Creating and Implementing E-Portfolios

For Lifelong Learning and Evaluation

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Abstract. While many educational institutions struggle to find the perfect assessment to evaluate student content knowledge, they may lose sight of the next step – lifelong learning. This paper will focus on how the creation and implementation of e-Portfolios can help to prepare senior undergraduate students to design and realize future career pathways with the use of this electronic assessment tool. In particular, this paper will illustrate how one university has changed their focus in evaluating student learning in a strategic approach to incorporate a new type of "capstone" course for business undergraduate students. As Knowles (2008) noted, "everyone [learners] should be able to participate and control their own learning process" [1]. As a result, there are still students leaving educational institutions not fully prepared as to how to approach the job hunting process. This particular academic tool has been helpful for the instructor to evaluate the students' abilities and skills to apply content knowledge gained from the core business administration programs, as well as prepare students for their next career endeavor.

Keywords: e-Portfolios, lifelong learning, virtual learning, online learning, assessments, evaluation

1. Demographics of Online Learning (Distance Education)

As a result of changing economic factors and budgetary changes, many traditional teachers and students have started to move away from taking traditional on-ground classes, and opting for online courses. Thus, schools have seen an increase in their student populations, and now they are faced with the growing dilemma of lack of physical classroom space. Thus, the need for additional online courses has risen as a result of these ever-increasing student enrollments. Further, many traditional teachers have been considering or reconsidering the option of transitioning over to the online learning environment, as opposed to limiting their career possibilities solely to the on-ground teaching experiences. Finally, many current and potential instructors are seeking training in order to obtain proper online instruction to prepare them for online teaching.

In fact, as many people are considering online learning to be a new academic endeavor, one must also consider the next step for college graduates – the world of work. In this regard, the corporate environment may differ from the academic setting; however, the need to learn and grow is equally important in the world of business and academia. While online learning has been focused more on the academic setting, many companies are learning that online learning has many benefits in the corporate/business environments. Thus, many companies and organizations are focusing on the "learning" element of their employees' daily work lives, as well as helping to build their knowledge management with a concentration on helping the organization learn from previous and current experiences. Thompson [2] stated that "organizational learning involves the acquisition of new information and the ability to analyze that information creatively, learn from it, and apply that learning in useful ways." (p. 95). As organizations realize that there is a need to "capture" and "utilize" this type of learning, they also realize the need for the organization, as a whole, to concentrate on building up this learning element to include everyone in their respective organization, as well as setting up informal and formal learning center or circles. While organizations and communities view the impact of

online learning in the U.S., we also have to look at how type of learning is impacting the world and our global capital.

2. An overview of E-Portfolio: Role and Purpose in Evaluating Student's Work

Electronic Portfolios (e-Portfolios) have been defined in many different ways in terms of how they are designed and developed, as well as implemented and evaluated. According to the University of Berkeley (2004):

> An e-Portfolio functions like a file cabinet with file drawers and file folders. Students store personal, educational, career, skill assessment, non-academic/work experience, certification, and rewards information in their portfolios. The information placed in an ePorfolio is referred to as an artifact.[3]

While some academic institutions are quick to employ very extensive and developed e-Portfolio software systems, others educational organizations may want to consider their own creation and implementation of an e-Portfolio system (evaluative project). As a result, one can surmise that there are many different needs to be considered here in terms of determine how an e-Portfolio system/project can be used and eventually evaluated. In any event, it is ultimate role of the educational institution to determine if there is a need and how it can be met in terms of an e-Portfolio approach.

In order to understand why e-Portfolios are used, one needs to look at its role and purpose in today's learning environment. Can educational institutions evaluate a student's skills and ability, as well as help them prepare for potential career development opportunities? Many universities are turning towards the creation and implementation of e-Portfolios. These e-Portfolios serve several purposes, but the final outcome is whether the e-Portfolio itself can be seen as a true measure of what the student has been able to achieve – as well as serve as an indicator of their potential skills and abilities. Thus, the key goal of the e-Portfolio is to help highlight the student's ability to create a collection, selection, and reflection of their online works that best demonstrates their skills and abilities. One needs to look at the evaluative purpose of e-Portfolios.

3. E-Portfolio Applications in the Classroom

E-portfolios serve as a showcase of a collection of selected "created" academic achievements to demonstrate a student's writing and researching skills. Greenberg (2004) noted that "the e-portfolio is not simply a personal home page with links to examples of work . . . it is a network application that provides the author with administrative functions for managing and organizing work (files) created with different applications for controlling who can see the work and who can discuss the work (access) . . . [4]. The application of e-portfolios in the academic environment has been increasing over the decades. However, with the onset of the technological evolution, the use of computers in the academic setting has enabled many instructors, administrators, and staff members to create and implement a variety of educational applications. Rather than focusing on only one single final course project, the e-portfolio serves as a replacement for the final course project, as well as enhancement of the learning experience.

