

BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES: IMPLEMENTING E-PORTFOLIOS IN A GRADUATE STUDENT AFFAIRS PREPARATION PROGRAM

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While e-portfolios are increasingly used in higher education graduate professional programs (Underwood & Austin, 2016), few studies provide an overview of e-portfolios, particularly in the helping fields (Wakimoto & Lewis, 2014). The following article provides an overview of how a student affairs graduate preparation program implemented the use of e-portfolios to assess graduating Masters students and how students perceived the process of creating their e-portfolio. Details about the implementation process and recommendations are provided to assist other programs that wish to integrate e-portfolios.

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Many have called for curricular reforms within graduate student affairs preparation programs to better prepare future practitioners. These calls included new student affairs professionals having specific skill sets such as finance and budgeting experience, legal knowledge, and proficient writing skills (Herdlein, 2004). Others have indicated the need for the development of broader initiatives, such as aiding in the creation of a student's professional identity, making formal curriculum applicable to practice (Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008), possessing a knowledge base regarding institutional inter-workings (Magolda & Carnaghi, 2004), and having a broad knowledge base in counseling skills (Kretovics, 2002). Given the vast needs of the field, it is critical that graduate preparation programs provide education on both specific skill sets and the ability to connect theory-to-practice.

To address the calls for adequate preparation of student affairs administrators, and to provide a framework for student affairs work, ACPA: College Student Educators International (ACPA) and NASPA: Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (2015) developed a document outlining 10 competency areas for student affairs educators. These areas of professional competency highlight foundational historical, philosophical, and theoretical knowledge bases and skills such as assessment, evaluation, and more recently, the use of technology. While these areas of professional competencies serve as a guide for student affairs educators and graduate preparation programs to prepare new professionals, some scholars are critical of using only a competency-based approach. For instance, Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) stated that graduate student affairs preparation programs should attend to the "cognitive, interpersonal, and intrapersonal development" and "students' ability to see their own education and professional development as object, rather than subject" (p. 330). Focusing solely on a competency-based education system "runs the risk of privileging certain epistemologi-

cal and ontological frameworks to the exclusion and detriment of others" (Eaton, 2016, p. 576). Graduate preparation programs need to focus on both the development of professional competencies and the development of holistic measures to assess graduate students learning.

One way to better prepare professionals is the implement of e-portfolios into graduate preparation programs (Denzine, 2001; Herdlein, 2004; Janosik & Frank, 2013). E-portfolios are an increasing trend in graduate preparation programs in higher education (Underwood & Austin, 2016). E-portfolios serve as a space where students can make meaning of their academic and professional experiences by showcasing their abilities to connect theory and practice. They can also serve as important tools for career development (Garris, 2007) and help graduates communicate their skill to employers. Given the possibilities e-portfolios provide, faculty at Castle University's (pseudonym) Higher Education and Student Affairs (HESA) program decided to pilot the use of e-portfolios as a culminating experience for graduating master's students.

This article provides a case study of how faculty engaged in curricular reform by instituting the use of an e-portfolio assessment to better prepare graduating student affairs educators. The following will provide an overview of e-portfolios, information about implementing e-portfolios, reflections from students on their experiences, and recommendations for integrating e-portfolios into other programs. Findings discussed how e-portfolios allowed students to reflect on their education, provide opportunities to showcase multiple skill sets, and provide an ongoing medium for professional development.

Overview of E-portfolios

Deemed a high impact practice by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), e-portfolios provide students opportunity to actively engage in their learning, provide opportunity for reflection,

and illustrate course, programmatic, and even university learning outcomes (Watson, Kuh, Rhodes, Light, & Chen, 2016). E-portfolios in higher education are used for both formative and summative assessments, career searches, and spaces to showcase accomplishments (Barrett, 2006; Wang, 2010). With increased technology, higher education has moved more towards digital or electronic portfolios (e-portfolios) due to the ease of sharing and updating material (Lin, 2008), and their ability to showcase multimedia (Ring, Weaver, & Jones, 2009). They allow faculty and institutions to easily collect and assess student work, development, and growth (Janosik & Frank, 2013).

