

# eportfolios As seen in The Greentree Gazette from cradle to career

BY RICHARD D. R. HOFFMANN

A “killer app” is generally regarded as a software application or hardware platform that is category-defining, rapidly adopted and widely adapted to new uses. By any definition, eportfolios appear to fit the bill. They have the potential to change the way students, administrators, faculty and the world beyond communicate and collaborate.

Some students are quite familiar with the concept. Art majors seem always to be carrying their large, flat, black leather portfolios. Lots of students use hard-copy folders to carry work samples, grades and essays to meetings with advisors and counselors. Job seekers march off to interviews with binders containing special-version resumes, reference letters, transcripts, writing samples and work product they hope will impress prospective employers.

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## **Academically and administratively useful**

Eportfolios are electronic equivalents of those formats, with the worldwide web thrown in. Personal information portals are online banks of unique personal information, presented in a customizable environment that allows others to view and collaborate with the owner. On campus they are also a great way for advisors and professors to stay involved in their students’ academic achievements, a vehicle to keep mom and dad in the loop, useful in the job-search process for seniors and alumni. They can also be great tools for student prospecting.

Eportfolios could well become a baseline institutional offering expected by both students and faculty. As with many new products, the way on to a college or university campus isn’t pre-ordained. CIOs may lead the way, but

academic advising, admissions, placement offices, sponsored projects and tenure committees are all potential first-users of eportfolios. They have made their way into places as diverse as Stanford University and Bryant High School. If the eportfolio is indeed higher ed’s killer app, late adopters will be at a distinct disadvantage.

The eportfolio is conceptually simple. Using a web interface, learners bank their personal content including biographical information such as current addresses and contact data; in-progress coursework, digital media (images and documents), assessment results, work history, etc. The collection can grow over time, and new types of content may be added, a process that may start prior to freshman year and go on well past graduation.



folio Features | folio Lifecycle | folio Demo

What she's sharing:	Who she's sharing it with:
College Admissions Essay	Admissions Officer
High School Transcripts (Certified)	Kyle Walker (heart)
PSAT and SAT scores (Certified)	Pam & Dad
High School Exit Exam scores (Certified)	Ms. Kneen (guidance counselor)
Extra Curricular Activities	Mr. Gustavson (Music, 8th Period)
Report Card (Certified)	Drama Club
Plyers-Briggs Assessment (Certified)	Laura Nichols (at County Library)
Homeschooling Video	Jess and Sam (best friends 4ever)


Jennifer A. Westner, Class President. Online

PREVIOUS STAGE | NEXT STAGE

folio by ePORTARO

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California State University, Sacramento University Portfolio



University Mission  
Planning Process  
Evidence  
Institutional Portfolio  
Program Documentation

The purpose of this portfolio is to present the processes and documents that demonstrate CSU, Sacramento's commitment to "Create a Culture of Evidence." The content and structure of this portfolio are in direct response to the needs of specific internal and external organizations and individuals who are interested in the University's efforts to demonstrate its educational effectiveness. [Click here to learn about the Uthman Institutional Portfolio Project.](#)

questions & comments

of evidence

achieving excellence in education

## An eportfolio might contain

- Biographic information
- Contact information
- Photos
- Degrees
- Honors and awards
- Assessment results
- Standardized test scores
- Course history or transcripts
- Objectives
- Work history
- Group projects
- Reference letters
- Graded assignments
- Employer and peer reviews
- Certifications
- Research
- Publications

### Watch the demand grow

As a portfolio owner prepares to meet with an advisor, or applies to graduate school or starts a job search, he or she can create different views for the web browsers of each prospect using a subset of the portfolio's content. The view intended for a graduate business school admissions officer may be quite different from the view created for parents, advisors or peers.

Some portfolios allow viewers to add comments. Some allow collaborative modification of the owner's content. This could be a potential boon for academic users. Research groups could create portfolios for sharing early results with colleagues around the world. An un-tenured faculty member could bank published work, honors, speaking engagements, etc. Tenure committees could review online each candidate's body of work, along with forms for comments and voting.

