

# REAL-TIME STUDENT ASSESSMENT

Meeting the Imperative for Improved Time to  
Degree, Closing the Opportunity Gap, and  
Assuring Student Competencies for  
21st-Century Needs

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Foreword by George D. Kuh

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## CASE 5.3.

**ePortfolios as an Archive of Development in Studio Arts at Auburn University**

Artists have long used portfolios to showcase their work and their artistic processes, so when Auburn University undertook an ePortfolio Project as our institution's Quality Enhancement Project, studio arts was among the first programs to join the faculty cohort. We understood the value of helping students migrate their traditional portfolios into a digital form that would be more easily shared and help students learn the website design and technology skills they would need as professional artists. We also understood the need to provide feedback as students developed the capacity to reflect on their own processes, assess their work with a trained but objective eye, and learn to exercise the critical judgment required of all artists. We worked collaboratively to closely examine our existing curriculum and make decisions about where and how students would be introduced to ePortfolios; have opportunities to reflect and receive feedback on their reflections; and, of course, produce artifacts. Actually producing artifacts is no problem for a studio arts student, but capturing clear photographs of those artifacts to document them in an ePortfolio required some consideration of both the logistics and equipment required for such photographic evidence and the curriculum that would teach students the skills they would need to create a photographic archive. We were able to quickly identify a capstone course where students would be able to assemble the final version of their ePortfolios before graduation, but it seemed important that students begin the creation of a working ePortfolio much earlier. Thus, we created a new course at the sophomore level that would get students started on the process and encourage them to archive their artistic creations and their reflective thinking about their processes and successes throughout their undergraduate studies. In addition to giving students early and frequent practice on the key skills necessary to produce a successful ePortfolio, we also saw the archive ePortfolio as useful to instructors as a record of history and development.

Studio arts students typically take a few foundational courses and then numerous courses that range from ceramics to drawing, photography to printmaking. Students take multiple pathways through the major, and so it is not uncommon for a course to enroll students the professor has never worked with alongside students the professor has taught over multiple semesters. The ePortfolio archives our students are now required to keep provide the professor with easy access to prior projects, allowing us to help students see connections between and across the various courses they take.

Students who have been working on a particular project or technique in drawing, for example, might well build on that work in a pottery class, albeit in a different medium. Students can be encouraged to experiment with strategies and processes they have used before as they work with different forms, solve new problems, or work within new constraints.

When professors look at ePortfolio archives to gather background information about a student's experience, they are not, of course, conducting formal assessments, but they are using their own experience and critical judgment to plot an action plan for fostering student growth. Consciously or not, such moments are assessments of the most immediate and valuable kind because they enable the professor to help a particular student in a particular moment to maximize his or her learning experience. What more value could we want from ePortfolios or the authentic evidence of learning they represent? What more could we ask of assessment?

*Note.* Contributed by Gary Wagoner, associate professor emeritus, Department of Art and Art History, Auburn University. Used with permission.

Cambridge, Cambridge, & Yancey, 2009; Chen & Light, 2010; Michelson & Mandell, 2004; Reynolds and Patten, 2015). Over the longer term, of course, if alternative providers and credentialors align their assessment of student work with the DQP/LEAP outcomes framework and existing major program outcomes frameworks, discussed in chapter 2, that learner-centered commitment would also build coherence across students' pathways. Credentialors recognize that higher education is moving toward outcomes-based frameworks and shared sets of criteria and standards of judgment. For example, in its webinar presentation to prospective students who seek credit for prior learning, *Documenting Competence: A Learning Portfolio*, the Council on Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL) (2013) specifically points out to students that the organization is paying close attention to the outcomes-based assessment landscape in higher education. For now, what remains important for students are the following processes: (a) educators helping students see the relevance of their learning over time documented in ePortfolio work, as demonstrated in Case 5.3; and (b) students integrating their learning from other educational providers or credentialors along their education pathways.

ePortfolios are significant long-term contributors to our students' future. They provide direct evidence of what students know and can do, in contrast to grades, credit hours earned, or lists of outcomes aligned with courses or education experiences. Thus, institutions and programs that require ePortfolios