There are three primary types of e-portfolio systems: assessment, learning-based, and professional and/or career portfolios. An assessment-based e-portfolio "demonstrates institutional accountability and serves as a vehicle for institution wide reflection, learning and improvement (Kahn, 2001, p. 136). Here, programs or institutions can use the e-portfolio to assess students' growth, competency, and knowledge. These e-portfolios can support and illustrate competency or accomplishment of programs and objectives (Buyarski & Landis, 2014).

Learning-based e-portfolio systems focus on learners' reflections of their learning process. The goal of this type of system is to support student learning with the use of critical reflection (Garis, 2007). Because learning is fluid, reflecting and representing what and how one knows is important in the learning process (Cummings, 2006). This type of e-portfolio allows students to evaluate themselves, reflect upon their own learning, growth, and engage in critical thought (Denzine, 2001; Garis, 2007). These types of e-portfolios are not institutional; rather, they serve as vehicles for students to reflect on their own learning experiences (Barrett, 2007).

Professional e-portfolios afford users a platform to showcase accomplishments, experiences, and work samples for employment (Garis, 2007; Reardon, Lumsden, &

Meyer, 2005). These career development systems are tools that allow students to be intentional and systematic in using evidence and samples of work gained through academic preparation (Garis, 2007). Students can send their e-portfolios to potential employers who will be able to see academic preparation, work experiences, and other critical artifacts that illustrate students' capabilities.

While there is much scholarship on e-portfolios generally, there continues to be a gap regarding the use of e-portfolios in the helping professions (Wakimoto & Lewis, 2014), or those professions that assist in academic and nonacademic development and growth (Reynolds, 2009), including the student affairs profession. While e-portfolios are increasingly used within graduate preparation programs (Underwood & Austin, 2016) only a few studies serve to provide concrete "pathways" or overviews of implementation of e-portfolios (Wakimoto & Lewis, 2014). According to Janosik and Frank (2013), the implementation of e-portfolios in their student affairs graduate programs was "powerful and meaningful, particularly with the job search process" (p. 18). They discussed that students reported some difficulty learning the platform and adapting to change within the curriculum. Students reported that crafting their e-portfolio took more time than they expected and concern about the ambiguity of what the finished product would look like. The students, however, shared their creation of e-portfolios added value to their graduate experiences. Given the benefits, many student affairs graduate programs are implementing e-portfolios, however there are gaps in the literature regarding the implementation process for graduate student affairs programs.

Overview of the Case

The site, Castle University, a Midwest public research institution, enrolled just over 13,000 undergraduate students and nearly 5,000 graduate students. At the in-

stitution, 57% of students were white, 14% were Hispanic and/or Latino/a, and 13% of students were Black or African American. The HESA program historically focused on Adult and Continuing Education. However, since 2014, the focus of the masters program shifted to focus more on higher education and student affairs administration. This shift was intentional as it better aligned with students' goals and the larger goals of the student affairs field.

The HESA program enrolled about 50 masters students, half were first-year masters students, half were second years, and nearly all students were full-time. Full-time masters students typically took two years to complete coursework and most had a graduate assistantship. The students in the HESA program were more diverse than the larger university with over 45% of students who identified as students of color.

Despite a lack of literature detailing how e-portfolios are implemented in a helping profession (Wakimoto & Lewis, 2014), the program faculty at Castle University's HESA program decided to move forth with the implementation of e-portfolios. Previously, faculty expressed concern about the use of a summative assessment, a research paper, as the capstone experience for the master's program. The 20-25 page capstone research paper did not require original research; rather, it served more as a literature review on a topic of students' choice. Both faculty and students felt that the research paper did little to showcase the variety of skills, knowledge, and competencies students acquired during their master's program. Moreover, while the paper's intent was to allow space for students to connect their coursework and theory to practice, faculty complained that praxis was rarely showcased.