Early adopters are finding that what is simple in concept can quickly become an exercise in "scope creep" as new and creative ways to use online portfolios are con-

ceived. "There has been a lot of discussion on Drexel's campus about eportfolios," says Jan Biros, associate vice president at Drexel University. "What started out as a nice simple display of student resumes and examples of student work has ballooned into a very complex web application. Students and faculty have all shown interest in broader capabilities, such as integration with other systems and greater interactivity."

### Build or buy?

In meeting these demands, colleges may prefer to work with a product vendor rather than writing their own. Drexel, whose preference is to buy and rapidly deploy new applications rather than build, eportfolio products such as ePortaro Inc.'s Folio are under discussion. Other colleges are forming consortia with the aim of developing eportfolio applications that they can all use (see sidebar). But they'll have to keep up.

Mark Mojdehi was part of the development of an early eportfolio application for the University of Minnesota. Now vice president for design with ePortaro ([www.eportaro.com](http://www.eportaro.com)) he's seen the functionality widen first-hand: "Customers want to use this application in ways well beyond where our thinking was just a couple years ago."

## eportfolio initiatives and contacts

**Elmhurst College** [www.elmhurst.edu/~perport/index.html](http://www.elmhurst.edu/~perport/index.html)

**University of Florida** [www.coe.ufl.edu/school/portfolio/index.htm](http://www.coe.ufl.edu/school/portfolio/index.htm)

**Stanford University Learning Lab** [sll.stanford.edu/consulting/tools/efolio/](http://sll.stanford.edu/consulting/tools/efolio/)

**ePort Consortium** [www.eportconsortium.org](http://www.eportconsortium.org)

**AAHE Portfolio Clearinghouse** [www.aahe.org](http://www.aahe.org)

**Ohio University** [www.cob.ohiou.edu/~mgt300/esp/PORTFOLIO.HTM](http://www.cob.ohiou.edu/~mgt300/esp/PORTFOLIO.HTM)

**ePortaro, Inc.** [www.eportaro.com](http://www.eportaro.com)

### A competitive advantage

Because eportfolios can give students a competitive advantage job seeking and graduate school applications, early adopter campuses can be expected to leverage their status as a competitive advantage over peer institutions. They expect their eportfolio investments to not only help them attract better students but to forge better relationships with key employers.

"Like it or not, our students are in competition for jobs and admissions slots," said Katie Mullins, careers and learning technology coordinator for Bryant High School in Fairfax County, VA, which is making use of *Folio by ePortaro*. "Eportfolios can provide our students with a benefit that their peers won't have. This is an exciting technology both for us and for our students."

Users are basing their high expectations on an understanding that eportfolios will be universally accepted and in wide use. Proponents predict that eportfolios will encompass every stage of a student's life, from pre-school on. This long-term vision includes not just universities maintaining eportfolios for alumni, but businesses and internet service-providers (ISPs) maintaining eportfolios for their employees and customers.

"We would love to see this broaden our relationships with the other organizations that will play roles in our students' careers and lives," says Mullins.

While benefits to students may be self-evident, the return on investment for other users is not as readily apparent. Clearly, they offer advisors

and professors the opportunity to participate more deeply in the activities, successes and failures of learners. Parents less than satisfied with the traditional level of participation in their child's education—paying tuition and perhaps seeing grades—may likely welcome the idea that some of their kids' academic experiences can be made browse-able. But it will still be up to the eportfolio owner to populate and expose that view for mom, dad and prof.

### Can it be kept simple?

Simplicity and ease-of-use will be the key to overcoming such ROI hurdles, Mojdehi stresses. [Marie Wai Cadden, CEO of Information Methodologies, Inc. \(imi\), an enterprise web integrator for higher education, believes that transportability is key. "A non-portable eportfolio is self-limiting," Cadden says. "The applications that will succeed in this market have to support every conceivable content type. Therefore, integration with all campus systems and portability from server to laptop to palmtop are key issues."](#)

ePortaro's *Folio* reportedly allows such flexibility. With ePortaro the one 'buy' exception, there are a half-dozen or so eportfolio initiatives currently that are university-led, including both consortia and independent development efforts. More corporations are expected to jump into the fray to compete with ePortaro, as interest in eportfolios grows. ["They'll have some catching up to do, but new entrants will help broaden the category and make everyone compete on functionality," says Cadden, whose firm's technologies are being used in the Folio product.](#) ■