The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning
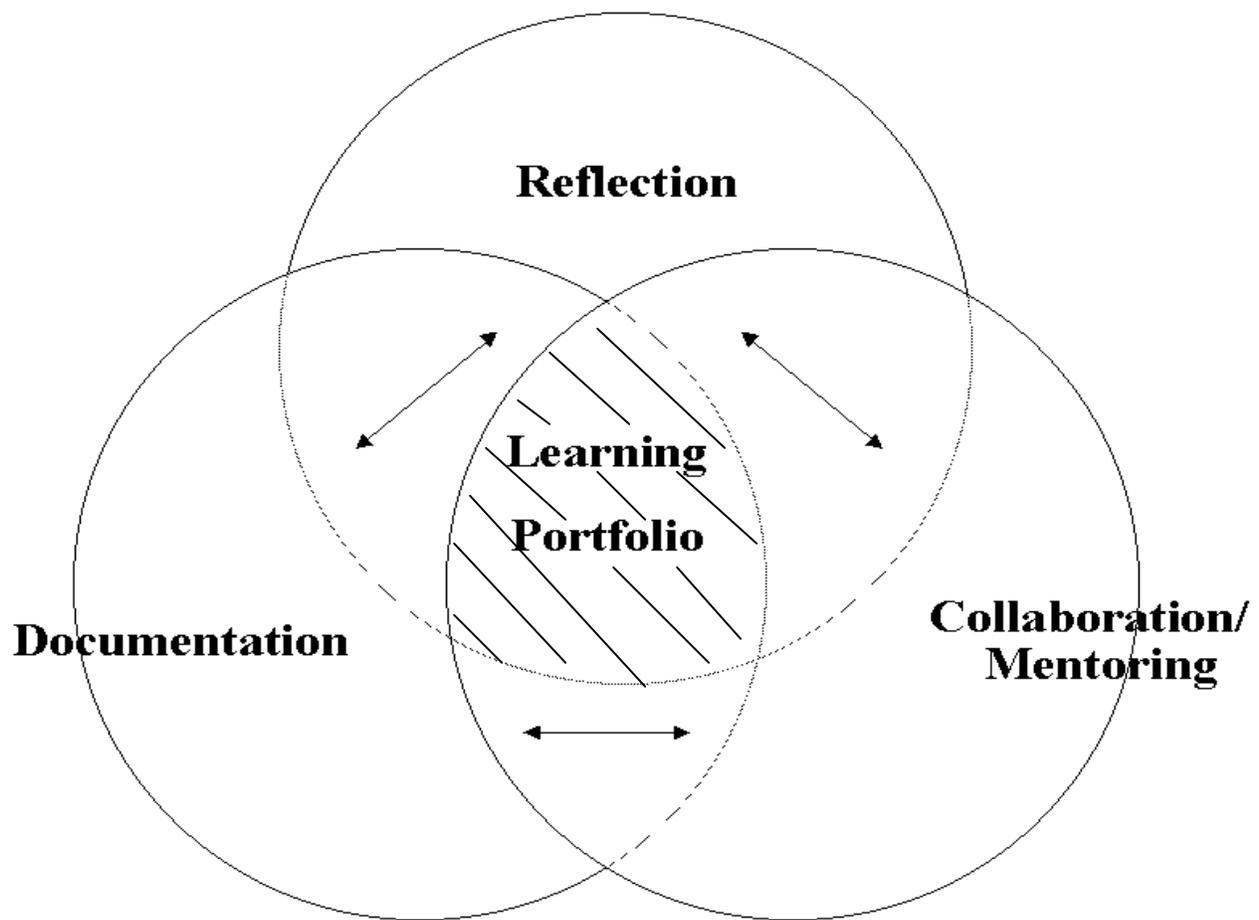
John Zubizarreta
Professor of English
Director of Honors and Faculty Development
Columbia College, SC
USA
jzubizarreta@colacoll.edu

The *Learning Portfolio*:
What Is It?

