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Web-Based Digital Portfolios and Counselor Supervision

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Abstract
Web-based digital portfolios provide a promising tool for counselor supervisors looking for effective ways to evaluate counselor candidates while maximizing the associated learning process. This paper describes a project involving the use of web-based portfolios that were created by counselor candidates. The project illustrates the benefits of the web-based portfolio for both the counselor supervisor and for the counselors in training.

Advances in technology have afforded counselor educators a powerful new tool to utilize as they evaluate and assess the progress of the counselor candidates they supervise. By taking advantage of the dynamic nature of the Internet, the web-based digital portfolio represents the next generation of portfolio assessment. Neither the use of portfolios or technology are new to the field of education, yet an innovative project undertaken within the University of Nebraska at Omaha has exemplified the potential usefulness of digital portfolios to counselor educators and their counselor candidates.

In 1996, Alschuler wrote that he was able to download more than 100 pages of research abstracts, summary analyses, experiments, and bibliographies dealing with portfolio assessment. Although most of these were related to the field of education, none of the data related to counselors. Despite this observation, counselors, educators and related professionals have demonstrated a clear shift toward the increased use of portfolios by counselors (e.g. Baltimore, Hickson, George, & Crutchfield, 1996; Boes, VanZile-Tamsen, & Jackson, 2001; Carney, Cobia, & Shannon, 1996; Rhyne-Winkler & Wooten, 1996; Rita, 2001). Concurrent with the shift toward increased portfolio use was the emergence of innovations in technology that also had the potential to impact counseling assessment (e.g., Lundberg & Cobitz, 1999). As expected, the increased use of both portfolios and technology in counseling has inevitably combined to facilitate the use of electronic portfolios. (e.g., Lewis, Coursol, & Herting-Wahl, 2000).

Web-Based Portfolio Project

In the Fall of 2000, counselor candidates, selected faculty and staff at the University of Nebraska at Omaha began a project associated with a PT3 grant (Preparing Tomorrow's Teachers to Use Technology) that involved the development of a web-based professional portfolio for secondary school counselor candidates. The web-based portfolio is similar in some respect to the electronic portfolio yet can be produced, edited, accessed, and viewed entirely through the Internet. The dynamics brought about by the inclusion of the Internet into the portfolio development process revealed important implications for counselor supervisors and candidates. This paper refers to individuals who were working to earn their credentials to become secondary school counselors as candidates to distinguish them from k-12 individuals who are identified as students. Each candidate developed the portfolio to fulfill one aspect of his or her comprehensive examination. Fourteen counselor candidates have been involved in the project through the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 academic years. Prior to this project, counselor candidates had been required to develop portfolios that were paper-based and were contained in three-ring binders.

The development of a portfolio serves multiple purposes for the counselor supervisor and candidates. First, portfolios can be used as a means of reflecting upon a candidate's developmental growth. This type of formative assessment can be applied throughout an entire program or to a specified sequence of courses. As Baltimore, et al (1996) suggest, portfolios can also be used as a summative assessment tool because they can help students to integrate the learning experienced throughout an entire program. Despite the flexible nature of portfolio use for summative or formative purposes it is important to emphasize that it represents merely one aspect of evaluation. That is, portfolios alone do not represent a comprehensive means of evaluating counselors in training.

Secondly, portfolios provide candidates a means of demonstrating their competence and experience in an array of related professional activities. Candidates have the flexibility and capacity to use the electronic portfolio to demonstrate their competence by using combinations of text, graphics, audio, video, and other multimedia formats. Such digital artifacts can provide evidence that candidates can integrate and apply the theoretical content of their course work to the setting in which they plan to work as a school counselor. For example, some candidates chose to provide video clips of group guidance lessons they developed and presented at their school practicum sites. Included with the videos, the candidates could provide developmentally appropriate lesson plans and targeted student competencies.

Third, the online portfolio provides guidelines for the scope of activities to be included to assure an appropriate breadth of practicum experience. For example, the secondary school counseling program at the University of Nebraska at Omaha is a proponent of the Missouri Model of Comprehensive Guidance and of the

National Model for School Counseling Programs offered by the American School Counselor Association (ASCA). Both models propose the categorization of counseling activities into the four program components of: responsive services, individual student planning, curriculum, and system support (Bowers & Hatch, 2002; Gysbers & Henderson, 2000). Counselor candidates are expected to provide evidence of their competence within each program component because counselors are to be qualified to deliver an entire guidance program. In other words, each candidate activity included in the portfolio is associated with a program component and a targeted ASCA National Standard. This structure assures that candidates are focused upon meaningful practicum activities that represent an appropriate breadth of experience.

