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Career College Students' Perceptions of Portfolios and Their Influence in the Hiring Process

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Career College Students' Perceptions of Portfolios

and Their Influence in the Hiring Process

ANDREA JAMES WEBB, B.A.

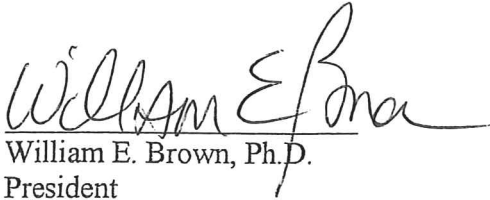
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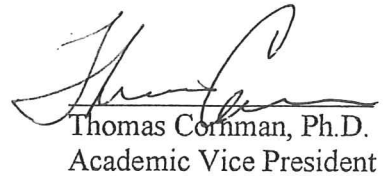
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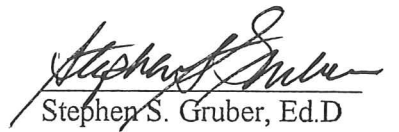
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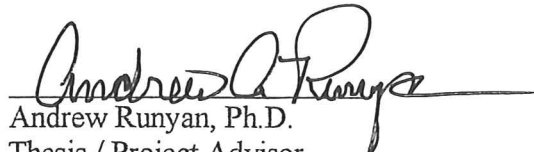
I HEREBY RECOMMEND THAT THE THESIS PREPARED UNDER MY SUPERVISION BY Andrea James Webb ENTITLED Career College Students' Perceptions of Portfolios and Their Influence in the Hiring Process BE ACCEPTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF Master of Education.


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CAREER COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PORTFOLIOS

Abstract

Two-year college enrollment continues to increase to meet the challenges of our changing economy. Due to this increased enrollment, it has become quite evident that more research in the area of two-year colleges is needed. Many two-year colleges have their students complete a portfolio upon graduation, to assist them in the competitive job market. Does the portfolio really help students get jobs? The contents of this paper follow a mixed-method study that involves surveying graduates of two-year colleges as well as interviewing employers who frequently hire two-year college graduates.

Graduates from a number of two-year colleges were asked to complete a 27 item survey with a four-point Likert scale. Employers that frequently hire two-year college graduates were interviewed regarding hiring practices when portfolios are involved. Several themes emerged from both sets of research data, but overall, portfolios continue to be a positive way to assess students, who not only have many differing levels of knowledge, but also differing learning styles in differing disciplines. Portfolios are a positive addition to an interview, so long as the student portfolio includes artifacts that accurately depict what a candidate is capable of doing. Further research could be conducted in the form of a case study, closely following one or two students in the employment process from the initial job search to hiring.

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CAREER COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PORTFOLIOS AND THEIR
INFLUENCE IN THE HIRING PROCESS

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment

for the requirements of the degree

Masters of Education

By

ANDREA JAMES WEBB

2011

Cedarville University

CAREER COLLEGE STUDENTS' PERCEPTIONS OF PORTFOLIOS

Introduction To The Study

Over the past twenty five years, portfolios have gained popularity in higher education. What were traditionally used by artists and musicians to showcase talent, have now become popular as assessment tools. According to Lombardi (2008), portfolios are not only a tool for authentic assessment, but also a means for students to be reflective practitioners emphasizing the how and why, as much as the what. Portfolios provide opportunities for college students to participate actively in learning by thoughtfully selecting materials for entry and engaging in self-assessment. This exercise in self assessment gives students a sense of responsibility for their learning according to Parker White (2005). White (2005) also believes that portfolios can be used across any discipline and tailored to fit students' needs. While these are all benefits to the utilization of portfolios, in addition, portfolios can stimulate reflection which aids students in understanding their own development and learning processes, as well as helping students establish a plan for future learning.

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Portfolios can be a powerful and useful assessment tool when used under the proper conditions. According to Tartwijk, Driessen, Van Der Vleuten, and Stokking (2007), there are three conditions where the success of portfolios can be maximized. The first condition involves creating portfolios that are tied to goals and content, which leads to a meaningful collection of materials for reflection. The second condition involves creation of portfolios to foster a self-directed learning environment in which students are active in the learning process. The final condition refers to how portfolios are introduced to students and faculty (Tartwijk et al., 2007). These conditions are ideal for portfolio use as an assessment. Not only are portfolios a great way for students to reflect, but they are a great way for students to take charge of their learning. Portfolios can be an excellent tool for students as they transition to college, graduate school, or into the workforce.

