The Use of Portfolio Advising with Recreation and Leisure Services Majors

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Abstract

Portfolios have been used in other fields for some time as a way to document development of competence and knowledge. Recently, the field of recreation and leisure studies has promoted the use of portfolios, but there is little documentation of their use in the field. The purpose of this article is to share a process used to develop, implement, and evaluate the use of portfolio advising with students in a recreation and leisure services curriculum. Portfolios were used to increase reflection and self-assessment of learning on the part of students, to increase students' sense of self-responsibility for their professional development, to increase students' planning and organizational skills, and to document professional development outcomes. Overall, students felt that they were more organized, could plan better, and could use their portfolios in internship and job interviews to show evidence of their professional development. The portfolios were used less as a tool to reflect on their learning and their professional development process. Recommendations include structuring portfolios into assignments in courses across the curriculum to receive the full benefits from their use.

Keywords: portfolios, advising, assessment, undergraduate students, professional development, recreation education

Biographical Information

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Introduction

Students enter the recreation field from diverse backgrounds and often, with uncertain expectations. Development of the professional self, as well as the reflective learner, is critical to helping students along the path to competent and caring practice. Purposeful methods to facilitate academic and professional development in recreation curricula are needed to ensure that students enter the field prepared. This is especially true given the diverse, eclectic nature of the recreation field and the sometimes short-ened period of time students are in the major, due to the major often being discovered later in students' academic careers. One method that could facilitate the organization and integration of learning in the major, and help prepare the student for the professional arena, is portfolio advising. The purpose of this paper is to describe how a portfolio system of advising was designed and implemented in a recreation and leisure services curriculum at one university.

Portfolios have been used for some time in performance-related academic fields, such as art and architecture, to demonstrate accomplishment or competency (Mokhtari, Yellin, Bull, & Montgomery, 1996; DeGraaf & Jordan, 1996). The historical use of professional portfolios is rooted in the visual arts, where it has been important to portray a sample of one's work. The artist's portfolio is a "display of a public professional self" (Castiglione, 1996, p. 2). In the arts and architecture, the portfolio is used to display carefully selected end products, not to portray progress or process.

More recently, the development of portfolios has been promoted for a variety of professional fields, most notably teaching. The use of portfolios in teacher education has been fueled by the need for educational reform (Adams, 1995). The main purpose of portfolio assessment in teacher education and assessment is the improvement of teaching through continuous feedback and self-reflection (Perkins & Jeffrey, 1993). According to Campbell, Melenyzer, Nettles, and Yyman (2000), portfolio assessment has gained widespread application in teacher education. Pre-service and practicing teachers document progress toward standards of teaching performance by presenting a portfolio of relevant artifacts. Assessment of that progress provides feedback and develops personal responsibility for professional development. According to Campbell et al. (2000), the four critical elements recommended for teacher portfolio assessment systems are: (1) establishing a philosophy and standards, (2) monitoring student learning, (3) mentoring and supporting students, and (4) developing a comprehensive assessment plan.

DeGraaf and Jordan (1996) proposed the use of portfolios as a pedagogical tool in the preparation of students in the recreation, parks and leisure field. They described the portfolio process as a method of helping students plan their career development and to document their career related accomplishments. DeGraaf and Jordan identified both the process of portfolio development and the finished product as benefits of a portfolio system. Because many recreation degree programs have a strong emphasis on experiential learning, portfolios were presented as a useful way for students to interpret the

development that took place from those experiences. DeGraaf and Jordan also suggested that portfolio development would increase personal responsibility on the part of students and provide a means of documenting accomplishments as educational programs move toward competency-based learning.

The term portfolio has been defined in a variety of ways. A portfolio has been described as "a collection of artifacts documenting a student's work and activities over time..." (Ross, 1996, p. 162). Approaching portfolios from a more process-oriented direction, Wolf (1989) discussed portfolios as "biographies of works, a range of works, and reflections" (p. 37). Carroll, Potthoff, and Huber (1996) presented a variety of definitions of portfolios, including "a container of documents"; "a means of collecting"; "whatever the community using the work wants it to be"; "a collection of ...best works"; and "a fusion of process and product" (p. 253). The working definition of a portfolio used by a program should be reflective of the portfolio's purpose. Mokhtari, et al. (1996) presented a fairly broad definition, which would apply to multiple purposes of portfolio advising: "the portfolio is a cumulative record of progress that fosters reflective thinking and can be used for advisement, assessment, and eventual placement." (p. 246).

