

Executive Summary: ePortfolio Uses

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ePortfolios are electronic portfolios displayed via computer. They are typically uploaded to the Internet but may also be affixed to CD-ROM or DVD-ROM. The files comprising a portfolio may be a collection of works as they were created or may include revisions of work; almost always, the portfolio includes reflection on the body of work. If the portfolio was created to document or assess, it also includes analysis and evaluation.

Well established in the arts since the 1980s, portfolios today are becoming entrenched as exit requirements by colleges of education¹. As ePortfolio platforms are offered for student use, educators fairly ask if the electronic version of a portfolio is any different from a hard-copy or physical one. The differences lie in the ability to duplicate and distribute the product with little cost or effort, the capacity for multimedia files, and portability that permits work on a number of platforms or software products. Electronic processes heighten copyright and security concerns of portfolios; and while electronic portfolios create a space savings compared to print versions, the sheer number of portfolio adoptions nationwide creates a storage problem for institutions.

Functions of ePortfolios include documentation, planning, evaluation, job-seeking; and uses include student presentations, program review, and institutional effectiveness¹. While universities and schools have often made self-study and documented it, the use of electronic records to represent self-study is new. A driving force may be that since 2004 SACS has increasingly relied on an institution's webpage or internal ePortfolio for documentation under review². Thus, at the same time that schools are adopting ePortfolio platforms and standards for their students' use, administrators and faculty are establishing processes that they are likely to use for their programmatic documentation, including faculty credential and performance reports. One classification system of ePortfolios offers three temporal categories: creation after works are complete, process during a program and following a structured guide to completion, on-going process without a prescribed structure and without an intended completion date or goal.

For students, ePortfolio options cannot rival social software but especially undergraduates respond positively to the opportunity to create a web-based representation of their studies and career goals. For academic programs, ePortfolio permits the tracking of students' development over time. At the University of San Diego, advanced programs use a model for student checks at admission, midway through program, exit or graduation, and follow-up post-graduation. (In addition to working on a commercial ePortfolio platform, the school uses Dreamweaver and Access to form its database management system³.) The extent to which student works are supported is still being debated, even at schools that currently require ePortfolio creation by all registered students. In short, questions of file/portfolio sizes and length of time of storage/access are not always answered before school-wide initiatives begin.

For faculty, ePortfolio use is typically first seen as a teaching tool and only later adopted as a means to document performance areas (if the ePortfolio is to be used for annual evaluation or for tenure/promotion application) and credentials (for institutional reporting for accreditation, for example). In some disciplines, a constructivist model describes faculty ePortfolios: the electronic collection of works that not only increases over time but also changes qualitatively as the faculty member continues to develop as scholar.

For administrators, ePortfolio can serve as a data source of aggregated assessments of student works, faculty credentials, and program tracking records of student progress (especially as it relates to retention and graduation). National standard sets are included in leading ePortfolio platforms, increasing the value of ePortfolios to meet accreditation requirements and to serve as documentation in accreditation reports. ePortfolio can support several uses across a campus; however, a single platform is not adequate for an institution's full reporting purposes. At best, an ePortfolio platform contributes to a larger system of inputs.

Widespread adoption of ePortfolios can be dated to the mid-1990s. As commercial platforms have proliferated (since about 2000) adoption has been an easier and easier decision. From a data collection perspective the most efficient ePortfolio would be fully integrated with a learning management system and institutional data content management system.

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2	Lorenzo, G., & Ittelson, J. (2005). <i>An overview of institutional e-portfolios</i> . EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative, ELI Paper 2:2005.
3	Ammer, J., Getz, C., Hubbard, L. (2005). Comprehensive e-portfolio NCATE assessment system: Rethinking learning & teaching. Paper presented at the annual Syllabus 2005 Conference, Los Angeles.