- The learning portfolio is a **flexible**, **evidence**-based **process** that combines **reflection** and **documentation**.
- It engages students in **ongoing**, **reflective,** and **collaborative** analysis of learning.
- It focuses on **purposeful**, **selective** outcomes for both **improving** and **assessing** learning.

--Material adapted from *The Learning Portfolio* (Anker, 2004)
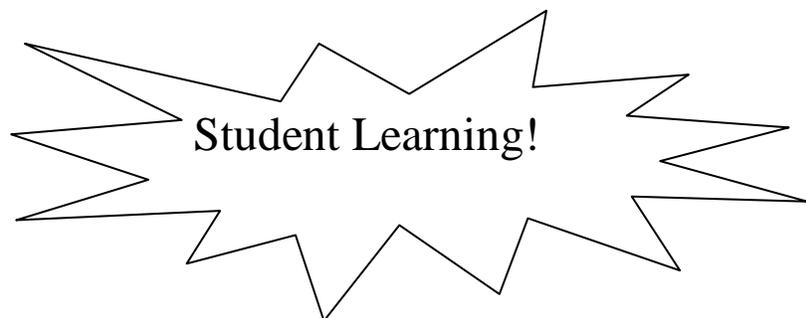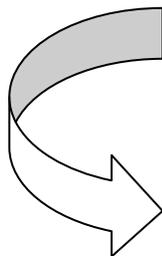
The Learning Portfolio