Purposes of Portfolios

Several purposes for portfolios have been proposed. Wolf (1989) took a very developmental, personal approach to portfolios. She proposed that portfolios were useful to individual artists and practitioners for reflection on the creative process or professional development. A portfolio would thus be a way to reflect on the developmental process and better understand that process.

Portfolios are also used by faculty to evaluate or assess the progress of individual students. Examples include the fields of history (Dougan, 1996), athletic training (Hannum, 1995), recreation and leisure (DeGraaf & Jordan, 1996) and teacher education (Carroll, Potthoff & Huber, 1996; Ross, 1996). Typically, students submit portfolios to faculty, who then assess the students' progress toward meeting professional competencies. The contents of the portfolios are designed to provide evidence of professional competence. The portfolio may be utilized to provide a basis for coaching or mentoring of an individual student (Hannam, 1995). The portfolio process is also useful in demonstrating the type of purposeful approach to program evaluation that faculty should be modeling for pre-professional students (Krause, 1996).

In addition to faculty evaluation of students, portfolios are thought to increase self-evaluation by students (Dougan, 1996; Ross, 1996; Wolf, 1989). The process of accumulating and organizing portfolio contents, and reflecting on those contents, places students in a strong self-evaluation mode.

Portfolios also provide a means of assessing the overall effectiveness of educational programs. Summaries of the contents of individual student portfolios may be summarized into a statement about overall program effectiveness. Development of educa-

tional program portfolios, including evidence that the educational program is achieving its goals or intentions, is a natural extension of the portfolio advising process (Dougan, 1996; Dollase, 1996).

A practical use of portfolios by students is to demonstrate their accomplishments and capabilities to prospective employers (Powell & Jankovich, 1998; Taylor, 1990; DeGraaf & Jordan, 1996). The portfolio may be a useful tool for accumulating evidence of professional competence, helping students better understand their capabilities, and for presenting the individual student to employers.

Upon graduation, recreation, parks and leisure students have diverse employment opportunities in a variety of types of organizations. These diverse career opportunities mean that students frequently need to employ individually unique career development strategies. Also, many recreation degree programs place a strong emphasis on experiential learning. This creates a need to interpret the value of those experiences, so that students can assess their own accomplishments, abilities and needs and for prospective employers to better understand the abilities of job applicants (DeGraaf & Jordan, 1996). A portfolio system has several benefits that are especially useful for recreation, parks and leisure students in addressing these needs.

First, it is a method of planning for career development and readiness. To some extent the professional preparation of each student is unique. The recreation field is broad and each student may be aimed toward a somewhat unique niche in the profession. Portfolio development is a useful means of planning for this individualized career development. As a part of the planning function, students are able to assess their strengths and weaknesses, hopefully looking for career opportunities that will emphasize their strengths and plan for development in those areas of weakness.

Second, a portfolio system assists students and faculty to document the accomplishments of experiential learning components of the curriculum and the student's career development. By documenting and interpreting those experiences, students and faculty are better able to understand how those experiences have enhanced learning and development. Also the documentation and interpretation assists the student in projecting to employers the value of those experiences.

Third, the portfolio system creates a means of discussion and evaluation of students' career development during the academic advisement process. Students in the recreation field often seek career development advice from academic advisors. The portfolio process provides information upon which the faculty advisor can base career development recommendations and also helps the student explore their own answers to those career development questions.

Portfolio Contents

Kieffer and Faust (as cited in Krause, 1996) described three aspects of developing the materials for a portfolio: collection, selection, and reflection. First, the student must

collect or accumulate items for the portfolio, but merely collecting them is not the goal. The student should then *select* the items that are the best evidence of professional development or competence, making the selection with the audience and purpose of the portfolio in mind. Then the student must *reflect* on that professional development, demonstrating self-awareness.

