

ACADEMIC PORTFOLIOS: Realizing the Potential

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The Idea

Would you be interested in a tool that has this potential? It can motivate students to improve their writing skills. It can improve students' focus. It could be used as a cross-disciplinary vehicle. It can help students take greater pride in their written work. It can help students launch their careers. It can impress recruiting organizations. It can help students succeed.

The Tool

What has this potential? The concept of Academic Portfolios appears to provide this potential, and more. Portfolios, as used by artists and photographers, provide a means of assessing the quality of the individual's work. Such portfolios may also be used by other professionals as aids in starting their careers or transitioning between jobs. The portfolio helps reduce the uncertainty associated with hiring an individual (as to his/her capabilities), and firms find this risk reduction appealing. Professional Portfolios also are increasingly used in performance evaluation, as for faculty members. We are experimenting with variants of such portfolios for students at The Citadel. The results have been impressive. In fact, we believe the students using this approach are now realizing the potential described above.

The Details

What might an Academic Portfolio contain, and how might it be packaged? Candidate materials include reports from student internships, senior research project reports, letters of reference/commendation, essays, informational interview reports, certificates of training, resumes and reference lists, articles or poems published in students publications, concise descriptions of duties and responsibilities associated with student leadership positions or summer employment, and virtually anything else that showcases the student's communication skills. The inclusion of work which shows the student's capacity to use word processing, graphics, spreadsheet, and database software is encouraged. Engineering students may include design work. Business students in the Honors Seminar find the series of reports they produce to be excellent candidate material. English students find samples of creative writing appropriate. Work completed outside the student's major is often appropriate, if it demonstrates skills related to the student's career aspirations. Creativity is encouraged; we recently advised a student to include a video he had produced for a class in his portfolio. He did so, very successfully. This expanded definition of portfolio will be increasingly important, to allow for creativity. Some students now include copies of their portfolio on 3 ½" disks, ZIP disks or CDs as part of their portfolios.

The basic portfolio is packaged in a 1" O-ring presentation binder. Black or white binders appear to present best. The transparent cover sheet allows the student to create an attractive title page, identifying name, major (with any supporting areas), month and year of graduation, school, and the portfolio itself (as ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO, COLLEGIATE

PORTFOLIO, or by other appropriate title). Sheet protectors are used, with adhesive tabs to segment contents. A clear table of contents is used, sometimes with abstracts of the contents. While no clear maximum size has been established, it appears that size should be kept to less than 50 pages. Several resumes and reference lists are typically kept in the inside front cover pocket. Some students also slip a resume under the clear sheet on the outside back cover, with some also including a resume near the beginning or end of the portfolio contents. Multilingual students are encouraged to include a resume in each language in which they are proficient.

The Use

The portfolio may be used in the student's interviewing, including the first interview. A reference is made at the end of the student's resume regarding the availability of an ACADEMIC PORTFOLIO, thus the interviewer may ask to see it. If not asked, the student can typically find an opportunity in the interview to introduce the portfolio. While the interviewer will typically not read the entire portfolio, he will review it briefly and may ask to keep it for closer study. The portfolio needs to make an excellent first impression, and needs to also impress under closer scrutiny. Recruiters, often initially surprised by the student's preparation of the portfolio, have had only positive comments regarding portfolio use by students. Recruiters see this as a way for students to distinguish themselves from their competitors. Students are increasingly developing such portfolios, and are being supported by faculty who assign written work, which may fit the portfolio. We also are increasingly advising students how to write for the portfolio, outside the requirements of a class.

Thus?

We are in a period of experimentation. There appears to be a great opportunity for continued development of Academic Portfolios as yet another way to favorably differentiate Citadel students.

For More Information:

Sample Academic Portfolios may be viewed in The Citadel Career Center at 573 Huger Street. For assistance in starting your portfolio, you just need to assemble your works from your college courses, including any internships, that show your strongest relevant skills: writing, analysis, design, presentations, research, etc. Then call us at 953-1618 to arrange a time to review the material and discuss how best to present it in your portfolio. The construction of the portfolio is quite easy and it will also be easy to edit as you add new projects. Based on comments from alumni and recruiters, building and using your portfolio gives you a strong advantage in competing for the best jobs.

Thank You

Sample Portfolio Cover

Academic and Professional Portfolio

Aaron L. Citadel

**Business Administration Major
Management Information Science Minor**

Graduation: May 2010

The Citadel