National Standards

The expectations placed on the counselor candidates increase as one considers the national standards for school counseling programs (i.e., Campbell & Dahir, 1997). Indeed the infusion of national standards into professional portfolios is not new.   Rieman (2000) wrote extensively of the inclusion of standards in her work titled, *Teaching Portfolios, Presenting Your Professional Best*. The ASCA National Standards provide another perspective from which to view counselor activities (i.e., career, personal/social, and academic) providing specific student (k-12) competencies for each. Not only are these divisions present in the national standards, they are also cited as a critical piece of the foundation of the National Model of School Counseling (Bowers & Hatch, 2002). As suggested by Boes, VanZile-Tamsen, and Jackson (2001), candidates involved in this project were asked to demonstrate competence in delivering guidance activities that support student development in the domains of career, personal/social and academic. Additionally, candidates examined their practicum experiences in light of the Missouri Model's program components as well as the ASCA National Standards. By combining these two perspectives, a dynamic model for assessing counselor competence emerged. Therefore, as candidates documented practicum activities, they considered where the activities fit into the overall guidance program and how their students were to benefit. Figure 1 provides a visual worksheet that demonstrates the purpose of all portfolio elements and illustrates the breadth of activities the practicum and portfolio must include.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework for Program Components and National Standards

		System Support	Curriculum	Responsive Services	Individual Student Planning
Career					
	Standard A	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard
	Standard B	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard

		Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard
	Standard C	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard
Personal/ Social					
	Standard A	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard
	Standard B	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard
	Standard C	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard
Academic					
	Standard A	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard
	Standard B	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard
	Standard C	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard	Activity related to Component/Standard

Technology

Current technology provides counselor candidates the tools to create, maintain and present a dynamic digital portfolio. Digital counseling portfolios consists of a variety of multimedia artifacts such as counselor-made materials, digital photographs, student assessments, videos of classroom experiences, guidance plans, statements of philosophy, research projects, and any other artifacts that represent oneï¿½s accomplishments (Barrett, 2000; Farmer, 1997; Oros, Morgenegg, & Finger, 1998; Pulliam & Weitman, 1996/97).

Digital portfolios differ significantly from the traditional paper-based portfolios as illustrated in figure 2. Furthermore, the digital portfolio reflected in this article was not typical because it was entirely Internet-accessed and database-driven. The use of the Internet in the portfolio development process increased the ability of counseling candidates to effectively construct and use their portfolio. Internet access allowed the portfolio to not only display multimedia artifacts, but individuals could search, edit, sort and create elements online. This also provided candidates the opportunity to work on the portfolio asynchronously from any place that they had web access. That is, candidates were not bound to a single place or limited by time restrictions for data entry or portfolio development. Throughout this project, candidates took advantage of its mobility, as they developed their portfolios from their practicum sites as well as home or other places with Internet access.

To support the candidates in the construction of their online portfolio, a special website was developed

that allowed each candidate to create portfolio elements without having knowledge of html coding and typical web page development software. This site was the launching point for the portfolio and was <u>easily accessed through a web browser</u>.

The database-driven portfolios in this project were password protected, therefore shielding the candidates' privacy. Candidates could control the passwords to reflect different levels of access so that they could share their work with only desired audiences such as peers or potential employers.

