Chapter IV

**ePortfolios:**
Constrcuting Meaning Across
Time, Space, and Curriculum

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**ABSTRACT**

This chapter explores research on ePortfolios from the perspective of defining, evaluating, and demonstrating value to enduring learning. It makes a case for the public/private container and the value to the learner of digital artifact creation, self-reflection, and presentation. It explores the use and challenges of ePortfolios in instruction and makes a case for the ePortfolio as an effective tool for knowledge creation. Finally, the authors examine the question of assessment in implementation of an enterprise ePortfolio: the value of learner assessment, peer and public assessment, and the need for institutional assessment of the ePortfolio.

**SCENARIO**

Reggie rushes onto campus 35 minutes before class and heads for the University Commons, seeking a double mocha and a quiet seat in the shade. She has worked much of the night on the first draft of her Communications 200 ePortfolio section, and despite the initial proposal review and go-ahead by Professor Harrison, she has some doubts regarding how her performance team members will critique it. Sure, it meets the learning goals she had proposed, but does her project really work for an external audience? Do the pages have good navigation? Are the timings on the Flash module she (crazily) decided to use paced right? What about the pictures she loaded into the “nonverbal behavior” analysis? Should she have checked them on multiple browsers?
It may be last minute jitters, too little sleep, or simple insecurity, but Reggie decides to make one more pass on her project reflection narrative. She should also make sure that the permissions are set for her team to review. Reggie would not want her mother wandering into her public “giving speeches” module and asking a lot of questions about her learning process material. Mom already asks too many who-what-when-where-and-why questions.

Reggie pops open her laptop, gulps hot mocha, and signs into the campus wireless network. First she brings up her public page as an anonymous Web viewer, and navigates to the COMM200 site. Looks good in Firefox®. She then logs in, checks the COMM200 folder permissions, verifies her team member rights, and opens her reflection narrative.

She tries to ignore the semester of work, thought, and knowledge creation she has put into understanding effective speaking and imagines it from the perspective of her team of fellow learners. She reads over her explanation of why she made some of the choices she did. Would her team members have made similar choices? Josh, whose final project was to create a resource site of jokes and stories for speeches, will probably be the worst critic of her Flash piece. It would not be the first time he jumped on style, ignoring the content. She decides to add a reminder that this was her first foray into Flash, and the simple design she chose was to help the viewer better understand the 10 ways to ensure audience understanding of meaning—not to wow Josh with fancy, ‘flashy’ moving objects.

Checking her watch, Reggie sighs, saves, then enters the course area and checks Professor Harrison’s latest announcements, glances at the number of unread messages for all her courses, and with 13 minutes to deadline, posts her personal MyPort address in the COMM 200 assignments area, and sets her laptop to sleep.

Would that she could do the same (sleep), but she has two more back-to-back classes, dinner with Jeremy (wouldn’t Mom love to know), and three site reviews of her COMM team members to begin. Maybe another mocha wouldn’t hurt? No time. Off to class.

**THE ePORTFOLIO**

**What is It?**

A quietly growing response to a variety of demands being made of higher education is the use of the ePortfolio to assess student learning, document learner progress, and provide the graduate with a functional tool for selecting and presenting their achievements and records. Across the academy, pockets of innovation are occurring that ask the learner to create a “personal digital record containing information such as personal profile and collection of achievements” (Wikipedia, n.d), as well as information, artifacts, links, tools, and records that can selectively be provided to the owner of the ePortfolio and to the faculty, peers, friends, prospective employers, or public to whom the owner has chosen to grant permission.

A portfolio can be as simple as a collection of a student’s best work or as complex as an alternative assessment procedure. It can be a learning strategy or an elaborate assessment. Graves (1994) says a portfolio “is a place where a student’s selected work is kept, ... [any] container designed or created by the student to hold his or her artifacts” (p. 171). What goes into the portfolio depends on the purposes of student and teacher (Graves, 1994). Barrett (1998) explains that a portfolio is “a purposeful collection of student’s work that illustrates efforts, progress and achievement” (p. 7). It is a means of communicating growth made by a student, and is much more than a
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