

## Electronic Portfolios: Emerging Practices in Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning

Barbara L. Cambridge, vol. ed.

*American Association for Higher Education, 2001, \$28 members and \$34.50 nonmembers (paper), 229 pp., ISBN 1-56377-050-4*

Reviewed by John C. Ittelson

New electronic communications technology and the Web, together with a desire to have learners assume responsibility for documenting, reflecting, and assessing their own learning, are key motivators behind the growth of the electronic portfolio movement. In this American Association for Higher Education publication, the editorial team has highlighted emerging practices around a theme of electronic portfolios as “knowledge builders.”

The organizing framework groups e-portfolios into those developed by students, faculty members, and institutions. Chapter authors represent a good mixture of institutions and disciplines, and highlight many diverse uses for electronic portfolios. Of significant interest is the variety of technical expertise represented. Although the authors shared enthusiasm for the potential of electronic portfolios, as academics they also offered healthily critical views of this teaching and learning tool.

I’m sure readers will find that every chapter contains valuable information. I personally found those on student portfolios authored by Emily Springfield to be of particular interest. Both the chapter on the Kalamazoo effort and the chapter comparing electronic and paper portfolios raised useful questions.

In the case of Kalamazoo, the project began in 1996, providing an historical perspective on which to base some intriguing findings. Their portfolios emphasize reflection and include materials about both the academic part of a student’s life and data on their cocurricular activities. A primary

goal of their portfolios is to assist students and advisors in planning a student’s course load. In the freshman year seminar the task is explained and emphasized. In the second and third years the students add to their portfolios, but no particular class emphasizes the activity. The seniors’ portfolios emphasize reflection on their whole university experience, as well as its use as a job-seeking tool.

The second section of the book focuses on faculty portfolios. The overview by Daniel P. Tompkins points out the power of this tool for faculty communication with both students and peers, showing faculty’s professional activity in their discipline and in their classrooms.

An excellent segment by Helen Barrett provides very practical suggestions on how to begin the process of developing an electronic portfolio. Her knowledge about both K–12 education and the multimedia development process are clearly useful as she outlines the various steps, and the critical thinking, that go into portfolio development. She delineates three types of faculty portfolios: formative, summative, and marketing. Also of great value is her analysis, which begins to match tasks to currently available tools.

The final section addresses institutional portfolio development, acknowledging the newness of the efforts and selecting just a few examples to represent the wide variety of forms they take. Although institutional portfolios vary widely, they do have some common elements. According to Susan Kahn, they gather information and evidence from across the institution, and are designed to assess and improve effectiveness institution-wide. They focus on student learning and are designed to demonstrate accountability. A critical component is assuring that key high-level university players be involved in the development and that the effort includes, at a minimum, representation from among the faculty, staff, institutional research area, and community.

One example of an institutional portfolio developed for external uses is the Indiana University–Purdue Univer-

sity Indianapolis (IUPUI) effort, described by Sharon J. Hamilton. IUPUI’s effort at institutional self-examination in a public forum is described, pitfalls and all, and should be of great interest to other urban institutions struggling to define themselves, their mission, and their values.

In another chapter, Dean Dorn described the Sociology Department at California State University Sacramento’s effort to develop a departmental portfolio for internal purposes. Their goal was to focus more attention on teaching and learning, while also developing a portfolio that would streamline their five-year program review process. The prototype was also seen to have value in institutional accreditation efforts. I found this section, as well as the one prepared by Judie Gaffin Wexler from the Western Association of Schools and Colleges especially relevant to my own institution as it prepares for accreditation review.

It’s not surprising that with AAHE’s focus on student learning and on disseminating effective practices, they would publish this collection of thought-provoking practices on the use of electronic portfolios. Even better, the organization offers an accompanying Web site <<http://www.aahe.org/electronicportfolios/>>. Once again, thank you, AAHE. ☺

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## Web Teaching Guide: A Practical Approach to Creating Course Web Sites

Sarah Horton

*Yale University Press, 2000, \$15.95 (paper), 242 pages, ISBN 0-300-08727-6*

Reviewed by Connie L. Braun

Multimedia specialist Sarah Horton has written a thorough, practical

approach to preparing and using a Web site as an enhancement to face-to-face classroom meetings. *Web Teaching Guide* is not a technical, how-to guide; rather, it is written for those who want to explore the pedagogical possibilities of the Web.

