

# Ensure Students Are Learning: Faculty Descriptions of Innovative Teaching Practices

## Developing Detailed, Comprehensive Academic Plans With e-Portfolios

### Innovative Teaching Practice Description:

In this practice, students create an e-portfolio to help them make informed decisions about their academic and career goals. The e-portfolio documents a student's progress through the process of goal discernment: self-assessment, goal exploration, and goal-setting. This project supports students in developing a strategic plan for completing their community college academic goals (e.g., certificates, associate degrees), for transferring to a university, and/or for preparing for a new career. Students use the website creation tool [www.wix.com](http://www.wix.com) to create a website for their e-portfolio.

This e-portfolio project consists of five sections that students populate throughout the semester:

1. *Personal Narrative & Goals*

This portion of the e-portfolio clearly outlines the credential or degree the student intends to earn at the community college; the career they are working toward; and how that career choice fits with their values and interests. For students who plan to transfer to a four-year institution, this section should also specify the college or university to which they intend to transfer.

2. *My College Choices*

Many students have only one transfer university in mind, and some have no idea at

the beginning of the term where they wish to transfer. For this part of the project, students must research and present information on three or four schools and rank them in order of best fit in terms of their career goals and expectation for success. Students identify the major they would like to pursue at each of these universities; consider student life options that are of interest (including sports, clubs, and other extra-curricular activities); determine housing preferences; and prepare a detailed cost of attendance for each university choice. Students also include information about the city or town where the university is located, along with the advantages or disadvantages of that location. Other pertinent information to collect includes the kind of student academic support that is available, graduation rates, crime statistics, transferable credits, etc. This section should be very well researched and very thorough. Students must also provide links to the universities' websites in this section.

3. *Academic Plan*

In this section, students lay out their academic plan for both the community college (first one to two years) and for their top choice of transfer university (last two to three years). This should be fairly detailed and requires significant research to develop a semester-by-

semester plan. For this, students can revise and upload the academic plans they developed previously in the course.

#### 4. *Financial Plan*

This section presents a realistic budget for how students will fund their academic goals. This plan should include expected grants, potential scholarships, savings, earnings (such as off-campus employment or on-campus work-study), loans, and any other sources they can tap to finance their academic goals. Links to information about at least four scholarships for which they can apply should also be included in this section. Ideally, students will have completed the FAFSA and will have an idea of how much, if any, financial aid they can count on from that. Students should understand that any deficit in income versus expenses will most likely come from loans and that loans should always be a last resort for financing their college education.

#### 5. *Career Plan*

For this section, students must gather research on their chosen career path, mostly citing CFNC.org and the Occupational Outlook Handbook activity. The Career Plan also requires students to research professional associations related to their desired career and include links to these organizations' websites. In addition, students submit a resume, preferably including volunteer experience, as part of this step.

The portfolio represents a significant part (40%) of the final course grade. The instructor grades students' portfolios primarily on the following:

##### 1. *Sources*

The information presented in the e-portfolio should come from a variety sources. Students must use either MLA or APA format to cite their sources and include footnotes on each page. Almost every page should have sources listed; a simple link to a website is not a proper citation.

##### 2. *Overall Effect*

While the e-portfolio must contain pertinent information, it should also look professional—it should be clear and well written and demonstrate proper grammatical conventions. It should also have a strong visual appeal in its entirety. Therefore, the instructor deducts points for hard-to-read script, poor color choices, and busy backgrounds that distract from readability.

Students have opportunities to earn bonus points on their portfolio projects. They must provide documented proof for each activity:

- Conduct an interview with someone in their chosen career field. Develop 10 questions about the career, the working conditions, the benefits/fulfillment, etc., and use those in an in-person, telephone, or email interview. Post the entire Q & A in the Career Plan section of the e-portfolio.
- Visit the preferred transfer university in person— a great way to learn more about the campus and meet with a transfer advisor. Include information about the visit (e.g., date, basic details about the interviewee, etc.) and photos of the campus.
- Complete and submit an application for a scholarship or an application to the transfer university of choice.