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Portals and Portfolios: Customizable Tools for Improving E-Learning

“By their very nature, portals and online course tools continuously evolve, sometimes at a rapid pace.”

(Michael Martys and William Wilson, [“Learning from Experience.”](#) *Syllabus*, July 2001)

The concepts highlighted in this month's issue have been around for a while, but have changed greatly in the past few years. As potentially useful tools in any college e-learning program, portals and electronic portfolios merit the “Where are they now?” examination that this BEEP provides.

Portals

“Portal technology provides a central online tool to access and exchange internal information, as well as link to external information, vendors and resources according to the needs, mission and choice of the institution.”
(Michele M. Norman, [“Portal Technology: Into the Looking Glass.”](#) Special Publication, *Converge Magazine*, 2003)

Background

- [“Campus Portals: Beyond the Bulletin Board.”](#) Article in *Syllabus*, (15:12), July 2002, that profiles some of the major commercial developers active in the higher education market.
- [“Campus Portals: Future Hope, Past History, or More Hype.”](#) Article by David Eisler, Weber State University, in *Syllabus*, (15:12), July 2002, that provides an update on the progress and challenges of portals in higher education.
- [“Learning from Experience: Points to Ponder About Portals.”](#) Article by Michael Martys and William Wilson in *Syllabus*, (14:12), July 2001, that suggests the need for policies in portal development that will address, among other issues, privacy and security, intellectual property, data errors, and methods of training the user community.
- [“Portal Technology: Into the Looking Glass.”](#) Special, multi-chapter online publication by *Converge Magazine*, 2003, that takes a close look at portal technology in higher education. It includes a historical perspective, as well as an overview of what is necessary for portal creation.
- [“The Power of Portals.”](#) Article by Florence Olsen in *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 9, 2002, that reviews customized Web services offered via portals at colleges and universities. She gives background information on the concept of a portal, then looks at examples of existing portals and their developers.
- [“Ready or Not, They're Here: Library Portals.”](#) Article by Elizabeth Buchanan in *Syllabus*, (14:12), July 2001, that examines online students' needs for library portals and those of [North Carolina State](#), [University of Buffalo](#), and [uPortal](#), a joint effort of more than 25 universities.
- [Web Portals in Higher Education: Technologies to Make IT Personal.](#) A 2002 Educause publication by Richard N. Katz and Associates now online about many aspects of portal use.
- [“What Is a Portal, Anyway?”](#) Transcript of a talk sponsored by the [Corporation for Research and Educational Networking \(CREN\)](#), January 20, 2000, on academic portal creation.

Examples

- [“Building a Personalized Education Portal.”](#) Article by Robin R. Ethridge and others in *Educause Quarterly*, (23:3), 2000, about Louisiana State University's award-winning system.
- [“Best Practices: January 2003 Power Portal: Cal Poly Sets Pace with Web Services.”](#) Article by Judith Lamont in *KMWorld* (12:1), 1/1/2003, on California Polytechnic State University's portal.
- [Prospective Students.](#) List maintained by Weber State University (UT) that links to many exemplary academic Web sites and portals. It includes sites for admissions, advising, orientation and home pages, as well as some how-to articles not linked to this BEEP for portal construction.

Portfolios

“This tool brings to bear the native talents of computers – storage, management of data, retrieval, display, and communication – to challenge how to better organize student work to improve teaching and learning.”
(Trent Batson, [“The Electronic Portfolio Boom,”](#) *Syllabus*, December 2002)

Background

- [“Building An E-dentity for Each Student.”](#) Article by John C. Ittleson in *Educause Quarterly* (24:4), 2001, that explains/endorse the use of e-portfolios by universities for student transcripts.
- [Creating Online Portfolios.](#) Web site from the State University of New York at Stony Brook that offers its students a simple, four-step formula for portfolio creation.
- [Directions in Electronic Portfolio Development.](#) Paper by David Gibson and Helen Barrett posted on *ITFORUM* on November 30, 2002, that explores the advantages and trade-offs of two methods of developing e-portfolios: generic tools and customized systems. Co-author [Helen Barrett](#) of the University of Alaska also maintains her own Web site on the same subject.
- [“The Electronic Portfolio Boom: What’s It All About?”](#) Article by Trent Batson in *Syllabus*, (16:5), December 2002, that thoroughly examines and explains the concept of an e-portfolio. The article also includes a full list of links to e-portfolio tools now available or in production.
- [EPAC: An Electronic Portfolios Virtual Community of Practice.](#) A Web site created by Educause’s [National Learning Infrastructure Initiative \(NLII\)](#) in November 2002, with the support of the [American Association for Higher Education \(AAHE\)](#) and the Electronic Portfolios Action Committee. Its goal is to bring together those involved in e-portfolio development around the world to improve the understanding and use of portfolios in learning and teaching.
- [ePort Consortium.](#) Collaboration of select higher education and IT institutions working to define, design and develop software for the forthcoming e-portfolio environment and system.
- [“Making the Case for the Use of Web-Based Portfolios in Support of Learning to Teach.”](#) Article by Lucy Avraamidou and Carla Zembal-Saul of Penn State University in *Journal of Interactive Online Learning* (1:2), Fall 2002, promoting portfolio use in teacher education.
- [Online Portfolios.](#) Comprehensive Web sites with links to many articles on e-portfolio creation at all educational levels, as well as ideas on how to use them.

Examples

- [Albion College \(MI\) Digital Portfolio Project.](#) Includes an overview, how to get started, portfolio samples, and a training schedule.
- [Alverno College \(WI\) Diagnostic Digital Portfolio.](#) Lets students track their learning progress; process feedback from faculty, external assessors and peers; and look for patterns in academic work to gain more control and become more autonomous learners.
- [Career Management Pilot Program.](#) Partnership led by the State of Minnesota and supported by the U.S. Department of Labor and seven other major partners to create a Web site that allows students to store all learning and career information.
- [Colleges of Education Student Portfolios.](#) Examples from a number of schools with certification-related portfolio programs for teacher education students: [Missouri University](#), [University of Florida](#), [University of Iowa](#), [University of Wisconsin](#), and [Valdosta State \(GA\)](#).
- [eFolio MN.](#) E-portfolio product available to all Minnesota residents and students enrolled in Minnesota schools to store information online throughout their careers.
- [Florida State University Career Portfolio.](#) Prepares students for the world of work through planning, reflection, skill development, and portfolio documentation.
- [Folio Thinking: Personal Learning Portfolios.](#) Collaboration of research groups at the Royal Institute of Technology (UK), Uppsala University (Sweden), and Stanford University (CA).
- [Kalamazoo College \(MI\) Portfolio.](#) Allows students to collect their significant academic and experiential work in one place, develop long-term goals, and learn Web design.
- [Learning Record Online.](#) Web site of the University of Texas that offers an e-portfolio format based on interviews, observations over time, samples of students’ work, and more.
- [Student Portfolios.](#) Penn State Web site that guides undergraduates through the process of collecting, selecting, and reflecting on evidence of their academic and co-curricular activities.
- [Urban Universities Portfolio Project.](#) Collaborative effort of six urban public universities to develop prototypes of electronic institutional portfolios.