Reflection + Documentation + Mentoring =

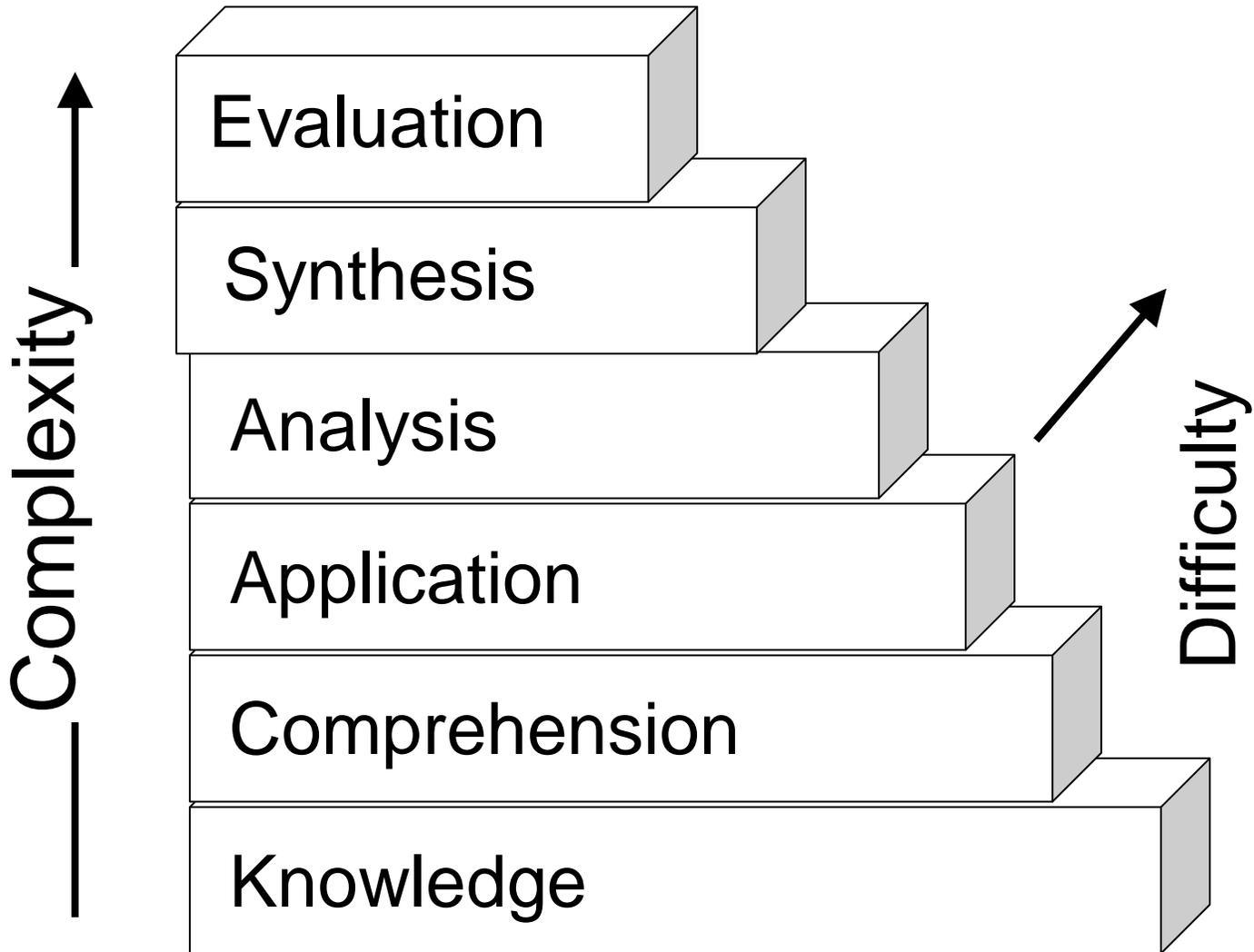*Learning!*

SUCCESSFUL USE
OF LEARNING PORTFOLIO

- Course assessment/evaluation

- Major/departmental outcomes

- General Education program review/assessment

- Academic advisement

- Teacher preparation

- Internship/practicum

- Service learning

- Field/experiential learning

- Prior learning assessment

- Fine arts

- Technical/professional skills

- Career preparation

Student Learning!

Levels of Bloom's Taxonomy

Difficulty and Complexity

Complexity ↑

Evaluation

Synthesis

Analysis

Application

Comprehension

Knowledge

Difficulty ↗

Complexity and difficulty are different. Complexity establishes the level of thought; difficulty determines the amount of effort within each level.

--Adapted from David A. Sousa, *How the Brain Learns*, 2nd ed. (Corwin, 2001)
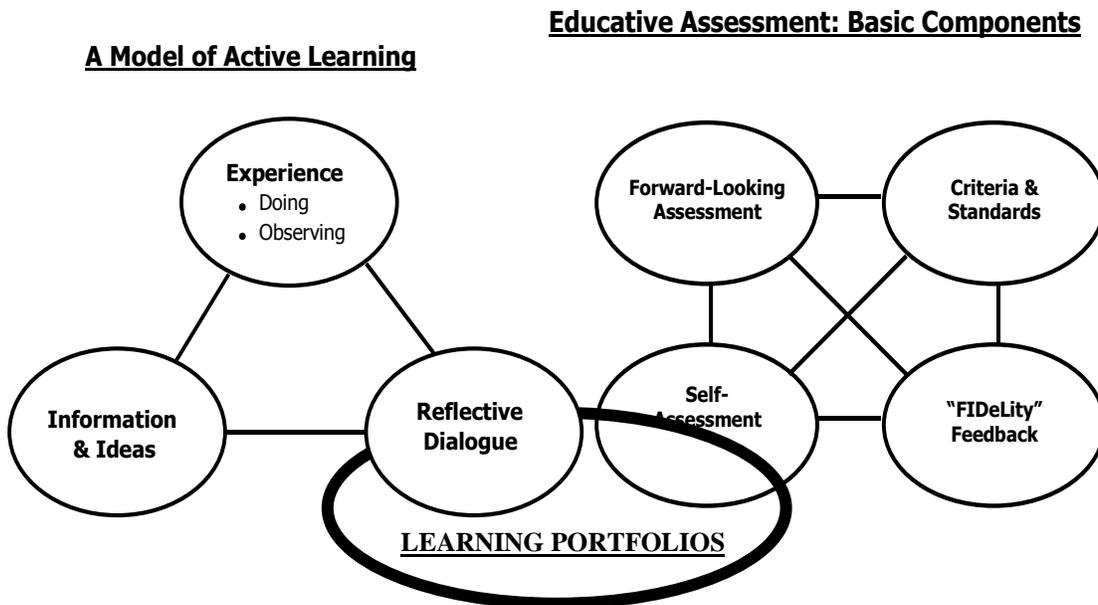
The Role of Learning Portfolios

in

Creating Significant Learning Experiences*:*

--From L. Dee Fink (Jossey-Bass, 2003)

