaling up" ePortfolio use has typically referred to growing the number of students, there may also be an opportunity to "scale down" and to con-

sider how portfolio pedagogies and models could be applied to a group project or course assignment.

The second area of focus underscores how ePortfolios are evolving in the higher education space and recognizes the knowledge and skills that are necessary for successful curation practices, such as digital literacy, authenticity, and visual rhetoric. As we ask students to share personal reflections, multimedia artifacts, and evidence of curricular and co-curricular experiences in online environments, some in public spaces and others inside learning and assessment management systems usually behind an institutional firewall, a growing number of questions and concerns about privacy and digital ethics in the short term and long term continue to arise.

Lastly, while the recognition of ePortfolios as a high impact practice prioritizes their independent value, they are at their best when coupled with other practices in order to expand, enhance, and foster greater student engagement. Integrative learning is a foundational principle of ePortfolios in the context of a lifelong and lifewide learning trajectory, moving beyond simply making connections among experiences inside and outside the classroom and paying explicit attention to the translation and transfer of learning from diverse contexts and experiences in order to enlighten future decisions about education, employment, and achieving a meaningful and purposeful life. Future ePortfolio research will continue to draw upon the findings and insights from the learning sciences, self-authorship, self-efficacy, career development theories, and other research traditions.

The ePortfolio@edu case studies, exemplar tools and practices, and emerging research are a rich and vibrant snapshot of not only where the ePortfolio field is today but also how far we've come. Yet, the foundation and core values of reflection and metacognition and the emphasis on pedagogical process over technological product remain unchanged. Integrative learning and synthesis have become even more important to ePortfolios as students, faculty, and administrators take a more holistic and comprehensive view of the design of the educational experience and who learners are when they set foot on our campuses as well as who they are becoming. The emergence of new practices, methods, research questions and directions exemplified in this collection will inform and guide researchers, practitioners, and learners in our ongoing ePortfolio journey.