Horton carefully outlines each step in the development process that will guide a Web author through creating and then using a course Web site. Five steps constitute the chapters of the book. These steps follow a logical sequence, so readers will get a good sense of how best to proceed when designing an academic Web site. Throughout each of the five chapters, the author cites case studies to demonstrate recommendations.

Chapter 1, Planning, goes through the process of selecting development tools. Choices include courseware systems or any of many Web authoring tools. Each of Horton's suggestions on how to get help, define objectives, organize the course site, and promote the Web site is invaluable. Together, they more than justify the book's cost.

Chapter 2, Developing Content, provides many ideas on writing content for the Web. They include gentle reminders about respecting copyright and practicing courtesy, and recommendations for evaluating available Web resources. Most helpful are the ideas for interactivity and engaging students in the course content.

The third chapter, Creating, provides the greatest detail on the actual technical work required to create a usable, good-looking, well-designed Web site. Taking time to answer the end-of-chapter questions is a worthwhile undertaking.

Using the Site, Chapter 4, probably is the most important section in this book. These pages offer guidance on the process of teaching with the Web site. Too many individuals are satisfied with having created the Web site, without considering all the things necessary to ensure success in teaching with it.

The final chapter, Site Assessment, offers a reminder to conduct routine

assessment of the effectiveness of the Web site as a resource. Different methods of assessment are recommended. The author encourages readers to learn from assessment, not ignore it!

Horton's most important point, though, is the statement that "a Web site author's work is never done." Among experienced Web authors, many will already know this fact, while others will need the reminder. For those about to embark on this particular journey, following her sound advice will prove valuable. *€*

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### **Roundtable on Project Management: A SHAPE Forum Dialogue**

*James Bullock, Gerald M. Weinberg, and Marie Benesh, eds.*

*Dorset House Publishing, 2001, \$21.45 (paper), 172 pages, ISBN 0-932633-48-X*

*Reviewed by Mark Sheehan*

Which would you rather do, read another self-styled expert's book about project management or listen to several dozen experienced, articulate professionals discuss the topic? We all learn differently, of course. While I'll be among the last to abandon single-author books as pedagogic resources, I admit being thoroughly fascinated by *Roundtable on Project Management*, whose dialogue format is very different from the traditional didactic monologue.

Jerry Weinberg is a prolific author of books about consulting, project management, "systems thinking," and related topics. In this latest effort, Weinberg and co-editors James Bullock and Marie Benesh have adapted material from a subscription-only e-mail forum into a well-organized, deftly edited, fast-paced discussion that brings new perspectives to a well-worn topic.

The experts taking part in the dis-

ussion are all from the software development arena. Most are managers or executives; some are independent practitioners or consultants; others are from corporations large and small. Unfortunately for *EDUCAUSE Quarterly* readers, none is from academia. Nevertheless, I found most of the issues discussed in the book entirely relevant to the software development projects taking place at my university.

The first half of *Roundtable on Project Management* discusses getting projects started off on the right foot. The contributors discuss sizing, estimating, planning, and managing a project. This section is rich with lists of techniques, processes, and questions to ask at various stages in a project. The second half of the book deals with patterns in the decline and fall of unsuccessful projects. It offers a number of mechanical metaphors for project failure (most involving the steamship Titanic) and seems to focus more on accepting than on transforming a failing project.

Overall, the style of the discussion is Socratic: questions outnumber answers, and no one appears to believe there is a one-size-fits-all truth to be illuminated. The delight of this book is the variety of viewpoints it expresses. No single expert's point of view dominates; thus, any reader is likely find what he or she needs. I saw myself — and my colleagues — in many of the examples cited by the contributors, and I saw us from angles I'd never imagined before.

Reading *Roundtable on Project Management* is like lurking on the edges of a well-moderated, learned listserv. Whatever shape your projects are in, you will find voices in it that resonate. I hope the book's engaging, innovative style will inspire similar books on other topics more directly relevant to information technology in higher education. *€*

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