As each instructor or course designer prepares courses, they have to decide upon which type of portfolio is necessary to meet the course objectives. According to Greenberg (2004), there are three types of portfolios:

- – Showcase e-portfolio – organization occurs after the work has been created.
- – Structured e-portfolio – a predefined organization exists for work that is yet to be created.
- – Learning e-portfolio – organization of the work evolves as the work is created. [5]

If we examine the use of e-Portfolios in terms of school accreditation, many educational institutions focus on the "showcase e-portfolio" approach. However, as more and more online schools begin to incorporate e-portfolios into their courses and programs, they are learning more towards structured e-portfolios. On the other hand, some colleges and universities are moving a step further to a more learner-centered approach and using learning e-portfolios. This paper will address the creation of E-Portfolio program, or course component, in terms of four phases: 1) Needs Assessment; 2) Design and Development; 3) Implementation; and 4) Evaluation. In the following sections, each of these phases will focus on important questions that all instructors, course designers, and administrators need to consider as they move forward with E-Portfolios in their courses and programs.

4. Needs Assessment Phase

As one starts working with the design and development of E-Portfolio, a needs assessment should be conducted. Following the research phase of the needs assessment, it is important to focus on the intended components of the E-Portfolio to be used in the proposed course. The following section will discuss the components considered in the e-Portfolio project.

In the undergraduate Senior Seminar, students were asked to construct their final E-Portfolio with the following elements:

- Resume (standard or virtual resume)
- Cover Letter
- Web page (creation of a potential business idea)
- Brochure (business)
- Business Plan (planning a potential business venture)
- Reflective Essay
- Design and Development

The course designer reviewed the Senior Seminar course description and learning objectives. This helped to serve as a basis for creating this particular course for all finishing undergraduate seniors. Once the components of the e-Portfolio were identified, the design and development phase was considered the most critical step.

5. The Design & Development Phase

During the Design and Development Process, the course designer and instructor focused on the development of an 8-week online course to help prepare senior (undergraduate) students to create their own e-Portfolio. Instead of focusing on works from other courses, it was decided to focus on assignment, which could help the student in his or her career development endeavors. In particular, the assignments were created from the learning objectives of the core courses in the Business Administration program.

It was decided that the current educational online software program, Educator, was to be utilized in the creation and implementation of the E-Portfolio assignments to be required for the course. Discussion boards were created to help encourage students to discuss the development of each assignment, as well as to help guide them through the portfolio process. After the development of these various learning activities, the next step was to focus on the implementation of the e-Portfolio component into the Senior Seminar.

6. Implementation Phase

During the Implementation Phase, there were some considerations that needed to be addressed prior to the launching of this course. First, who will be in charge of the implementation phase? The instructor, who was also the course designer, was appointed at the lead instructor for this course in charge of all course design and implementation issues. Second, it was decided that there would be a need for documentation of the course effectiveness. Third, the question of whether there should be monitoring or reporting device was considered important, but the final decision was to allow the University's current course evaluation survey to service as the key reporting instrument. Meanwhile, the instructor would record observations and feedback gained by students during each term to be later discussed with the Dean.

Another consideration was to rest with the instructor whether he or she would require students to place all work within a self-created webpage or electronic portal or to just submit the assignments individually. It was determined by the instructor, after several course offerings, that the majority of the students were eager to place (link) their course assignments to a self-created webpage. In fact, some students went a step further and created elaborate web pages and/or electronic portals to display their work for the course (or future employers).

7. Evaluation Phase

As noted before, it was decided that the current University's course evaluation survey would serve as the primary evaluation tool. However, for course audits and reviews, the individual E-Portfolios would serve as

the primary assessment tools. Also, many universities are using E-Portfolios for course assessment and for accreditation purposes. After several course offerings of the course, the researcher (instructor) has seen an increase in the enrollment. In fact, some students have reported back to the instructor that they have been emailing future employers with their web page URL address for the potential employer to review their e-Portfolio (capstone) presentation. Other students have noted that they have downloaded their e-Portfolio onto USB drives to carry with them as they venture out on upcoming interviews to display their academic work product to potential employers. For purposes of this paper, discussion of the evaluation process was limited in scope.

8. Conclusion

While technology has increased the possibility of more students to participate in taking online courses, in light of various family obligations, business, and personal constraints, changes still need to be done in terms of embracing diversity in education in terms of meeting the needs of our students. Thus, educators need to be proactive in making appropriate changes in the curriculum to help strengthen course offerings, as well as incorporating teaching strategies and technique that meet the needs of the course objectives, as well as motivating and encouraging the adult learners to want to learn even more. We need to continue to nurture and guide our learners as they pursue academic and career developmental endeavors.

9. References

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