While faculty had discussed moving towards an e-portfolio system for some time, during the spring semester of 2016, faculty decided to pilot the use of e-portfolios. Students were given a choice on which capstone course they enrolled; they

could choose either the e-portfolio section or the research paper section. Because the e-portfolio was a new initiative, and because faculty had not prepared students to retain their coursework, projects, or assignments to use as artifacts in the e-portfolios, students were given an opportunity to opt out if they wished. While faculty could have waited to implement the e-portfolios with a new cohort of students, they did not want to wait another two years for this to occur.

A total of 13 students chose to enroll in the e-portfolio capstone section and 12 enrolled in the traditional research capstone paper section. The e-portfolio section was structured as a weekend course that met on four Saturdays throughout the semester. Each class lasted eight hours and was co-taught by the author and another other faculty member. Students were required to use the web platform, Weebly, a free blogging site that they could customize. Faculty wanted to use a site that was free and that students could take with them after graduation. While the university had other platforms (e.g., LiveText and Blackboard), Weebly was chosen due to its ease and affordability.

The e-portfolio capstone had three primary requirements: students needed to show artifacts that they had completed during their Masters program, they had to illustrate reflection on those artifacts, and the artifacts and reflection had to speak to the five departmental outcomes.

While faculty initially thought to use the ACPA/NASPA (2015) areas of professional competencies, they felt it was too many for students to work with. Program faculty decided to require students to use these five outcomes for students to use as a "spine" of their e-portfolio, a guide to showcasing skills, dispositions, reflection, and outcomes. Overall, this e-portfolio project was designed to be an assessment portfolio in which faculty would use the e-portfolio to assess levels of student learning.

Artifact Collection

Students were asked to select artifacts from coursework, assistantships, internships, volunteer work, or from any other professional accomplishment to showcase artifacts that would connect to each of the five departmental outcomes. The department outcomes students were expected to use were:

- (1) Apply historical, social and philosophical foundations of higher education to the practice of higher education,
- (2) Apply learning and development theories to diverse practice settings in higher education,
- (3) Utilize a theory-to-practice model to develop and plan programs in diverse settings,
- (4) Apply principles of assessment/evaluation to the practice of higher education,
- (5) Critique and apply research findings to the practice of higher education.

Because e-portfolios can showcase audio, visual, and other multimedia artifacts, students in the e-portfolio section were encouraged to use a range of artifacts. They were encouraged to show presentations, audio and visual artifacts, programs they designed, and/or other initiatives they that illustrated a connection to each outcome. They were required to have at least one artifact for each of the five outcomes.

Artifact Reflections

Once students selected their artifacts, they were asked to provide critical reflection on it, and how the artifact(s) provided met each of the outcomes. Students were encouraged to discuss how their knowledge and/or practice was enhanced or changed from their specific artifact. Students were told that these reflections did not have to be positive; that is, students did not need to only present “successful” papers, or artifacts. Instead, they were encouraged to show products that illustrated growth in their coursework, assistantships, and other learning contexts.

Assessment

The program’s faculty assessed the e-portfolios. Each e-portfolio had two faculty members who reviewed it, scored it on the descriptive rubric, and then sent the rubric back to the two course instructors. The rubric consisted of five primary categories: Artifact selection, Artifact analysis and Reflection, E-portfolio Organization, Writing Conventions, and Style and Delivery. Each category was assessed on a scale of exemplary, proficient, emerging, and unsatisfactory. If two faculty disagreed on whether or not the e-portfolio was passable, a third faculty member reviewed it.

Research Design

This study utilized a case study approach, which examines “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (Miles, Humberman, & Saldaña, 2014, p. 28). Data was collected through observations of classroom sessions, semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002), and through document analysis. This study aimed to explore how students experienced the e-portfolio process and how they made meaning of their learning while creating their e-portfolios.