There are four classes of evidence that typically are found in portfolios (Hannum, 1995). Artifacts are documents prepared by the student, such as term papers, case study analyses, or reports. Artifacts are usually prepared for another purpose, such as class requirements, but saved to possibly include in the portfolio. Attestations are the second class, and include documents about the student, such as supervisors' evaluations or a letters of recommendation. Productions, the third class, are items produced specifically for the portfolio, such as reflective writing about one's experiences, strengths, or capabilities. And finally, reproductions are representation*s* of students' past work, such as photographs or newspaper clippings documenting a program that was implemented.

Given the documented benefits of the use of portfolios with students in other fields, a portfolio system of advising with recreation and leisure studies majors was designed, implemented and evaluated at the University of North Dakota.

The Portfolio System at the University of North Dakota

As is typical with many recreation and leisure services curricula, the students at the University of North Dakota take a core of courses common to all students in the major, plus additional courses in an area of emphasis. The students plan the emphasis area courses with their academic advisor and tailor the courses to meet their educational and career goals, in relation to the expectations of the profession. The core and emphasis courses, offered both in and out of the department, have numerous assignments that become increasingly complex and applied as students progress to higher-level courses. Thus, students have the expectation to take an active role in planning their curriculum, for mastering increasingly complex assignments as they progress through the curriculum, and for assuming greater development as a professional as they progress in their major.

The faculty in the Recreation and Leisure Services Program was desirous of developing a system of advising using a portfolio approach. Based on the literature in other fields (Carroll, Potthoff, & Huber, 1996), as well as the recreation field (DeGraaf & Jordan, 1996), it was believed this system would have numerous benefits to the students in the major. The anticipated benefits are listed in Table 1, and included things such as increased self-assessment, increased planning and organizational skills, and increased reflection.

The faculty members also believed that they would benefit from the systematic use of portfolio advising with students. Anticipated benefits for faculty are also listed in Table 1, and included things such as increased thoughtfulness and attention to writing

and other assignments across the curriculum, improved advising, and a more holistic view of the student as a developing professional.

TABLE 1

Anticipated Benefits of Portfolio Advising for Students and Faculty

Anticipated Benefits to Students	Anticipated Benefits to Faculty
• Facilitates self-assessment of learning as students progress through the major	• Provides a more holistic view of the student, as faculty members are able to view the students' work across courses, not just those they teach or those in their own department
• Encourages students to take more responsibility and control in the learning process, helping to shift the locus of control to students from faculty advisors	• Allows for more meaningful, higher quality advising, as students take more responsibility for their own learning and program of study, allowing faculty to focus on more substantive topics during advising
• Facilitates organization and documentation of the assignments students are doing in their courses	
• Allows students to make wiser, more informed decisions in relation to course selection sequence, based on the complexity of the assignments that occur in each progressive course as one factor in their decision-making	• Allows for more systematic planning of writing assignments between courses that builds on previous assignments
	• Increases assurance that students retain and use their writing assignments to their advantage; gives the responsibility of record retention (except official records required by the university) to the student
• Helps the students to reflect on the value the work they had completed, and relate it to their learning and their future professional roles	
• Allows students to integrate their work across various courses, thus helping them see their development of professional competencies and knowledge in a holistic manner	• Provides feedback on teaching and learning
• Serves as a resource of completed work in students' future job search	

Given these anticipated benefits, the faculty set out to design, implement, and evaluate portfolio advising with recreation and leisure services majors. Advising was seen as encompassing both academic and professional development. These steps were followed:

Step One: Educate Faculty About Portfolio Advising And Assessment

The first step was to educate the faculty on how portfolios are used in student development. There was limited work published in the recreation field, so the education literature was used, which was rich with information in the area of authentic assessment and portfolios. An in-service was arranged with a faculty member in the Education Department with expertise in portfolio advising. Once faculty members understood how portfolio advising/assessment was used in other fields, they began the process of designing the system they would use with students in the recreation field, which is described below.

Step Two: Assess, Describe And Document Writing Assignments In The RLS Curriculum

The faculty thoroughly reviewed and documented the writing and other assignments that were required across the curriculum. They analyzed the level of complexity in the common assignments, particularly in the core courses. They judged assignments according to their complexity, as the cognitive demands moved from knowledge, to comprehension, to application, to analysis, synthesis, and finally evaluation (Walvoord, 1986). This review helped to refine the assignments that were being required in recreation courses, aligning the level of the course with the level of complexity required in the written work. The faculty then identified key assignments in the core courses that would be "portfolio assignments," where students would be asked to add these to their portfolios.