The Integrative Relationship of Learning Portfolios

Educative Assessment: Basic Components

A Model of Active Learning

Experience
- Doing
- Observing

Forward-Looking Assessment

Criteria & Standards

Information & Ideas

Reflective Dialogue

Self-Assessment

"FIDeLity" Feedback

LEARNING PORTFOLIOS

--Graphic from J. Zubizarreta, *Learning Portfolio* (Anker, 2004)

- In *Creating Significant Learning Experiences*, L. Dee Fink proposes an innovative taxonomy of higher-level learning as the foundation for an integrated approach to designing college courses and other learning experiences. Fink's model stresses the importance of *active learning* and *educative assessment* (as opposed to simple "auditive assessment").

- One powerful tool for meeting the needs of higher-level learning and bridging the goals of active learning and educative assessment is the learning portfolio.

There is no single right answer. Contents are determined by the purpose of the portfolio. But here is a very generic table of contents, organized by broad categories and certainly not prescriptive or exhaustive. The table is meant to be suggestive, inviting multi-disciplinary ideas of what the actual, complex contents of a student portfolio might be, remembering the caveat that purpose will drive final decisions about both reflection and documentation.

_____

Table of Contents

1. *Philosophy of Learning* (reflective narrative on learning process).

2. *Achievements in Learning* (transcripts, course descriptions, résumés, honors, awards, internships, tutoring).

3. *Evidence of Learning* (research papers, critical essays, field experience logs, creative displays/performances, data/spreadsheet analyses, course electronic listserv entries).

4. *Assessment of Learning* (instructor feedback, course test scores, exit/board exams, lab/data reviews, research project results, practicum reports).

5. *Relevance of Learning* (practical applications, leadership, relation of learning to personal and professional domains, ethical/moral growth, affiliations, hobbies, volunteering, affective value of learning).

6. *Learning Goals* (plans to enhance, connect, and apply learning).

7. *Appendices* (selected documentation).

© Adapted from *The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning* (Anker, 2004)

Sample Questions for Student Reflection

The durable value of learning portfolios in improving student learning resides in engaging students not just in collecting representative samples of their work for assessment, evaluation, or career preparation but in addressing vital *reflective* questions that invite systematic inquiry:

- *What* have I learned?

- *When* have I learned? In what circumstances? Under what conditions?

- *How* have I learned or not, and do I know what kind of learner I am?

- How does what I have learned fit into a comprehensive, *continual plan* for learning?

- What *difference* has the learning made in my intellectual, personal, and ethical development?

- In what ways is what I have learned *valuable* to learn at all?

- *Why* did I learn?

Sample Assignment Sheet for Learning Portfolio
 (Brookfield 1995)

Instructions on Keeping a Learning Journal
>The purpose of this journal is twofold. First, I hope it will give you some insight into your own emotional and cognitive rhythms as a learner. By this, I mean that you will become more aware of how you go about organizing your learning, what kinds of learning tasks you are drawn to, what teaching styles you find most congenial, what tasks you resist and seek to avoid, what conditions encourage you to take risks in learning. . . . Second, and more selfishly, I hope that you will be ready to share some sections of your journal with me. . . . If you'd like some structure to help you with the first few weeks' entries, try writing a few lines in response to the following questions:

- What have I learned this week about myself as a learner?

- What have I learned this week about my emotional responses to learning?

- What were the highest emotional moments in my learning activities this week?

- What were the lowest emotional moments in my learning activities this week?

- What learning tasks did I respond to most easily this week?

- What learning tasks gave me the greatest difficulties this week?

- What was the most significant thing that happened to me as a learner this week?

- What learning activity or emotional response most took me by surprise this week?

- Of everything I did this week in my learning, what would I do differently if I had to do it again?