Participants

After receiving university IRB approval, students enrolled in the e-portfolio section of the capstone course were solicited for participation. Of the 13 students enrolled in the e-portfolio section, eight agreed to participate. Seven of the participants identified as women, and four identified as students of color. Each participant was in their final semester of their Masters program.

Data Collection and Analysis

Three forms of data were collected: observations, interviews, and artifacts (e-portfolios). Data were collected through classroom observations of the e-portfolio class sessions. Observations took place on three, eight-hour long classes. During these class sessions, observations consisted of creating

descriptive field notes and a summary of the observation after each class (Merriam, 2009).

Semi-structured interviews (Patton, 2002) included two, hour-long interviews that centered on participants' experiences constructing and reflecting on their e-portfolio. The first round of interviews lasted between 60-90 minutes. The second round of interviews also spanned 60-90 minutes. The topics of questions included how students constructed their e-portfolios, why they included particular artifacts, how they designed their e-portfolios, what benefits and challenges they saw, and their overall experiences in the e-portfolio class.

Lastly, participants' e-portfolios were collected and analyzed. The e-portfolios included reflections on learning outcomes, sample work (e.g., papers, presentations, videos), and other information participants thought was important (e.g., resumes, "about me" statements, and photographs of themselves at university events).

Value coding was utilized (Saldaña, 2016) in the analysis of the interview transcripts and observational data. Value coding reflects "a participant's values, attitudes, and beliefs, representing his or her perspectives or worldview" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 131). In utilizing values coding, themes of participants' values and beliefs, particularly around learning, were centered. Coding focused on how participants talked about and illustrated in their e-portfolios beliefs and experiences about their processes. For instance, codes that emerged from data included "confidence in competencies," as participants discussed in both interviews and in class feelings of pride and confidence in their abilities of meeting department outcomes.

Document analysis was used for participants' finished e-portfolios to help "uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights" (Merriam, 1988, p. 118) regarding students' experiences with constructing their e-portfolio, and how they made meaning of their learning. Document

analysis took place through a systematic review of participants' e-portfolios. Each participant's finished e-portfolio was read through in an iterative process whereby patterns and themes within the data were noted and categorized (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006). Similar to the analysis of observational and interview data, the benefits and challenges participants experienced related to the process of developing their e-portfolio was focused upon.

After the development of themes, Guba's and Lincoln's (1981) member checking was used to uphold trustworthiness. As patterns emerged during the analysis phase, a list of patterns were sent to a sample of participants to examine. Participants were asked to comment upon or correct as they saw fit (Reason & Rowan, 1981). Triangulation of data from interviews, observations, and document analysis was used (Merriam, 2009) to help further support findings that emerged.

Researcher Positionality

It is important to discuss my own positionality as it pertains to this study. During data collection for this study, I was a core faculty member in the HESA program and co-taught the e-portfolio course with another faculty member in the program. I had extensive training on implementing e-portfolios as both a learning tool and as an assessment tool in undergraduate education and helped design the e-portfolio initiative for the program. I had been using e-portfolios with students for over five years in previous academic settings.

Limitations

My role as a faculty member, both in the program, and as a co-instructor for the course, may serve as a limitation. Given my roles, participants may not have felt comfortable being honest about their experiences crafting the e-portfolios. I mediated this by using multiple data sources and by explaining that participation in the study was voluntary and participants could stop

at any point without consequence. Another limitation is self-selection. Students were able to choose which section they wanted to take. This could have led participants to have a more positive outlook on creating e-portfolios.

Findings

The following section will discuss the benefits and challenges to the e-portfolio process identified by the participants. The benefits included: recognizing competence, connecting theory-to-practice, and showcasing skills. Challenges students identified included: being a “frightening” experience, a political process, and usefulness in job search.