Step Three: Design The Portfolio Advising System

Based on what was learned about portfolio advising, and with an increased awareness of assignments across the courses in the major, the faculty developed a portfolio system it felt would best fit the needs of the students in the major. First, the purposes of portfolio use were decided. These were (1) to increase reflection and self-assessment of learning on the part of students, (2) to increase in students a sense of self-responsibility for their professional development in the field, (3) to increase students' planning and organizational skills and, (4) to have a means to document and share professional and academic development.

Second, it was decided what form the portfolio would take. The faculty wanted to use an actual portfolio, versus a typical three-ring binder, to make the process more "real" to students. A professional-looking, six-pocket portfolio, available commercially, was used, which was customized with labeling.

The six pockets of the portfolio were designated for the six areas that were decided to be important for the students to collect work in order to meet the identified purposes.

These included (1) academic program information, (2) course syllabi, (3) assignments, (4) internship information, (5) professional development materials and, (6) certification information. Students were encouraged to collect other materials they felt were important in the documentation of their development as well. Below, each of these six areas in the portfolio is described in detail.

1) Academic information. This section of the portfolio included materials such as status/curriculum sheets (showing progress in the major), transcripts, academic program information, and the college catalog. Its intent was to facilitate self-responsibility on the part of the students in their degree planning and scheduling.

2) Course syllabi. In this section, students were encouraged to collect syllabi from courses that they may need to substantiate knowledge or competencies later, in internship searches, job searches, or certification applications. Particularly, students were encouraged to collect syllabi from directed studies.

3) Assignments. In this section, a "log sheet" was included that listed all the core courses, and a blank entry by each course. The intent of the log sheet was to prompt the student to collect written and other assignments from those courses and maintain an index of them. Also in this section was a "Reflection Guide" (see Table 2), which was to be used to prompt thinking and writing on the part of the students on their progress in learning, as reflected in their work. These thoughts were to be shared with their advisor, at least once during the semester.

4) Internship information. In this section, students were to collect information on all phases of the internship site search, as well as important documentation during and after they completed their internship (weekly reports, hour logs, etc.).

5) Professional development materials. Any information that helped to document the students' professional development was collected in this section of the portfolio. Typical items included resumes, evaluations from fieldwork or volunteer hours, brochures from conferences attended, membership information for professional organizations that the students joined, and more.

6) Certification information. The last section of the portfolio contained information on the CPRP and CTRS certification application. Students were asked to collect any additional information they wanted in relation to certification. For some students, this meant specialized certifications, such as first aid, CPR, lifeguard training, or EMT certification.

The sections of the portfolio were structured, but students were advised that they could redesign the portfolio in any way that best helped them to document their academic and professional growth.

TABLE 2

A Reflection Guide: Questions to Aid Student Review of the Portfolios

Reflection questions:

• As you review the contents of your portfolio, do you observe changes in your work?

• Have your ideas and thoughts taken new directions?

• Can you identify changes in your ability to get your ideas across?

• Are there pieces of work that seem to you to mark turning points in your thoughts or in your ways of expressing yourself?

• Are there pieces that you learned a lot from? That made real changes in you?

• As you go over your portfolio, choose writing assignments that you feel good about. What do you like about them?

• Are there pieces of work in your portfolio that fall short of your own purposes and standards? What about them dissatisfies you?

• Are there pieces of work in your portfolio that reflect assignments that seemed unrelated to your own interests and purposes? Are there ones that felt like "busywork" to you? How do you evaluate those pieces now?

• These are just a sample of the questions you could ask yourself as you review your portfolio. The goal is for you to take responsibility to assess your learning and your ability to communicate in writing.