- What do I feel proudest about regarding my learning activities this week?

- What do I feel most dissatisfied with regarding my learning activities this week?

>Don't worry if your answers to these questions overlap or if you feel one question has already been answered in your response to an earlier question. Do try and write something, however brief, in response to each question. Even noting that nothing surprised you or that there were no high or low emotional moments in your learning tells you something about yourself as a learner and the conditions under which you learn. (pp. 97-98)

The Importance Of Selectivity In Contents Of Learning Portfolio

The concrete evidence of learning in a portfolio is collected selectively in an appendix. The materials meet the specific purposes of the portfolio. The representation of student work, or products, in the appendix is linked to the reflective component of the learning portfolio, and it is driven by purpose and audience. For example, the following chart suggests some representative ways in which the *purpose* of a learning portfolio strongly determines the *themes* of the reflective narrative as well as the types of *evidence* selected in the appendices.

Purpose	Themes	Evidence
Improvement	Development, reflective inquiry, focus on goals, philosophy of learning.	Drafts, journals, online threaded discussion, emails, statement of goals, classroom assessments, research notes.
Job Search	Career preparation, versatile skills, ambitions, potential for future contributions, flexibility.	Showcase projects, writing & communication samples, résumé, references, internship evaluations, certifications, reports/logs, computer programs, awards, transcripts.
Writing	Voice, creativity, diverse & flexible skills, craftsmanship, facility with language, research proficiency.	Essay drafts, journal, listserv or threaded discussion entries, research paper, publications, concept maps or outlines.
Prior Learning	Mastery of content.	Products demonstrating skills & competency, references, achievement/placement test scores, interview transcript.
Problem Solving	Critical thinking, creativity, application of knowledge, flexibility, curiosity.	Problem-solving log, lab reports, computer programs, spreadsheet data analyses.
Field Experiences	Application of knowledge, trained skills, adaptability.	Field journals, logs, reports, video/audio tapes, photos, project leader's evaluation, grant proposal, publication.

© Adapted from The Learning Portfolio: Reflective Practice for Improving Student Learning (Anker, 2004).

10

QUESTIONS for MENTOR & STUDENT

- How will your portfolio be used? Who is the audience for your portfolio? What is the role of that audience?

- What have you learned about the subject that you did not previously know? What have you discovered about your learning style?

- What are the best examples of your work for this project? The weakest? Why?

- What do the pieces and the portfolio overall reflect about your learning?

- What new learning strategies have you adopted as a result of the portfolio process?

- What were the most difficult parts of the process? Why?

- In what ways is your reflective portfolio unique? How does it capture your personal learning experience and voice?

- What has been most meaningful about the portfolio process? Why?

How Does the Learning Portfolio Enhance Learning (and Teaching)?

✓ Power of Reflection

✓ Collaborative Learning

✓ Creative Assessment

✓ Multiple Intelligences

✓ Critical Thinking

✓ Risk and Challenge

✓ Writing = Learning

✓ Selectivity, judgment, responsibility

✓ Active Pedagogy

✓ *Can you think of other ways?*

_____   _____

_____   _____

Key Questions
about
Learning Portfolios

- How have products collected in a portfolio over time contributed to higher-level learning?

- What has the student learned from the process of creating, collecting, selecting, and connecting the work?

- How does the work fit into a larger framework of life-long learning which goes beyond simply completing graded assignments?

- Why and how is reflective learning valuable in the student's overall intellectual and practical development?

Challenges & Issues

- "Schmooze": patronizing, giving superficially what the professor wants

- "Sunset raving": rhetoric, glitz, appearance

- Product vs. process

- Coherence (reflection tied to evidence)

- The "wheelbarrow syndrome": bulk, physicality

- Electronic considerations: a legion of issues

- Writing: asset or liability?

- Evidence: purpose, type, variety, how much?

- Mentors?

- Evaluation: who, when, how, why?