Portfolios offer an alternative option to standardized tests for assessments. According to Schneider (2009), tests are misaligned: portfolios show what students are working on over time. In addition, portfolios allow for integration across multiple school levels and across multiple disciplines. Students are offered an emerging sense of purpose and direction according to Schneider (2009). After No Child Left Behind and its' focus on standardized tests, Schneider (2009) calls for a move away from admissions reliance

on national tests of general skills, to admissions materials that are closely tied to high school curriculum and to students' academic achievement. Like many others concerned about the Achievement Gap created by standardized testing, Schneider (2009) believes that standardized testing has helped to perpetuate patterns of stratification and unequal opportunity that disfigure our democracy. Portfolios offer a way to assess students that is authentic in that it comes from the student, and not from test prompts which many feel are biased. Portfolios would allow students to showcase not only their academic abilities, but their real-world work experiences as well. According to Powell and Jankovich (1998), employers are looking for communication skills as well as technical, leadership, and interpersonal skills. Due to a competitive job market, Powell and Jankovich (1998) believe that candidates must enhance their ability to pass an initial screening process by demonstrating that they have skills in these areas.

Many two-year schools and colleges implement portfolios as a career services tool to assist students in their job search. Powell and Jankovich (1998) believe that portfolios should enhance students' ownership, pride, and self-esteem. Portfolios should not only enhance these qualities, but a portfolio should enhance students' job searches, and serve as verification of actual education, training, and work skills. Students are required to create and build portfolios as a representation of what they can do in the work world for potential employers. According to Powell and Jankovich (1998), employers

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believe that portfolios give a more accurate picture of a candidate over standardized tests and grades. Powell and Jankovich (1998) state that portfolios should be targeted to employers' needs and designed with employers in mind. A recent survey shows that 75 percent of employers are not familiar with e-portfolios, and fourteen percent felt that portfolios were not valuable in employment decisions (Ward & Moser, 2008). Students work hard to create the perfect pieces for portfolio submission. Are employers really looking?

With two-year college attendance in most states reaching 27 to 37 percent, and two-year college attendance averaging 30 percent nationally, Rosenbaum (2007) states that new research data is needed to serve the new labor market demands. According to Rosenbaum (2007), parents, educators, and policymakers give advice and make policies based on old understandings of college, which may be outdated, misleading, or even harmful. Not only may it be necessary to research how students get jobs after graduation, but Rosenbaum (2007) states that asking career staff if they place students in jobs and how they do so may help two-year college students in the future.

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Definition of terms

Achievement Gap – the difference in performance between low-income and minority students compared to that of their peers on standardized tests. Traditionally; low-income and minority children have not performed as well as their peers on the tests

Assessment – is the process of gathering and documenting information about the achievement, skills, abilities, and personality variables of an individual.

Authentic Assessment – derives its name from the idea that it tests students in skills and knowledge needed to succeed in the real world. Authentic assessment focuses on student task performance and is often used to improve learning in practical areas

Electronic portfolio – is a collection of electronic evidence assembled and managed by a user, usually on the Web. Such electronic evidence may include inputted text, electronic files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and hyperlinks. E-portfolios are both demonstrations of the user's abilities and platforms for self-expression, and, if they are online, they can be maintained dynamically over time

Portfolio – a selection of a student's work (as papers and tests) compiled over a period of time and used for assessing performance and progress

Portfolio Assessment – uses a collection of examples of the actual student's work. It is designed to advance through each grade of school with the student, providing a way for teachers and others to evaluate progress. One of the hallmarks of portfolio assessment

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is that the student is responsible for selecting examples of his or her own work to be placed in the portfolio

Process – documents a student's progress and achievement from initially beginning a task to completion of a task, from first to final draft

Product – showcases a student's progress throughout a class or task, focused solely on a student's finished products and best works

Reflection – a mental process that attempts to structure or restructure an experience, a problem, or existing knowledge

Traditional portfolio – usually a binder containing a compilation of paper documents that highlight or showcase a student's progress over time

Statement of the Problem

While many educational institutions have implemented portfolios into their curricula over the past twenty five years, they have seen how portfolios can be of use as an assessment tool, as well as a tool for transitioning into the workforce. Portfolios may allow for students who would not normally excel on tests to have alternative forms of verification of knowledge and achievement. This may assist students in their job searches as well as in their college application processes.