Benefits of E-Portfolios

Students shared many benefits to the e-portfolio process and with their final product. Participants liked how the e-portfolio illustrated tangible practices, events that they participated in, and “proof” of their abilities. They indicated using the site to show faculty how they connected theory gained from their coursework to their practice, how they were able to show readers of their e-portfolios a variety of skills in diverse manners, and that it was something that they could keep long-term, for professional development and careers.

Recognizing competence. Participants shared that the process of developing an e-portfolio allowed them to realize that they were knowers. During class, students discussed with each other that before the construction of their e-portfolio, they were uncertain if they had met the outcomes laid out by the program, let alone the content covered in their coursework. As they talked with one another, they commented on how the process of creating their e-portfolio gave them more confidence in their abilities to be student affairs practitioners. In an interview, one student, Maria, [all names are pseudonyms] offered, “I really didn’t think that I had met those outcomes at first, like at all.” But, as she found, analyzed, and re-

flected on her different artifacts, she shared that not only did she learn, she applied her knowledge in her assistantships and in the classroom. Maria went on, “Like, I am prepared for the profession. I can see that now through my artifacts.”

In her interviews, Trisha shared she was a little surprised that she had met the program outcomes. She stated,

I think at first, I thought that there was like a dissonance, like between the program outcomes and my work. At first, I didn’t think I had really done anything that showed that I had met them [the outcomes]. I guess I thought a lot of my program was just, like, writing papers in APA format. But, then I looked at the competencies, and realized, yes, I did perform those things. I did learn those things. I can do assessment. It wasn’t until the e-portfolio that it really sank in.

As Trisha shared her experiences constructing her e-portfolio, she commented on how she used the programmatic outcomes as her guide. While at first she assumed she had not met the outcomes, she realized that she had done work that mapped onto them. She continued,

Before, if someone asked me, “were there times I did assessment?” I would have said “no.” But now, you know, I’m able to answer that in a job interview, that yeah, actually I have. I have actually learned and performed assessment. I maybe didn’t realize it until I reflected on the artifact.

In the process of creating her e-portfolio, Trisha realized that not only had she learned about assessment, she had carried out assessment projects. This became apparent in class, as she offered to help another student come up with ideas for what he could use as his assessment artifact. She talked with him about her realization about how she was doing assessment and helped him identify different assessment projects that he had done, too.

Connecting theory-to-practice. Some students shared that they chose the e-portfolio project because they could “show” versus “tell” about their accomplishments. One student, Vanessa, said she felt that, “I could finally show people my work, instead of just tell them about it.” Another student, Greer, echoed that sentiment:

I used artifacts from my assistantship, which was great. Like, I showed things that I had actually done. Like, here is how I used challenge and support theory, here is where I was developmental with my staff, here is how I did assessment. I guess I felt like I could give proof, you know? Proof that I can use what [faculty] taught me.

For Greer and Vanessa, they liked that their e-portfolios could show viewers their abilities.

Mara, who was a graduate assistant in residence life, shared that she saw benefits in creating the e-portfolio because it showed her use of theories in practice. She offered, I was glad I could show work from outside of the classroom. I used two programs that I did for my assistantship and was actually able to show how I used the theories. I think that is what I liked best, showing how I had taken material from class and actually applied it. I think it shows that I can be a good professional. I like the idea of being able to use this for career advancement, too.

The idea of offering “proof” that they were able to “show” meant that they could showcase their understandings of theory in their actual practice. The e-portfolio, as a medium, provided space for them to communicate their capabilities, not just in knowing, but in actual practice.

Showcasing skills. Participants also shared that they saw great benefit in using the e-portfolio as a way of showing potential employers more of their skill sets. Cassie said that she was able to show people not just things she had learned in the program, but other capabilities, too. She said,

I’ve actually done some website de-

sign. I’ve had to create websites before. And so, in doing this, I could show people that I can do that skill in addition to what I showed in my artifacts. I can show that I have the ability to do websites, audio and visual projects, and so that they can see I bring a lot to the table. I’m creative, resourceful. People don’t just read what I can do, like in my resume, but really see it in my portfolio.