Tips for LP, Time, Stress & Large Classes

✓ **Start slow and small. Ideas: one class, count as portion of course grade, weighted grade for complete project with simple individual feedback such as checks, substitute for final exam.**

✓ **Streamline feedback: focus on purposeful items, don't try to respond to all dimensions of portfolio, collect digital bank of common responses for reuse.**

✓ **Think of portfolio as different, not more, in course syllabus, assignments, assessment.**

✓ **Use technology: most web course management tools include handy feedback and assessment systems.**

✓ **Develop scoring rubrics to help make feedback and grading processes clearer, more efficient.**

✓ **Large classes? Offer feedback on a schedule to rotating groups; respond to randomly selected individuals throughout the term until all have received at least one communication about their work; rely on structured peer feedback.**

✓ **Do you have your own teaching portfolio? You should! The principles, methods, and valuable benefits applicable to *your* portfolio will help you design an equally powerful, manageable learning portfolio for students.**

✓ **Be careful, clear, deliberate in planning portfolio project; have explicit goals, objectives, due dates, length and assessment criteria. Save time by being organized.**

✓ **Incorporate portfolio work into other work in course, as drafting for a graded paper, project, or lab report, for example. Let portfolio serve double duty.**

Resources on Rubrics:
Assessing the Learning Portfolio

1. Authentic Assessment Toolbox at
http://jonathan.mueller.faculty.noctrl.edu/toolbox/.

2. TLT Group page on rubrics:
http://www.tltgroup.org/resources/flashlight/rubrics.htm.

3. Rubric for critical thinking: http://www.insightassessment.com/pdf_files/rubric.pdf.

4. For PowerPoint presentations, but adaptable to other uses:
http://www.cgu.edu/pages/762.asp.

5. Templates for rubrics: http://rubistar.4teachers.org/index.php.

6. Andrade, H. G. (2000, February). "Using rubrics to promote thinking and learning."
Educational Leadership 57(5). See http://www.ascd.org/. Follow links to
Publications>Educational Leadership>Archived Issues.

7. The following pieces are available at http://pareonline.net/: "Recommendations for
Developing Classroom Performance Assessments and Scoring Rubrics," Barbara M.
Moskal (2003); "Designing scoring rubrics for your classroom," Craig A. Mertler
(2001); "Scoring Rubrics: What, When and How?" B. M. Moskal (2001).

8. *National Teaching & Learning Forum* 13.6 (Oct. 2004): 9. DEVELOPER'S DIARY:
"Why Rubrics? Educating in Fractal Patterns IX," Edward Nuhfer. See
http://www.ntlf.com.

9. Ohio Learning Network, "CourseCheck" Resource Bank, includes rubrics to
assess Seven Principles of Good Practice. See Principles Two, Four, Five, Six:
http://www.oln.org/teaching_and_learning/coursecheck/resourcebank.php.

10. Monmouth University's Faculty Resource Center information on rubrics:
http://its.monmouth.edu/facultyresourcecenter/rubrics.htm.

11. Illinois Community College Board's "Preparing Technology-Proficient Educators
in Illinois." Scroll to "Information on Rubrics":
http://www.iccb.state.il.us/pt3/res/link.html

Selected Resources on Electronic Learning Portfolios

AAHE e-portfolio info.: http://ctl.du.edu/portfolioclearinghouse/index.cfm.

Albion College Electronic Portfolio: http://www.albion.edu/digitalportfolio.

Alverno College Diagnostic Digital Portfolio: http://ddp.alverno.edu/.

Barrett, Helen. Consulting/educational site: http://www.electronicportfolios.com.

Cambridge, Barbara L., et al. *Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning*. AAHE, 2001.

EDUCAUSE Learning Initiative: http://www.educause.edu/E-Portfolios/5524.

Indiana University, Open Source Portfolio Initiative: http://eport.iupui.edu/.

Kalamazoo Portfolio web site: http://www.kzoo.edu/pfolio.

Kimball, Miles A. *The Web Portfolio Guide: Creating Electronic Portfolios for the Web*. Longman, 2003.

LaGuardia Community C ePortfolio: http://www.eportfolio.lagcc.cuny.edu/.