Graduates are entering a highly competitive workforce now, and they must have some kind of edge over other applicants. Schools have offered opinions about portfolios as authentic assessments of their programs. Employers have offered their opinions about portfolios as well. While educational institutions posit that portfolios are beneficial to students entering the workforce, 75 percent of employers reveal that they are not familiar with certain kinds of portfolios (Ward & Moser, 2008). Are students creating portfolios for grades alone, or do portfolios really assist students in their employment searches? Researchers have yet to study two-year college students and their employment results. According to Rosenbaum (2007), new research data is needed to understand how new college courses, programs, and degrees might have labor market payoffs. More simply, one can ask students whether they obtained their job through school help.

Other similar studies have focused on the effectiveness of portfolios as assessment tools. Studies have also been done to find out how students felt during the portfolio process. While surveys ask how students found their first jobs after schooling, only one survey included school help as an answer, and it only considered high school placement according to Rosenbaum (2007).

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Scope of the Study and Delimitations

My mixed qualitative and quantitative study will examine two-year career college students who have been required to complete a portfolio prior to graduation. The scope of my study will involve identifying students from two-year colleges from several different disciplines or areas of study who have created portfolios, and who have actively been seeking employment. Actively seeking employment is defined as having at least two interviews with prospective employers. Students from two-year career colleges are most likely to struggle in a competitive job market due to the multitude of other highly trained and educated candidates. I will survey students to see what their perceptions of the portfolio are in the hiring process. I am excluding students, who have attended traditional four-year colleges, as well as those two-year college students who have not been actively seeking employment according to the previous definition. I will limit the areas of study or disciplines to four or five which will allow for several different perspectives.

My study will also look at attitudes and opinions of employers and the influence portfolios have in their hiring process. Employers have been previously surveyed about e-portfolios and their assistance as an employment tool. Ward & Moser (2008) found that fourteen percent of employers did not find any value in portfolios as a job search tool. In light of this fact, some students may feel like they have wasted their time in

creating a portfolio that has little effect for them in real life. In my study, I will interview prospective employers to find out what factors do help to influence hiring decisions when prospective employees have portfolios.

Significance of the Study

While portfolios may have been a controversial topic over the past twenty five years, they are still prevalent in our educational system today. Students are required to complete a portfolio to show how competent they are in a field. While students pour much hard work into the creation of a portfolio that is used for a grade, career colleges sell the portfolio as a tool to help students get jobs.

One previous study of two-year college students focused on how students felt during the process of creating their portfolio. Survey questions were centered on feelings of self-confidence, empowerment, motivation, reflection, and pride (Brown, McCrink, & Maybee 2003). While many studies and articles have discussed the effectiveness of portfolios as not only an assessment tool, but a tool that transitions into the workforce, Brown's study focused only on how students felt after creating their portfolio.

My study will take this study one step further to find out if the portfolios created did in fact translate into a position in the labor force. By interviewing students and employers, I hope to see that not only do portfolios increase self-knowledge and

reflection, but portfolios also increase a two-year college student's chances of employment. With the recent influx of two-year college students, future research and preparation will be necessary to learn about what factors will influence these students' entrance into the workforce.

Methods of Procedure

My study will be a qualitative study involving the interviewing of students from two-year colleges, as well as their employers, to find out if their portfolios had any influence in the hiring decision. I will be interviewing six students from four different programs at two different two-year colleges. Students will be recent graduates who have been actively seeking employment, or who have recently earned a new position. Interview questions will be open ended.

The first threat to internal validity is an historical effect. Students who complete the interviews may change their opinions if employment positions are found within the timing of the interviewing. Students who have had interviews and not earned the position may have a more negative opinion toward their portfolios, feeling that their portfolios were ineffective. Likewise, students who have had interviews and earned positions may be slightly more positive, feeling that their portfolios were effective. A second threat to internal validity may be my instrumentation. I have addressed this threat by conducting

several pilot interviews to make sure there are no domain specific questions and no weighted questions.

Threats to external validity include anomalies to the norm and the timing of my interviews. With our current job market being in a down turn, and highly competitive, my study may be open to scrutiny if the job market strengthens or weakens. I will address this threat by conducting my interviews in a timely manner over the course of one to two months, so as not to compromise the accuracy of my study.