Figure 2.Comparison of Traditional and Digital Portfolios

	Database-driven Digital Portfolio	**Traditional Paper Portfolio**
Storage	Artifact stored on a central server and accessed through a database.	Mainly manila folders, 3 ring binders or storage boxes.
Data	Hypertext can make searching and cross-referencing data easier therefore making it easier to retrieve and view. Specific, artifacts can be reused and recycled into various types of portfolios for different audiences. Artifacts are not limited to text.	Data stored in a paper file
Accessibility	Needs Internet to access and view. Copies are infinite.	Technology is not necessary to view. Copies are finite.
Audience	Can be configured for multiple audiences using the same digital artifacts	One copy is difficult to reconfigure for multiple audiences
Contents	All artifacts are digitally created making them easy to search and display in different formats such as CD-ROM, database and web pages. Contents can include multimedia elements that include video, audio, hypertext, animation and digital images and graphics	Mainly paper-based and flat files
Review	Web-based portfolios can have multiple reviewers access the portfolio simultaneously	Only one reviewer can access the portfolio at a given time.
Replication	Can be easily replicated without degrading contents.	Traditional portfolios are difficult to replicate
Creation	Must develop technology skills. Some software tools require advanced technology skills to create a portfolio	No special skills needed to create the portfolio
Compatibility	Must be compatible with the reviewers computer, at times special viewers or plugins are needed	No special equipment needed to view

Benefits

This project supports earlier literature that suggests that the process of developing a portfolio has value beyond merely the production of the portfolio itself (<u>Curry, 2000</u>; <u>Kish & Sheehan, 1997</u>). Throughout the process

of developing each portfolio, it became evident that the candidates were finding value in the project in both the summative and formative sense. That is, the portfolio was not only a culminating record of their practicum, but it enhanced learning along the way. As with many well-designed academic projects, the process itself had become a rich learning experience.

Technology Skill Development. At the beginning of the project, consideration was given to the potential that the web-based portfolio project could easily become a technological burden to the candidates, thus hindering their counselor skill development. Although increased technological competence for candidates was desirable, the supervisor was cautious to assure that energies were appropriately focused on a broad range of counseling skills rather than technology. Despite the intentional focus on counseling skills, the increased skill and comfort level of candidates related to the technology did indeed become evident over the course of the project. One candidate provided evidence of this growth by writing on a project evaluation, ï¿½My computer skills were tested and enhanced regularly.ï¿½ For example, candidates became proficient in creating artifacts by scanning and manipulating digital audio, video and other forms of multimedia. Again, this was not the primary goal of the web-based portfolio but it was a noted benefit.

Motivation. The motivation of the counselor candidates to complete the project far exceeded the supervisor's expectations. Candidates representing diverse age groups, ethnic backgrounds and both genders seemed not only to tolerate the digital format but they quickly outgrew the features of the early version of the web-based portfolio. For example, students asked for opportunities to include audio clips, PowerPoint presentations, video clips, hyperlinks and more. At each opportunity the supervisor and web-master were able to accommodate candidate requests that ultimately seemed to help maintain the candidates high level of energy.

Collaboration. According to Campbell (2000) collaboration is an important element of the counselor supervisor and supervisee relationship. As the candidates and supervisor discussed the portfolio in relation to the practicum experience, a generalized feeling of collaboration emerged. The dynamics created by the web-based portfolio project also led to a group feeling of accomplishment and common direction. Collaboration with one another was made evident as candidates shared ideas and experiences freely and engaged in meaningful conversations about the breadth and utility of the various practicum experiences. Furthermore, the project fostered collaboration between the counselor candidates and professional counselors, site supervisors, and technology support staff.

Reflection. As candidates reflected on their daily experiences, they began to recognize how random guidance activities were quickly becoming pieces of a comprehensive guidance program. One candidate wrote,

ï¿½It [electronic portfolio] also made me integrate and incorporate the components and domains on a much deeper level both personally and professionally.ï¿½ Candidates consistently discussed amongst themselves and posed questions regarding ways to enhance their practicum experiences. The nature of many candidate questions was, "What did you do within the curriculum component to help students meet the personal/social standard A?"   As the group interacted, it became apparent that the self-reflection of the candidates assured a varied and appropriate breadth of candidate experiences.

Accessibility. As an evaluation tool, the supervisor could use the Internet to monitor the candidates' progress on their portfolios. For example candidates were assigned deadlines by which time they were to have completed a predetermined amount of progress on the portfolio. The supervisor checked to assure that appropriate and meaningful progress was being made without the candidates having to turn in a physical document. This type of point-in-time assessment of candidate work is especially useful in light of Baltimore et al's (1996) assertion that portfolios can reflect a candidate's developmental process. This format allowed the supervisor and candidate to interact and discuss ways to refine their counseling skills as the practicum unfolded.

