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For this module, I interviewed 2013 Professional Writing alumna Allegra Smith.

Synthesis:

- Though we make portfolio in WRA 210, can always be improved/reinvented, because the world is constantly changing, as are you, don't be afraid to change with it.
- Because the world is constantly going more online, it is essential to have a constantly updated digital portfolio.
- Use your digital portfolio to showcase your personality as well as your portfolio pieces.
- Link everything together, that way it is easy to access your portfolio and people can easily admire all of your hard work.

Interview Transcript:

How did you begin designing your portfolio?

So, I'm going to share something really embarrassing with you. I started thinking about portfolio functionality and design when I took WRA 210 (intro web authoring), my first ever PW course, in the spring of 2010. It's really hard to find my final portfolio from that class, since it's hidden in the bowels of MSU's AFS web server space, but here it is: <https://www.msu.edu/~smit1449/portfolio/portfolio.html>. I started thinking about portfolio design, and the rhetorical moves a portfolio should make, very early on in my time at MSU, and I think it paid off. After making this first portfolio for 210, I knew some of what I wanted to do and definitely did not want to do (like creating my own wireframe for my site, blech).

So, I took an entire semester to create my final portfolio, which is housed here: <http://allegra-w-smith.com/>. I started with a Wordpress template and customized its HTML and design, then populated it with my own portfolio pieces and textual information.

How does your digital portfolio differ from your regular portfolio, and how are they similar?

I've never really had to give physical portfolio artifacts to people, except for when I applied for graduate school (and then I sent in my writing samples digitally; so I've never actually had to print everything out). The only way these artifacts exist is in files on my hard drive; and I think that this speaks to changes in the lives and identities of professional writers over the last decade or so. We are living and working in different worlds than our parents, where we rarely need "regular portfolios" (and maybe, if you are applying somewhere that requires one, it should give you pause).

How did you decide what activities to put in your portfolio?

I wanted to show, with my portfolio pieces, how I straddle the line between industry and academia. I showed examples of my scholarly research, as well as my ability to create, design, and edit documents that have "real world" functionality. I showed how I could compose in a variety of genres and environments, writing reports, research papers, creating presentations, etc.

What do you believe is the most important part of your portfolio?

I think that the professional identity that my portfolio portrays is its most important part. My portfolio shows my careful precision as a scholar, but also my unique identity and voice. It is this overall effect that I think has benefited me the most in my digital presence.

How has your portfolio helped with your current career?

I created my portfolio after my acceptance into graduate school, so right now it serves as an online presence and marker of my scholarly-professional identity. It houses my CV and my research, and helps me to get the occasional odd freelance job to make a little bit of money on the side. As I begin to apply to PhD programs next fall, it will evince my ethos for me online as programs see if I am a good fit for them.

How did you balance professional and personal in your portfolio?

Very carefully, haha. When I presented my portfolio during the portfolio reviews at the end of WRA 455 last year, one of the first questions was "what's with the teapot?" I created a quirky, off-color brand identity for myself because I didn't want to be disingenuous with my digital presence. I am a writer with a punchy voice and very particular interests. I am fueled by my drive to help others become more confident in and excited about their own writing, my love of beautiful words and design, and a bottomless pot of tea. My design conveys that, and my samples and artifacts showcase my skill and versatility as a communicator and teacher.

How do you present your portfolio?

My portfolio is linked on most of my digital presences online (Facebook, Twitter, Academia.edu, Google+, etc.) and included on every page of my CV. The last time I formally presented my portfolio and its contents was last April, during the final week of WRA 455 (the PW portfolio seminar). There was an audience of students and professors from the program, as well as alumni and community partners from across different professional writing disciplines.

What is the reaction of potential employers to your portfolio?

See above. Folks appeared pretty impressed, but some expressed doubts about my layout (particularly the script font and the teapot). Such nontraditional design is atypical for a graduate student.

What was the most difficult part of creating your portfolio?

I ran into some difficulties with design, since I am not a web author or developer by any means. I had a friend (Thomas Gregovich, PW grad 2013: <http://www.thomasgregovich.net/>) help me when I couldn't figure out the code.

Are there any tips for designing, or what to include in the portfolio that you be willing to share with me?

Think about the skills that you want to showcase to future employers. Think about what your best (or most impressive) work is. Think about the identity that you want to convey, not only through your choice of artifacts, but through your design and layout choices as well. Every aspect of your portfolio is rhetorical.