Step Four: Obtain Review And Feedback On The Portfolio Design

The faculty was interested in the portfolio as a *product* as much as a *process*. That is, faculty members wanted students to use the portfolio as a method of documenting their professional competence to external reviewers, such as prospective employers, as much as they wanted students to use it to assess and reflect on learning. Therefore, prior to implementation, the faculty asked for feedback on the design of the portfolio from an advisory committee, comprised of parks and recreation practitioners representing the diverse areas of the field, as well as student members. Several committee members provided positive feedback. The practitioners expressed that the emphasis on writing was excellent, as this skill was so critical as a professional. Also, the advisory committee expressed that the portfolio would be "impressive to a potential employer," showing evidence of organizational skills and preparation, in addition to the actual work in the portfolio. As employers, they had practical suggestions for the content of a prospective employee's portfolio, which they called "real world assignments." These included such

things as brochures, newsletters, press releases, and public service announcements. Review and feedback on the portfolio design was also solicited from the university Writing Across the Curriculum Coordinator, who felt that the portfolio process and form was thorough and clear.

Step Five: Orient Students To The Use Of The Portfolio

Once the design and review of the portfolio system was completed, faculty oriented students to its use. Through a series of "portfolio advising meetings," students were educated about the benefits of portfolios, and how they would be used in the major. Because faculty members were concerned about students feeling a sense of ownership with the portfolios, they emphasized to the students that they could use the design provided, or come up with their own, as long as documentation, reflection, self-assessment, and self-responsibility were a part of the process. A handout, illustrated in Table 3, was used in the orientation sessions. Students were encouraged to keep the handout in their portfolio, as an orientation aid after the meetings.

TABLE 3

Handout Used to Orient Students to Portfolio Advising

Portfolio Advising in the Recreation and Leisure Services Program

What is portfolio advising?

Portfolio advising is the process of compiling a longitudinal collection of your work as a student, and organizing it in a manner that allows for periodic self-assessment and reflection on your learning in the major. It includes writing assignments, as well as other materials of use to you as you progress in the degree program and move toward joining the professional world.

Why use portfolio advising?

As a student in the Recreation and Leisure Services major, you will take a core of courses common to all students in the major. In addition, you will develop an emphasis area, in conjunction with your advisor, as a means of individualizing your education to best meet your learning and career goals. Common emphasis areas include therapeutic recreation, parks and recreation administration, and outdoor recreation. The core classes are the foundation on which the emphasis area is built. In the core and emphasis area courses, you will complete writing assignments that become more complex and applied as you progress through the major. For example, in the introductory course, "Leisure and Society," you will complete a research or issue paper on a general area of concern or interest in parks, recreation, therapeutic recreation or leisure studies. In a later course, you may complete a program plan for a parks and recreation agency. In another course, you may write a grant proposal for a program area. Other common writing assignments include weekly reaction papers, clinical writing in therapeutic recreation, park management plans in outdoor recreation, and more.

TABLE 3 (Continued)

Handout Used to Orient Students to Portfolio Advising

Because of the extensive and valuable writing done by students in the Recreation and Leisure Services major, and because of the individualization within the emphasis area, a system of advising using a portfolio approach will be used. Portfolio advising offers the following benefits to you as a student:

• Assists you in organizing and documenting the writing you are doing in your courses

• Assists you in conducting an ongoing self-assessment of learning that has occurred through writing and courses as you progress through the major

• Assists you in having more responsibility and control in the learning process, helping to shift the locus of control from the faculty member/advisor to you

• Assists you in making wiser decisions in course selection and sequence, based on the complexity of the writing that occurs in each progressive course as one factor in your decision-making

• Serves as a resource of your completed work for your future job search

• Assists your advisor in the advising process. Advisors are able to gain a more holistic view of your work, as they are able to view your work across courses, not just those they teach or those in the RLS program

How do you use the portfolio?

• Begin to collect your writing and other works from your courses. Use the portfolio (available at the bookstore under RLS 271 course section) to help you organize your work. Suggested writing assignments to collect are given in the portfolio pocket labeled, "Writing," but you may choose to collect others. In addition, you can alter the organization of the portfolio pockets to better meet your needs. The idea is that this is YOUR portfolio, to be of use to you!

• Keep your academic course of study (status sheet) up-to-date and organized. When registration time arrives, you will have a better idea of courses you need to take when you meet with your advisor.