Similar to students who liked the benefit of having “proof” of skill, Cassie saw benefits of using the e-portfolio to illustrate not just coursework, but also technical skill as well. Cassie customized her e-portfolio to illustrate her creativity. She added her own personal artwork as the website background, embedded audio music that played when pages were clicked, and used the site to express her personality. For Cassie, she said she “wanted to go all out, you know, to show people that I can do a lot with technology.”

Danny also indicated that he enjoyed being able to demonstrate that he was able to learn new technologies. He offered,

You know, a lot of campuses, and in student affairs especially, it’s important to show that you can learn new stuff. And I think I can tell people that like, I learned this [creating a website] in a short time. I think this can really show people that I’m willing to learn new things, even if they are hard.

Both Cassie and Danny shared that showing skills through their e-portfolios, particularly regarding technology and their ability to learn new things, would show aspects of their skill sets that they may not have gotten an opportunity to share.

Challenges of E-Portfolios

While those who completed the e-portfolio discussed the benefits they saw, they also shared some challenges. Participants shared there was some fear when creating their e-portfolios. For some, they also saw this as a political process regarding what classes they selected artifacts from

and how they framed their experiences in those classes. Finally, students were concerned about how their e-portfolios could be used in their job searches.

A “frightening” experience. Participants expressed concern and even fear about creating the e-portfolio. While summative assessments can be frightening, students shared specific aspects with which they struggled. For instance, Carla shared, “As far as picking the artifacts, I did at least two per outcome just in case one wasn’t strong. I was worried. I was worried that one artifact wasn’t enough. I needed to be sure, I guess, that I showed that I met [the outcomes]. Like, I wasn’t going to fail this. I put at least two [artifacts] up there because I didn’t know what would happen if I didn’t choose the right one or that we didn’t do it right.”

This concern for not “doing it right” was a theme throughout many participants’ interviews about their experience.

While there was concrete “proof,” in this process, there was also an abstractness that frightened the students. Class time was often spent with students being concerned about if their artifacts were “right,” if their e-portfolio design was “good.” Students compared their e-portfolios with each other’s and worried that they would be graded by comparison with each other’s work. For example, Cassie was so skilled in technology and chose to customize her e-portfolio more than other students. Students shared in class that they were worried that their e-portfolio would be graded “against” hers and deemed “not as good.”

Mara similarly shared, “I actually found this process a little terrifying,” adding that, “I felt terrified when I only offered a few pictures versus, like, a full research paper.” Upon asking her to explain what she meant, Mara shared,

I guess a research paper, I don’t know, I guess it is long and I know what they are supposed to look like. I guess research papers felt safer to include. Because I

know what good effort is in a research paper. But a few pictures showing me doing things, I don’t know, I guess it didn’t feel as hard, you know? Like, as hard as a research paper.

For Mara, she equated projects and papers that were more “difficult” or more time consuming as being “safer” options to include because she was more familiar with being assessed using those assignments. For her, and others, it was challenging to include items that did not feel as academically rigorous as formal research papers.

A political process. Students discussed that because faculty would be assessing their e-portfolios, they felt “this is a political process.” Danny shared, “for me, it was a little terrifying. I didn’t want a faculty member to get upset that I didn’t use their assignment or that I didn’t grow from it or something.” Danny went on to state,

Like, then [a faculty member] read the paper and then my reflection, they would be like, you still haven’t grown the way you said you did. Like, I was really worried about that. I didn’t know how they would read it if I admitted weakness. It was kind of a terrifying experience.

Mia shared similar experiences and offered that she did not include reflections or artifacts that she received less than an “A” on. She said, “I wasn’t going to give [faculty] a reason to mark me down or for them to think I never should have gotten a good grade on it in the first place.” Overall, participants worried that faculty mark down their e-portfolios if they did not use artifacts from the faculty members course.