Plenary Review of Literature

A review of literature on portfolios and has revealed several different formats and functions for use. From electronic portfolios to the traditional paper portfolio, from the process portfolio to the product portfolio, many educators and employers alike see how important a portfolio is to showcase valid and reliable student-centered learning that transfers to the workplace. Portfolios have been used for years across disciplines to show competency and progress. Not only have portfolios been used as tools for assessment, but they have also been used as an alternative to testing and a tool to assist in the transition from school to the workforce. Many champion portfolios as a way to shift responsibility and focus from the teacher back to the student, offering increased opportunities for cognitive reflection and self-knowledge.

Types of Portfolios

Portfolios come in several different formats and serve several different functions. The first type of portfolio is the product portfolio. The product portfolio holds a small number of documents to exhibit a student's expertise or competence in a field.

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According to Backes & Brown (2009), many use a product portfolio at the end of coursework or training to show what users can do rather than what they have done. Portfolios give a holistic representation of a student's knowledge, skills, and competencies related to their subject area. The product portfolio focuses on the best work of the student, showing items that represent the highest quality created. According to Lombardi (2008), product portfolios are used as evaluative tools for fine arts and creative writing departments to showcase work. Not only can a product portfolio be used in the arts or creative fields, but a product portfolio can be used to show the benefits of a field experience or service learning project as well incorporating assessment with reflection. A product portfolio, according to Brown (2002), should have stand alone evidence of mastery, including connections to program objectives, examples of best work, and documents from culminating experiences. The product portfolio is the avenue through which many two-year college students show prospective employers how their skills can transfer into the workplace. According to Powell & Jankovich (1998), product portfolios show the quality of work students are capable of generating, giving insight to employers about the student's oral, non-verbal, and interpersonal skills.

The second type of portfolio is called the learning or process portfolio. According to Lombardi (2008), the process portfolio shows the growth of a learner over time from a rough draft to a final copy. Studies have shown that teachers are not as interested in the

final product as they are interested in the change, movement, and progress over time.

The process portfolio will not showcase just a student's best works, but rough drafts and revisions done over time will showcase a student's increasing skill levels. Backes and Brown (2009) define a process portfolio, sometimes called a working portfolio, as a compilation of a large number of items or artifacts that fully document activities and competencies. Process portfolios are not only a tool for assessment and reflection, but also a tool that allows for the transference of skills into the workplace. Brown (2002) states that the contents of a process portfolio represent the processes necessary for cognitive growth. Process portfolios allow for interrogation of the learning environment, self-assessment using standards, and transference of learning to the workplace.

Portfolio Formats

While portfolios serve several different functions, like tracking progress over time, or showcasing a student's best work, portfolios also come in several different formats. The first format is a hard copy or traditional portfolio. A traditional portfolio is a collection of papers or documents compiled in an organized fashion and held in a binder. The paper portfolio, unlike its electronic counterpart, does not require any new software or hardware specific knowledge, and does not stress technical infrastructure with a large amount of necessary server space according to Tartwijk et al (2007). While

paper portfolios may be hard to carry or transport, they are also tactile and in many cases more meaningful. A traditional portfolio allows for a student's personal touch, but not so much that it leads to a lack of focus or cohesion.

Electronic portfolios, or e-portfolios, according to Lombardi (2008) are becoming the sophisticated replacement to the traditional paper portfolio. Traditional portfolios can be heavy or burdensome to carry, and only produce one copy, but the e-portfolio allows for easy care and storage. Bollinger & Shepherd (2010) state that e-portfolios allow students to create and store documents for long term projects, motivating students to gain technology, reflection, and content specific skills. Not only can the e-portfolio be used as an assessment tool in the classroom, it can also be a great asset for employers. Ward & Moser (2008) state that e-portfolios can meet assessment goals, serve students' employment and career needs, and provide a valuable tool for employers. 95 percent of the employers, who responded to the survey done by Ward & Moser (2008), said that they would prefer to access e-portfolio information on the Internet. According to Tartwijk et al (2007), e-portfolios allow for the linkage of content through the use of hyperlinks to form a richer picture of student work using Microsoft PowerPoint or a personal website.