• When you come for advising each semester, **you must bring your portfolio with you**. It is your ticket to advising! Be prepared to discuss the work you have been doing and the changes you may observe in it, as you develop as a student and as a professional. Questions to aid you in reviewing your portfolio are provided in the "Assignment" pocket. Writing notes about your portfolio review and bringing them with you to your advising session each semester would be helpful to reflect on your learning and to share with your advisor.

• Upon graduation, you may want to reorganize your portfolio to use as a tool in your job search.

Step Six: Implement And Evaluate The Portfolio System

The students were asked to begin using the portfolios immediately, and to review and reflect on the items they collected prior to any advising sessions. Portfolio advising orientations were held each semester thereafter for all new students in the major. Portfolios were stocked in the university bookstore and available for majors in the introductory level course. During advising, the student would present and discuss their portfolio with their advisor, addressing areas they felt most valuable in their development as a student and professional. Evaluation of the use of the portfolio system is described in the next section.

Evaluation of the Portfolio System

Methods

A qualitative evaluation approach was used. Each faculty advisor chose approximately five students to interview at least one semester after portfolio advising was implemented. Faculty members each chose the students purposefully, prior to advising, that included a range of students from those assessed as strong students to weak students in terms of commitment and achievement.

For the students sampled, it was first determined if they were using their portfolios. If so, they were asked five open-ended questions: (1) How has the portfolio been useful to you? (2) Has using the portfolio increased reflection on your learning? (3) Have you felt more in control of the learning process? (4) How has the portfolio affected your planning skills? (5) How will you use the portfolio after graduation, if you do? Students were assured that, since the use of portfolios was voluntary and used during advising, their responses to the above questions would in no way impact on their status in courses they were taking. Data were analyzed using a constant comparison approach (Tesch, 1990), looking for themes in the responses to the questions posed.

Results and Discussion

A total of 16 students were interviewed over a yearlong period. Of those who represented a wide range of students in terms of achievement, all but one was using the portfolios. Since the portfolios were not required in any courses "for a grade," it was felt that this was a high rate of voluntary use. The one student who was not using her portfolio had not heard of it, had missed the portfolio orientation, had missed advising appointments, and had missed many classes. This student was unable to respond to the questions posed in the interview, due to her lack of use of the portfolio, and she was not included in the subsequent study.

Students were first asked how *useful* the portfolio was for them. The predominant theme in the student responses was that the portfolio was very useful for them as an organizational tool. Almost all students interviewed commented on its helpfulness in

organizing the many materials they needed to document their progress in the major. According to one student, "It got me organized, it helped me get my important stuff together." Another predominant theme in the usefulness of the portfolios was its role in interviewing at job or intern sites. One student, who reported that she had brought it with her on her interviews at potential internship agencies, stated, "It was like have a security blanket along!" Another student talked about how impressed the interviewer was with her portfolio at her internship interview.

Students were next asked how the portfolio had increased *reflection on learning* that had occurred in the major. Three dominant themes emerged in this category. One was that the portfolio helped students gain perspective of the learning they were experiencing across courses, through their writing. According to one student, "I can see my writing getting better, it helps to look back over it." Another student stated, "It helps me to see how I've progressed." The second theme was that of integration of learning. According to one student, "It pulls things together, connects it all together for me." The dominant theme, though, was that students felt they needed to use the portfolios for a longer period of time to feel they had reflected on their learning at any great depth. As one student stated, "I haven't used it enough yet. Maybe when I get closer to graduation, it will force me to do it (reflect)."

Next, students were asked if they felt more in *control of the learning process* and their progress in the degree program, with the use of the portfolio advising system. Overwhelmingly, students expressed more control in the learning process, except for one student, who jokingly stated, "I never feel in control!" One student's response exemplified the sentiment expressed by most students, "It's easier, it's all here and you know what to do."

When asked if the portfolio advising system had affected their planning skills in the major, all students responded positively. Two factors seemed to facilitate planning for the students. One factor was having clearer information provided. As one student stated, the portfolio "laid it all out." The other factor was that organization was facilitated, which in turn helped students plan. According to one student, "It (the portfolio) forced me to get organized."

The faculty members were interested in how the students planned to *use their portfolios after graduation*, if at all. The predominant theme here was that students would use the portfolio to showcase their work in their academic career. They stated they would use it for job interviews, as a part of their resume, and to help references become familiar with their work. A handful of students stated they would use it to reflect on what they had learned it college. "I'll look at it, see what I've done, what I need to improve."