Most of the candidates were able to work on their web-based portfolios from school practicum sites, which was much easier than getting related materials to the university or even to their own home. This was beneficial for candidates who were working full-time jobs, continuing course work, and trying to finish their counseling degree or endorsement.

Paper portfolios allow for a single or limited number of copies that might be hundreds of pages in length. The online portfolio was accessible entirely via the Internet, thus there were no reproduction costs (i.e., photocopies and binders) and virtually no limitations on size. The number of sites from which the online portfolio could be viewed was limited only by the number of people who had Internet access. Candidates were not burdened by having to tote or mail a large binder to each prospective employer.

For this project, the portfolios were completed when the practicum was concluded. After candidates graduated and gained additional experience, they could update their portfolios without a dependence on a direct university affiliation. Indeed some graduates did access and continued to edit their portfolio after they had earned their degree.

Accountability. Candidate activities included in the portfolio could be sorted and examined by specific program components or ASCA standards. All activities included in the portfolio were connected to practicum activities and corresponding national standards. For example, the supervisor or candidate could examine how activities helped secondary students reach ASCA career standard A by clicking the appropriate onscreen buttons.

The data-based driven portfolio could include virtually unlimited number of links to standards and competencies making evidence of accountability easily accessible.

Job Search. Recent work by Boes, VanZile-Tamsen, and Jackson ([2001](#)) illustrates the usefulness of portfolios to counselor candidates in the hiring process. This benefit was potentially the most utilitarian to candidates searching for jobs. One candidate wrote, ï¿½ï¿½it [electronic portfolio] was useful when going to interviews and keeping up to date on things Iï¿½ve done.ï¿½

The web-based portfolio made it easier to connect with prospective employers. Candidates were less bound by the time limitations of reproduction and mailing previously associated with binder-based portfolios. Prospective employers could immediately identify specific skills and experiences of interviewees by using the portfolio framework ([see Figure 1](#)). The use of a portfolio as a job seeking tool is supported by Pardieck's ([2000](#)) assertion that principals indeed respond favorably to professional teaching portfolios.

Implications and Conclusions

As with all educational endeavors of merit, the web-based portfolio project is subject to constant critique, evaluation and revision. As the supervisors and candidates reflected on their experiences several themes emerged which provide direction for the projectï¿½s future. For example, empirical data related to the effectiveness of the web-based portfolio as an assessment tool must be established. Although researchers such as Tillema ([1998](#)) have offered empirical evidence that indicates portfolios are a valuable instrument for evaluating competence, this project must move toward analyzing the validity and reliability of the web-based portfolio.

A more formal process needs to be implemented to assure that counselor activities included in the portfolio produce the desired outcome. That is, do activities designed to foster student competence in career development make a difference? Although discussions relating to the appropriateness of activities are common, the ultimate decision on the meaningful relationship to standards or program components remains somewhat subjective. Consideration is being given to allow peer or third party reviews as a means of enhancing portfolio assessment. When handled in a confidential and ethical manner, this practice has the potential to support the evaluative and somewhat subjective decisions of the counselor supervisor.

The educational value of the web-based portfolio would be enhanced if candidates began developing their portfolio early in their degree program and maintained consistent involvement throughout the program. This type of commitment would require the support of an entire counseling program and from all teaching faculty. For example, a philosophy statement written for a counseling theories class might be included in the portfolio and

revisited later as students participate in their practicum. This developmental approach would serve to emphasize candidate growth as they complete their course work and practica experience.

Counselor candidates and supervisors involved in this project have modeled one method of using the Internet to further support counselor education. The flexible nature of the web-based portfolio and the enthusiastic acceptance of it among participating candidates provides a reason to be optimistic about future use of the format. We plan to continue the project and to further refine its function and purpose.   We look forward to sharing our future experiences with other counseling professionals and extend an invitation to examine our portfolio site.

A view only sample of a web-portfolio for school counselor candidates has been made available at http://pt3.unomaha.edu/counselingview. *Enter the login "**prepared**" and the password "**counselor**".*

A full access version of the web-portfolio for counselor candidates is available at http://portfolio.unomaha.edu/pt/slogin/index.htm. *Enter the login "**jgraduate**" and the password "**graduate**". Note: Entries submitted to this site will be edited, deleted or censored periodically.*

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