Portfolios as Assessment Tools

Portfolios can be used as an assessment tool in many ways and across many disciplines. Portfolios can be used as a summative evaluation of the content learned, as well as a formative assessment tool involving feedback by teachers or peers. Brown (2002) states that creating a portfolio necessitates that students engage in some degree of critical reflection as they identify, analyze, and evaluate their learning experiences. While portfolios can often showcase a student's best work, portfolios can also showcase a student's work over time allowing for coaching or mentoring opportunities. Educators can give feedback and suggestions about how well a student is performing a task. Having guidance and suggestions from teachers could help those students with differing circumstances to excel, using portfolio assessment over that of testing. Teachers can also benefit from the mentoring or coaching aspect of portfolio assessment, as this form of assessment offers opportunities to modify instruction to meet objectives.

Portfolios offer variations in student approaches. These variations provide flexibility in assessment, which aids in meeting the learning orientation needs of each learner. Rather than comparing students to one another in a norm reference fashion, portfolios examine academic growth over time giving teachers, students, and parents a holistic picture of the learner according to Evans, Hawes, & Shain (1999). Portfolios are often assessed with rubrics allowing students to have some idea of how they are going to

be evaluated. Communication, in the form of a rubric, paired with the creation of a portfolio can help students work at their own pace. Expectations and time lines are clearly set. The flexibility of portfolio assessment allows not only for modifications for teacher instruction and differences in student learning styles, but portfolios also offer opportunities to assess students' developing capacity for problem solving, providing a clearer, more comprehensive picture of their learning.

Since portfolios allow for educator feedback, they are ideal for assessing writing, research, and communication skills. Del Principe (2010) states that portfolios are ideal for assessing what a student has achieved in a course as well as assessing what level a student's proficiency is in the content area of writing. Mathews (2004) details the history of the National Writing Project started in 1974 at the University of California at Berkeley. The project stemmed from the notion that repeated drafts and frequent editing were a better way to assess how a student was performing than the old way of grammar and spelling tests. Portfolios allow teachers to assess a student based on his or her best work through drafts and revisions partnered with an oral presentation. Portfolios as a form of alternative assessment can be much more accommodating for students; resulting in a lower anxiety situation that occurs over the course of weeks or months and not in just a one day sitting. Lombardi (2008) says that longer episodes of teaching may be more effectively assessed through portfolios than through single observations; encouraging

important connections between process and product by bridging what goes on in teaching to what is played out in product.

Portfolios differ from standardized testing in that there is openness to the portfolio process. Evans, Hawes, & Shain (1999) feel that portfolio assessments access deeper, more complex and multi-dimensional aspects of student learning that are often untapped by more conventional pencil and paper assessments. While portfolios may be considered more work than testing, portfolios can be meaningful in a way that testing never can be. Students are offered the freedom to express themselves through a portfolio in ways that Scan-tron sheets will never allow. According to Mathews (2004), portfolios of some sort are indispensable if the goal is rich feedback at the individual or school level, while tests are of minimal use as they provide far too little information. Portfolios may give a more accurate picture of the progress of students or districts than what proficiency test scores can give. This more accurate picture is not only important to districts, parents, and students alike, but it is also important to prospective employers.

Portfolios can provide an avenue for prospective employees to showcase examples of what they can do. According to Powell & Jankovich (1998), some employers believe that portfolios more accurately measure a student's achievement than standardized tests and relate more directly to workplace skills than grades and courses taken. Portfolios are also a great way to begin a dialogue about what kinds of skills will

be most important when entering the workplace. Employers can ask questions and prompt prospective employees with just a few documents from a portfolio. According to Mathews (2004), the value of a portfolio resides in the wealth of information available and the various conversations that can be had about the work of the portfolio creator. A portfolio may help an employer to see much more depth and potential in a candidate than what a test score would communicate by assisting the prospective employee in giving a more meaningful and thoughtful response.

Not only are portfolios a useful assessment tool for teachers and employers, but portfolios are a way for students to reflect and take responsibility for their own learning. Students may use their portfolio as a way to self-assess, playing an active role in the assessment process. Tartwijk et al (2007), state that portfolios fulfill a role in the learning environment that challenges and stimulates students to act as active, self-directed learners. Portfolios strengthen the cognitive process known as reflection and assist students in developing their own metacognition. Since portfolios stimulate and challenge students as self-directed and active learners, many believe that portfolio assessment is not only a positive way to assess a student's achievement, but also a real and authentic way to assess what a student knows and doesn't know.

