

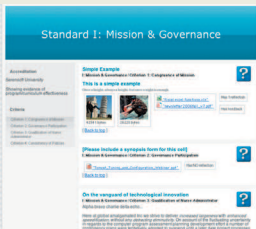


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# About E-Portfolios

A sample E-Portfolio produced via OSPortfolio:



# 1. What are E-Portfolios?



The scoop on what E-portfolios really are, how they can help your students and your institution, and how Serensoft can help you implement them

## So: What Are E-Portfolios?

**E**lectronic portfolios (e-portfolios) are a collection of artifacts, accessible electronically. Those artifacts could be term papers, presentations, reflections, or any sort of item intended to demonstrate learning, achievement, and mastery. This is a very basic definition, of course—and it doesn't adequately reflect the variety of e-portfolio uses, their potential impact on teaching and learning, or their role in individual, programmatic or institutional assessment.

You'll encounter many attempts to convey all the potential benefits of e-portfolios, but here's a reasonably thorough definition:

*Portfolios are a type of performance assessment in which students' work is systematically collected and carefully reviewed for evidence of learning and development. Generally students create portfolios by entering items in some kind of collection device or container such as a folder, binder, or disk. Materials, sometimes called artifacts, are added to portfolios as students progress through their academic careers...In addition to examples of their work, most portfolios include reflective statements prepared by students. Evaluators periodically examine the content of portfolios for evidence of student achievement with respect to established goals and objectives for learning. Because they contain longitudinal information, portfolios can be evaluated for degree of improvements as well as for overall quality...Both the selection of items for portfolios and the evaluation of portfolios are based on criteria established by faculty.<sup>1</sup>*

Granted, that definition is for portfolios in general and not specifically for e-portfolios, but the same concepts apply. The primary difference is that e-portfolios provide a wider range of

capabilities for compiling, organizing, reviewing and disseminating portfolio contents.

## What are the benefits of e-portfolios?

The potential benefits of e-portfolios are surely as varied as their uses. The American Association for Higher Education identified two key benefits for the use of student e-portfolios. One is to provide a context for reflection upon their social and academic interests, and the second is to improve career and résumé planning. Interestingly, in a survey of business executives, fifty-six percent found e-portfolios fairly or very useful in evaluating the potential for success of college graduates.<sup>2</sup>

A larger list of potential benefits includes helping to integrate theory with practice, personal development planning, increasing learner autonomy, and creating a foundation for programmatic and institutional assessment. Three benefits for teaching and learning merit additional comment—reflection, social construction, and process-centered learning.

Reflection is one of the most often mentioned benefits of e-portfolios and this is because it can have such an impact on learning. Reflection can take many forms and have different purposes. Reflection may be evaluative. It may involve synthesis or integration. Reflection may involve projections about the future based upon prior work.<sup>3</sup> All of those types can be facilitated with electronic portfolios.

While reflection is beneficial in its own right, it becomes much more powerful when shared and discussed with a community of learners. In that context multiple perspectives are brought to bear on the process of turning information



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### Footnotes:

- 1 *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education* by Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta, 1999, p. 131.
- 2 *How Should Colleges Assess and Improve Student Learning?: Employers' View on the Accountability Challenge* by Peter D. Hart Research Associates, 2008.
- 3 See *Digitized Student Portfolios* by Kathleen Blake Yancey in *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning* (2001) for more information about reflection and e-portfolios.
- 4 See *Electronic Portfolios as Knowledge Builders* by Barbara L. Cambridge in *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning* (2001) for more information about benefits of electronic portfolios.

# 1. What are E-Portfolios? *Cont'd*



into knowledge. E-portfolios assist this collaborative approach to learning.<sup>4</sup>

Portfolios can be especially beneficial for process-centered learning such as writing. E-portfolios can help to capture the process itself, not just the end result. Consequently, both the learner and the teacher can evaluate the process and incorporate that evaluation in improving the process; they aren't restricted to viewing the output as the result of a "black box." The reflection process, mentioned above, is also useful in this context since it allows the learner to engage in a very important self-assessment.

This is just a small taste of the benefits of e-portfolios. For more details see "Where can I get more information?" below.

## How can Serensoft Help?

Serensoft is a higher education services firm, meaning our goal is to use technology-based services to help colleges and universities meet their teaching, learning, and administrative objectives. We have helped several institutions work through issues associated with electronic portfolios. From developing a more complete understanding of electronic portfolios in general to focusing on how they might fit with a particular institution, we can help. From designing a best-fit solution to developing a pilot implementation, from training faculty on the use of electronic portfolios to helping your IT staff support them, we can help.

Assessment portfolios? Accreditation? Cost-effective and flexible solutions? We can help.

## Where can I get more information?

Serensoft produces this "Wonderings" series with the hope it will help higher education professionals as they explore subjects of interest. An electronic copy of our "Wonderings" can be found at the Serensoft web site (<http://www.serensoft.com/>). In addition Serensoft posts Webinars on related topics to the website—and, below are additional resources for electronic portfolios.

- Dr. Helen Barrett's Electronic Portfolio website (<http://electronicPortfolios.org/>) provides what may be the most exhaustive treatment of the subject on the web. The website includes Dr. Barrett's ongoing blog, writing and presentations—and links to numerous other resources.
- As e-portfolios are becoming more prevalent, many publications are devoting more and more space to the subject. Online articles for e-portfolios can be found at publications such as Educause (in particular Educause Quarterly at <http://connect.educause.edu/Library/EDUCAUSE+Quarterly/>) and Campus Technology (<http://www.campusTechnology.com/>).
- *Handbook of Research on ePortfolios* by Ali Jafari and Catherine Kaufman. A comprehensive treatment of the subject. It includes contributions from over 100 authors and addresses major aspects of rationale, technology, and implementation. Dozens of case studies detail current usage.
- *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning*. Barbara L. Cambridge, Susan Kahn, Daniel P. Tompkins, and Kathleen Blake Yancey, editors. Thorough treatment of major portfolio categories—student, faculty and institutional—using many case studies to examine and illustrate e-portfolio considerations, issues, and solutions.
- *Assessment Essentials: Planning, Implementing, and Improving Assessment in Higher Education* by Catherine A. Palomba and Trudy W. Banta. Focused on the larger question of assessment, this book does devote a few pages to how portfolios can be a useful assessment tool.
- Assessment Institute (<http://planning.iupui.edu/574.html>). Held annually in Indianapolis, the Assessment Institute is the United States' oldest and largest conference focusing on outcomes assessment in higher education.
- Making Connections (<http://www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/conference/>). Organized by LaGuardia Community College's Center for Teaching and Learning, this conference provides an opportunity for thought leaders, practitioners, and newbies to gather and exchange information on their e-portfolio research and experiences.