A major theme that emerged from the interviews with the students was that they liked using the portfolios. According to one student, "I use it a lot. I like it!" Another student stated, "It's a great tool." This was substantiated by the fact that almost all the

students, except one, brought their portfolios with them to advising and had contents in most or all sections of the portfolio.

In sum, the students felt the most benefit from the portfolio advising in the areas of planning and organization, and as a product to use in interviews with intern sites and employers. One student's written comment in her portfolio captured these two dominant themes:

> I believe that our UND RLS Program portfolio is a valuable tool for all students. Many students don't understand the significance of their prior work accomplished in school. Employers don't have much to go on when relying just on applications as a person's ability in written communications. Having a portfolio to display their achievements from their course work is a big plus to prospective employers. The portfolio is a way to organize essential documents such as resumes, school transcripts, evaluations, and certification information. Organization is an integral skill for any professional, and the portfolio is a great tool if used in the way it was intended in our program. I feel that our program should definitely keep the portfolios for incoming students, since it is one way in which we, as students, can centralize our important documents and showcase our hard work.

Although a less dominant theme, some students did use their portfolios to reflect on their learning, to make connections, and to assess areas of continued need. It was clear, though, from the student responses, that most had not yet matured enough with the use of portfolio advising to feel its full benefits. As one student stated, "I haven't used it enough yet to reflect." Given that the recreation major is often a discovery field, where students find and declare the major well into their college career, the reflective benefits of using a portfolio may be limited. This could possibly be addressed by structuring portfolio review at strategic points in courses in the curriculum, forcing more frequent and more deliberate reflection of the portfolio's contents. The self-initiating process that was designed in this study, using once-a-semester review sessions with the academic advisor, which lasted 30 minutes to an hour, may not be enough structure or frequency to receive the full benefit of portfolios for reflection on learning. Structuring portfolio assignments into courses would also provide a more systematic approach to capturing outcome assessment data helpful in program evaluation. Also, it may provide the means to ensure that all students in the major use portfolios. In this program, when portfolios were implemented, most of the students used them regularly. However, there were a small number of students who chose not to participate in the portfolio advising program. Unfortunately, these were the students who could have benefited most from use of a portfolio. By requiring the portfolios within courses, all students could benefit.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The use of portfolios in this program example was found to be very helpful to students in helping them organize their work, plan their course of study, and feel more in

control of their learning. The students viewed the portfolios as useful products to showcase their work to prospective internship sites or employers. The students did not, for the most part, experience portfolio advising as a developmental process, where reflection on learning was a significant part of portfolio use. Although students had collected work in their portfolios that documented the development of professional knowledge and competencies, they had not reflected on *how* they had learned or developed those areas.

For faculty members, portfolio advising helped them be more systematic in how and when writing was assigned. It also helped shift the role of advisors to more of a collaborator with students, than a matriarchal/patriarchal authority figure. Faculty members, too, needed to mature in their skills in helping students process and reflect on their collected portfolio works.

Several recommendations can be made, based on what was learned in this case of development and implementation of portfolio advising. First, portfolio advising could be more effective if it is structured into courses throughout the curriculum, instead of being used only during advising sessions. This would allow for more frequent, systematic use of the portfolio, and allow for the collection of program evaluation data. Also, more attention could be paid to discussion about the students' thinking and learning processes, as they review the portfolio contents in courses. It would be important, though, to continue to have enough flexibility in the use of the portfolios, so that students continue to feel ownership and pride in their own portfolios, and continue to feel a sense of control in their development as professionals. In this spirit, it is recommended that during their graduation semester, students develop a public display and celebration of their collected professional and academic work. A last recommendation focuses on the content of portfolios. The portfolio advising design described in this paper tended to focus on written work. In future use of the portfolio, it would be useful to expand its contents to include more experiential learning (e.g., service learning, fieldwork, videotaped leadership experiences), and more evidence of competency development across an array of areas (e.g., computer skills, leisure repertoire, group skills). This will further enable the student to reflect on their "whole" learning experience, and for faculty to get to know "whole" students to facilitate their professional and academic development.

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