Usefulness in job search. While students shared that they saw benefit in the e-portfolio to help them with professional development and career goals, many also shared that it was not something that any potential employer had either asked for or allowed space to share. Abigail shared,

I’ve been job searching now since January, it’s been difficult...I’ve been looking at things and for the most part they ask for a resume, cover letter and a

reference list. That's the extent. And then on their forms online, like, there's no space for me to put in anything additional. But nowhere in there is there even an option where I can say, "hey, I have this resource can you look at it." There's nowhere to tell them about it. So, I'm wondering how useful this is in a professional way.

Other students shared similar thoughts. Tara indicated that, "I think my e-portfolio is really great but I just don't know how I can really let anyone I'm interviewing with know about it. How do you casually bring up your website?" While students saw this as a potentially powerful artifact of their abilities, they were uncertain how to share their e-portfolios during the job application process.

Discussions

While the program's primary goal for the e-portfolio was to move towards a better form of assessment, the e-portfolio did far more than illustrate mastery of outcomes. Instead, it allowed space for students to apply, reflect, and move towards an analysis of their knowledge, skills, and development. As Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) recommended, programs must move from mere "knowledge acquisition" to a more process-based application of knowledge (p. 329-330). The e-portfolio allowed for such space. Framed by coursework, students were able to pull in their professional experiences, and upload artifacts that they used in their assistantships and professional lives. Students were genuinely excited to show faculty the knowledge gained from courses was used in their assistantships and internships. Framed as "proof," students wanted to show that they could be competent professionals.

The e-portfolio afforded students the ability to "show" audiences other capabilities. Whether it was technological skill, creativity, or other important attributes, participants liked the idea of showing themselves. While this was not necessarily the

intended goal of why the program would use the e-portfolio, there was benefit to participants and showcasing skills and their digital identity, which is increasingly important for student affairs practitioners to develop (Ahlquist, 2016). In addition to cultivating their digital identity, skills such as web design, ability to effectively use audio and visual displays, and other technological skills are needed in student affairs. Increasingly, offices such as career services are utilizing e-portfolios (Garis, 2007). Some universities are utilizing e-portfolios to help students make sense of out-of-classroom learning experiences and to develop leadership skills (Garis, 2007). Students who created these e-portfolios, particularly ones who showcased creativity and skill, will have a great deal to offer their future students and employers.

There were also some challenges, however, with this initiative. First, participants indicated that this was a "frightening" process, in part because it was a summative assessment but also because it was a new process. This sentiment was echoed by Janosik and Frank (2013) who shared that students struggled with creation of the e-portfolio. According to the authors, students needed a great deal of reassurance throughout the process and that students were creating their e-portfolios in a manner "that met expectation" (p. 17). The same was true for these students; throughout, as they expressed concern or fear. This concern that their e-portfolios were "right" or that they met expectations was a reoccurring theme throughout the study.

Students also shared that they felt artifact selection was a "political decision," stating that they were concerned with how faculty would perceive which artifacts were selected and how a faculty member had graded the artifact. This was a surprising finding as it was contrary to what students were told in the class. Students were told that this was about their learning, their journey, and their accomplishments. While the co-instructor and I did not address that this

was not a political decision with students directly, this is something that we plan to be more intentional about in discussing when we move forward with the next round of e-portfolios.

The benefits discussed by the participants were within the realm of being able to showcase theory to practice, skills, and professional development, many also discussed they were unsure how to share their e-portfolios with prospective employers. Participants discussed how there was no space on job applications to submit a link to their e-portfolio nor would they ever really be prompted to talk about it in a job talk. Throughout the course, students were told that this could help with job attainment, however, not necessarily through the sharing of the finished product. While the faculty knew that many of the students could not share the e-portfolio links to specific job listings, we did discuss that this project could help them in regard to reflecting and articulating specific job skills and practices. For us, we had framed it to them to reflect on learning and attributes that they could communicate to their future employers or during interviews, not by sharing the e-portfolio link. We spoke about this as being a tool for reflection about theory-to-practice, about outcomes and professional competencies, students heard something different: they heard that they could send their e-portfolios to employers.

