

## Student Voices

Excerpted from:

Miller, R., & Morgaine, W. (2009). The benefits of e-portfolios for students and faculty in their own words. *Peer Review*, 11(1), 8.

Full article: <https://www.aacu.org/publications-research/periodicals/benefits-e-portfolios-students-and-faculty-their-own-words>)

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The e-portfolio experience gave me a chance to find out about the skills I should be learning in college and there are ways that I can keep track of how I am doing. I was not taught how to think in terms of outcomes of skills so it was kind of challenging at first. When I was trying to figure out what types of knowledge, skills, or abilities I had learned from volunteer or internship experiences, it was very helpful to go to the Pathways Outcomes in my e-portfolio and think about how they applied to the experiences I was writing about for my public portfolio.

*Third-year student,  
University of Michigan*

Structured reflections helped this student analyze her learning experiences to reveal and understand outcomes that might otherwise have been missed. While course syllabi and college catalogs may declare what learning is supposed to take place, the structured reflection required for an e-portfolio can push students to “own” learning outcomes when they describe their progress and cite specific evidence of learning within their collections of work.

I have had many amazing experiences at Michigan, but I didn’t really know what they meant or how they all fit together... Now, I see patterns and themes in the work I have been doing, how things fit together. The work I’ve been doing actually makes sense... there has been some direction to it all along. I also realize that my work is a reflection of me and that my identity and background [an African-American woman growing up in Detroit] have always played a part in my learning...I see how I have already made a difference in my communities.

*Third-year student,  
University of Michigan*

This student writes about integration of learning—“how things fit together”—resulting from e-portfolio and reflection. She also refers to her growing self-knowledge and confidence in her ability to work effectively in different settings.

I didn’t know what an e-portfolio was when I first heard about it in class...My professor suggested to me that I develop the “about me” section of my e-portfolio because there, I would have the opportunity to write more about myself and so I did. In

that first e-portfolio I wrote about Palmira (Valle), the city where I was born in Colombia, and I wrote about Medellin, where I used to spend my vacations of school....and I wrote about the cultural assimilation process I was going through.

The second time I was asked to develop my e-portfolio, I had a lot more to share. I was in third semester at LaGuardia and I had already taken most of the classes connected to my major, so I decided include my academic work and goals that would make my family proud of me....my priority was to focus on my personal growth in my schoolwork and what I was learning at LaGuardia. After putting up my projects in my e-portfolio, I then started to think more about my future and my career.

Now, with more knowledge of computer programs for developing Web pages, I decided to use my e-portfolio as an opportunity to show and demonstrate all the skills that I have learned throughout my journey at LaGuardia Community College....All together, my third e-portfolio demonstrates me as a professional who is looking toward her future and who has many goals to reach.

Not only have I gained technical skills, but I've learned how to express myself as a serious student and a hard worker. The different sections of my e-portfolio made me realize the important things about how I see myself starting at LaGuardia, how I see myself now and in my future. My experience with e-portfolio at LaGuardia has made me see more of whom I want to be and how I *can accomplish my goals*.

*Student,  
LaGuardia College*

E-portfolios can be used for different purposes that may shift as students move through their programs. This community college student consciously (with professor guidance) began with self-exploration and expression (the "about me" section of her e-portfolio), moving on to communicating her learning and academic goals to her family. Finally, she emphasized professional aspects of learning by posting her most valued work from her major to represent her significant achievements and learning over time. This essay shows impressive development and self-awareness as the student takes control of her personal, academic, and professional planning and accomplishments.

I feel that the process has enhanced my understanding of the overall higher education experience....I have always felt confused and irritated by the lack of connection between my general education requirements and my core department requirements. I think that the e-portfolio is a great way to link the two types of classes that you take during your time at Portland State. I am a very visual person and the template of the e-portfolio was easy to follow and it truly helped to achieve the goal of linking my personal work to my personal goal. I also believe that this process was very empowering for me. It is easy to get discouraged with work that you complete during classes because you complete a paper, receive a grade, and then that paper is simply stored in a folder on your computer. This process helped me to look back on the work that I had completed in prior classes and place more value on the work that I had created. I was able to value the work because each assignment that I complete I have

taken one step closer to completing a personal or professional goal of my own. It was encouraging to see that I was not attending classes just to receive a piece of paper that declares I graduated from college, I was attending college for my own personal and professional growth.

*Student,*

*Portland State University*

The student who wrote this statement has realized a number of benefits from the e-portfolio experience. The integrative function is highlighted in the comments about connecting general education requirements with learning in the major. The structure and even the appearance of the portfolio template helped to organize the student's thinking and enhance his academic planning—"linking personal work to my personal goal." There is the realization that by creating a collection of completed assignments and looking back through the collection for coherence and meaning, one better understands progress toward goals and learns to appreciate the work. Finally, there is the very powerful realization that going to college is about more than the degree—the learning is important and, upon reflection, makes sense.

I didn't realize the importance of the work I was doing... all the communication skills I was learning while doing research.... When I had a chance to reflect on it and was asked to describe the experience to others in my e-portfolio, I realized that I had learned a lot more than I thought. I was so focused on getting into business school, that if I had not had the space to stop and reflect on my experiences, I would have never known how much I actually gained from everything I did my first year.

*Second-year student,*

*University of Michigan*

Reflection can be an awakening for students and serves to distill the meaning from experiences. Referring to a music performance of variable quality, a teacher of one of the authors once said "there's gold in that gravel." Reflection is like panning for gold, finding the valuable nuggets from among the gravel of day-to-day campus experience. Even for students with a focus on goals, as seemed to be the case for this student, pausing to reflect proved to be critical to making valuable learning conscious and more likely to be used in the future.