Chapter 92
ePorticulture:
Growing A New Culture of Assessment

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ABSTRACT

Institutional culture is a critical component in making eportfolios an integral teaching and learning tool. As instructors and students engage in using eportfolios, the campus goes through culture change in several different areas. Institutions may start with questions related to technology and logistics, but buy-in at all levels is critical as campuses begin to shift, redefine or adapt existing cultures of assessment. Namely, these efforts promote the adoption of more diverse and comprehensive assessment strategies—that embody new, learner-centered teaching methodologies—along with traditional strategies. By using more than one method to demonstrate their competencies within the context of the eportfolio process, students can become more reflective learners, make connections between curricular and co-curricular work, and prepare to enter the workforce. This chapter will help readers determine why they might pursue the use of eportfolios within their educational institution, at the course, program, or institutional levels.

etymology: *(n.) the act or custom of learning, developing intellectually and professionally, and transmitting knowledge through the creation, review, and assessment of authentic, reflective, and integrative student work that is shared over time via electronic portfolios. - Kelly and Cox (2009)*

ePorticulture: e *(electronic)* + **portfolio** *(a selection of a student's work compiled over a period of time and used for assessing performance or progress)* + **culture** *(the integrated pattern of human knowledge, belief, and behavior that depends upon the capacity for learning and transmitting knowledge to succeeding generations). - Kelly and Cox (2009)*

INTRODUCTION: DESIGNING A NEW EDUCATIONAL LANDSCAPE

For centuries, educators have been experimenting with the art and science of promoting, collecting, and assessing student work—just as horticulturalists have explored improvements in the cultivation of fruits, vegetables, flowers, or ornamental plants. Etymologically, "horticulture" derives from the Latin *hortus* (garden) and *cultus* (tilling/cultivation of land). And while horticultural practices have evolved into an extremely complex science, so, too, has the use of new tools and technologies to nurture and harvest a wider range of student work. It may seem a contrivance to apply a metaphor of horticulture to the cultivation of modern methods for growing and assessing student learning. Yet just as we have been besieged by core instabilities in our systems of agriculture and finance, we are seeing too often that our educational monoculture does not adequately prepare students for the ever-changing future. Our agricultural monocultures have led to an atrophy of knowledge about growing a wider variety of crops and an increased reliance on pesticides, creating a systemic fragility. Similarly, educational institutions are depending on mono-forms of harvesting student knowledge, such as standardized testing.

New digital technologies like electronic portfolios have opened the way for profound changes in education. The case can be made that, at the dawn of the 21st century, converging technologies and emerging social trends lay the groundwork for entirely new societal landscapes—in the very meaning of the work we do and the lives we lead, and ultimately in the what, where, why, and how we learn. Wardlaw (2006) argues that expectations for learning have changed in response to a new global context, requiring students to gain skills in communication, teamwork, problem solving, analysis, reflection, performance improvement, innovation, and lifelong learning. However, curriculum design has changed only marginally since the start of the modern academy in the Renais-

sance period. Emerging socio-technology trends must play a wider role in influencing changes in curriculum design going forward. Darling-Hammond (2009, p. 29) stated that on-demand and curriculum-embedded assessments should be used together to "measure the full range of knowledge and skills represented in standards." We believe that learners must be guided toward clear, concise academic learning outcomes and, like Darling-Hammond, that good practice in comprehensive assessment will require a wider variety of assessment strategies over time.

In this chapter on ePorticulture, we argue for a more educationally bio-diverse, or "edu-diverse," approach to teaching, learning, and assessing. Through our experiences of working "from the ground up" in an academic technology unit at a four-year university, we have worked directly with faculty and departments interested in innovative approaches to adapting the culture of assessment. We have also offered advice and recommendations to administrators and academic senate committees making operational and policy decisions for the institution. We are especially excited about the unique potential that eportfolios are creating and hope to share some cultural changes underway that relate to this new growth.

BACKGROUND: ELEMENTS FOR SUCCESSFUL PLANTING

In 1993, the Coalition of Essential Schools and the Annenberg Institute for School Reform conducted one of the first research projects investigating digital portfolios, also called eportfolios. Researchers identified five core factors to consider when exploring the successful planning and implementation of electronic portfolios: vision, assessment, technology, logistics, and culture. While the eportfolio movement has evolved and grown dramatically over the past 15 years, consideration of all of these basic factors still makes sense. We have learned a lot about what it takes to nurture

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