Recommendations for Future Practice

While there were multiple benefits to the new e-portfolio initiative in our program, there were a few items that we wished we had attended to in the process. For programs considering instituting e-portfolios, the following recommends should be considered.

Quelling Fears

Students continually need reassurance during the process of e-portfolio creation. It was critical that students be encouraged to avoid creating the e-portfolio in a man-

ner that was “right,” but instead, in a way that was meaningful to them. Students need to be empowered to take ownership of their e-portfolios and illustrate and craft their narrative and how they have met their outcomes. While it is a summative assessment, students need to use this space for self-reflection and articulation of self.

The prospect that this is a “political process” must be addressed with students. As the co-instructor and I discussed, it did not occur to us to talk about this with students. While I had explained in several classes that this e-portfolio was their creation, should center their learning, and was a vehicle to showcase that they have grown, developed, and meet outcomes, students continued to worry about the politics of faculty. Thus, it is recommended that students be told by all program faculty that they should choose artifacts that spoke most to them and to not be concerned about whose class it was done in.

Providing Clarity

More clarity needs to take place in regard to artifacts. Students cannot be retroactively graded down for an artifact. Students were concerned about showing a “weak” artifact, despite being told that they could, and to discuss how they have grown. Students showed concern about showcasing something that was not their very best. While this is understandable, particularly if they chose to use this the e-portfolio professionally, it is critical that students know that this process is one that should reflect their growth. Thus, if they want to show a paper or project with which they struggled, and discuss how they struggled, then that is just as meaningful, if not more so.

Perhaps one of the more critical recommendations that emerged from this project is better connecting students with how to use e-portfolios in their professional careers. While we did couch this as a means for career and professional development, we needed to be clearer about how it served in those capacities. Faculty need to talk about

the e-portfolio creation as more process-oriented. In creating this document, students were asked to reflect on their experiences, coursework, competencies, and skills. In writing the reflections, going through artifacts, and thinking about the department outcomes, they were preparing for the job field. Certainly, as students begin to job search, they will be asked about theory to practice, their abilities around programming or how they have applied learning development theories. Rather than a research paper, which may or may not have covered those types of topics, the e-portfolio gave them reason to articulate how they have met those key outcomes.

Making Key Connections

Throughout this process, faculty also recognized the need to make key connections, both in and out of the classroom. In the classroom, we recognized that each required course needed to have a different signature assignment that students could use for their e-portfolios. While we stressed in the e-portfolio course that students should use multimodal artifacts, we recognized that students only had research papers as artifacts from all their classwork. Regarding their coursework, the students had few items to choose from that were multimodal in nature. Therefore, as a faculty, we sat down and made signature assignments that were different for each course. For instance, in one course, we had a digital story as a signature assignment whereas in another course, we created an assignment that asked students to do a presentation. While we continue to have research papers and traditional coursework for signature assignments as well, this way, students could choose from a wider variety of assignments when selecting artifacts to showcase in their e-portfolio.

At the end of the e-portfolio semester, faculty realized that we could have made better connections throughout campus with this initiative. While students did upload many artifacts from their assistantships, we

realized that the site supervisors could have played an important role with the e-portfolio. Therefore, we also hope to partner with students' assistantship sites to make this a more meaningful process. While students discussed that this was helpful because they could showcase theory to practice, it would be beneficial if site supervisors knew that this e-portfolio existed so that they could use it for students' development, as well.

Conclusion

Implementing e-portfolios included many benefits for our students. It allowed them space to reflect upon their abilities and competence, connect theory to practice, and showcase their skills. What is more, these e-portfolios allowed the faculty a more holistic way of assessing students' understandings and foundations in the field of student affairs. The experience of crafting their e-portfolio gave students more confidence and more knowledge not just about what they know, but about how they have come to know it.

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