Lankes, Maria D. "Electronic Portfolios: A New Idea in Assessment." ERIC: http://wdcrobcolp01.ed.gov/CFAPPS/ERIC/resumes/records.cfm?ericnum=ED390377.

Lone Star 2000 Project. Pre-service teachers'and students' portfolios in CD-ROM format. See project at http://www.thejournal.com/; follow links to back issue Oct. 1996. Contact: Dennis Holt, U of North Florida, dholt@unf.edu.

Pennsylvania State University, "Programmatic Implementation of e-Portfolio": http://www.e-education.psu.edu/portfolio/curric_supports.html.

St. Olaf College, CIS: http://www.stolaf.edu/depts/cis/web_portfolios.htm.

Wesleyan U., for advisement: https://wesep.wesleyan.edu/cgi-perl/session.cgi.

SELECTED READINGS ON LEARNING PORTFOLIOS

Annis (Ferrill), L., & Jones, C. (1995). Student portfolios: Their objectives, development, and use. In P. Seldin & Associates, *Improving college teaching* (pp. 181-190). Bolton: Anker.

Bean, J. C. (1996). *Engaging ideas : The professor's guide to integrating writing, critical thinking, and active learning in the classroom*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Brookfield, S. D. (1995). *Becoming a critically reflective teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Cambridge, B., et al. (2001). *Electronic portfolios: Emerging practices in student, faculty, and institutional learning*. Wash., D.C.: AAHE.

Campbell, D. M., Cignetti, P. B., Melenyzer, B. J., Nettles, D. H., & Wyman, R. M. (2001). *How to develop a professional portfolio: A manual for teachers*. 2nd ed. Boston: Allyn & Bacon.

Campbell, D. M., Melenyzer, B. J., Nettles, D. H., & Wyman, R. M., Jr. (2000). *Portfolio and performance assessment in teacher education*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Claywell, G. (2001). *The Allyn and Bacon guide to writing portfolios*. Boston: Allyn and Bacon.

Elbow, P. (1998). *Writing without teachers*. Second edition. New York: Oxford University Press.

Emig, J. A. (1977). Writing as a mode of learning. *College Comp. and Communication, 28*, 122-128.

Fink, L. D. (2003). *Creating significant learning experiences*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Hillocks, G., Jr. (1995). *Teaching writing as reflective practice: Integrating theories*. Language and Literacy Series. New York: Teachers College Press.

Kimball, M. A. (2003). W*eb portfolio guide:Creating electronic portfolios for the web*. NY: Longman.

Moon, J. (1999). *Learning journals: A handbook for academics, students and professional development*. London: Kogan Page; Sterling, VA: Stylus.

Schön, D. (1983). *The reflective practitioner: How professionals think in action*. NY: Basic Books.

Sunstein, B. S., & Lovell, J. H., eds. (2000), *The portfolio standard: How students can show* us *what they know and are able to do*. Portsmouth: Heinemann.

Wright, W. A., & Barton, B. (2001). Students mentoring students in portfolio development. In J. E. Miller, J. E. Groccia, & M. S. Miller (Eds.), *Student-assisted teaching: A guide to faculty-student teamwork* (pp. 69-76). Bolton: Anker.

Yancey, K. B., ed. (1992), *Portfolios in the writing classroom: An introduction*. Urbana: NCTE.

Yancey, K. B., & Weiser, I. (Eds.), *Situating portfolios: Four perspectives*. Logan: Utah State U. Press.

Zubizarreta, J. (2004). The learning portfolio: Reflective practice for improving student learning. Bolton: Anker.

Crafting a Learning Portfolio Project

John Zubizarreta, Columbia College, SC, USA
jzubizarreta@colacoll.edu

Reflective Group Exercise: Think about how you would design a learning portfolio project for your classroom, program, or institutional use. 1) What kinds of reflective questions would you ask students to address? 2) What kinds of evidence or learning outcomes would be most useful? 3) How would you engage students in collaboration and mentoring in the process?

Purpose of Learning Portfolio:

REFLECTION	DOCUMENTATION/ EVIDENCE	COLLABORATION/ MENTORING