Authentic Assessment

Educators strive to assess students in a real way that most directly measures their aptitude in performing a skill or their application of knowledge gained. Unlike standardized testing, portfolio assessment comes out of a student's own classroom experience or practice. Many refer to this kind of assessment as authentic assessment. According to Mathews (2004), the idea of authentic assessment, evaluating children based on an in-depth examination of their work rather than their scores on standardized tests, goes back a century to the beginning of the progressive movement in education. While many even over a century ago thought portfolios were time consuming, many educators appreciated portfolios and their ability to emphasize research skills and creative thinking skills instead of testing. While standardized test scores can aid in ranking students and districts, they are hardly able to offer much information in regard to how students can perform real life, authentic tasks. According to Evans, Hawes, & Shain (1999), portfolios track student progress over time providing assessment results not in a static snapshot of learning, but in an image of authentic ongoing learning. Examples of some authentic learning outcomes are inquiry, collaborative skills, and critical thinking and problem solving skills which are demonstrated through portfolio activities and involve either the application of a skill or content mastery. Portfolios can be used to

assess student achievement in an authentic way by incorporating these real life skills and providing more direct evidence of learning through the performance of real life tasks.

The process of creating a portfolio encourages a more student-centered learning environment which allows students to progress toward the goal of being lifelong learners who are able to adapt to change. Portfolios allow teachers the opportunity to assess students in real and more meaningful ways. Students and teachers both can appreciate the amount of work that goes into the creation of a portfolio, and the pride that comes from the finished product. Evans, Hawes, & Shain (1999) found that while students felt that portfolios were more work than exams, they were more thought provoking and personally rewarding.

Advantages of Portfolios

Much has been written over the past twenty five years about portfolios and the benefits of their implementation to teachers and students. Many aspects of portfolios make them versatile as not only assessment tools, but as employment tools that can transition into the workplace. The benefits of portfolios in many ways can be attributed to creation process and how meaningful learning can be to not only students, but to teachers as well.

As assessment tools, portfolios have many a positive impact. Portfolios allow learning to become student centered and engender different types of learning which can be more engaging than a student's day to day classroom learning. Lombard (2008) says that portfolios structure experience, which shifts responsibility for learning back to students. Students have a choice in their own learning. Portfolios allow for opportunities to be creative, giving students the ability to offer more to learning than what is asked for on a test or exam. The process of portfolio creation for students increases the value of learning. In fact, according to Klein-Collins & Hain (2009), putting a portfolio together is a learning experience and an empowering process.

Portfolios can be aligned with standards in the same way that standardized testing can, which is beneficial to teachers and students alike. According to Brown (2002), through the process of portfolio creation, students can begin to see how standards are being met through classroom activities. Expectations are clearly outlined for students in the form of a rubric. Goals are set for students and they can monitor their own progress toward meeting those goals. In this way, students can take charge of their own learning improving their ownership and pride in completing tasks or applying knowledge.

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Portfolios allow for rich feedback from teachers. Communication, discussion, and collaboration become the norms used in portfolio assessment. Students use discussion and communication as avenues to facilitate feedback from teachers. Feedback, used for coaching or monitoring, allows students to navigate their way through learning tasks. Guidance from teachers offered at intervals throughout the learning process allows for the demonstration of growth over time, which is where some believe portfolios to be the strongest tool. According to Evans, Hawes, & Shain (1999), portfolios track student progress over time providing assessment results not in a static snapshot of learning, but in an image of authentic ongoing learning.

Brown (2002) states that learning takes place through act or insight. Insight may occur through collaboration with peers or through discussion with teachers. Insight may also occur through the process of reflection. Reflection in the portfolio process can lead to an increased awareness of a student's own self knowledge, or metacognition. Being aware of one's own learning can increase a student's potential to think and learn. Cognitive reflection is an important skill for students to utilize; empowering students to evaluate and critique their own learning experiences making it clear to them what is known and not known. Thus learning becomes engaging and participatory which is another dimension of portfolio implementation that can be beneficial.

Portfolios are effective as discussion and reflection tools, but students also utilize organizational skills in creating their portfolios. In many cases, students are allowed the

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freedom to select their best works to go into the portfolio. Critical reflection allows students to organize items in their portfolio that best showcase how their classroom tasks meet learning objectives. The selection process involved in creating a portfolio can strengthen students' transferable skills, making students more organized and more marketable to employers. According to Brown (2002), one of the advantages of portfolio implementation is that the portfolio process itself facilitates skills in organization and self selection of evidence in support in student learning.

While portfolios are advantageous and beneficial as assessment tools, portfolios can also transition from an educational setting to the workplace. Candidates for available positions can utilize a portfolio to demonstrate evidence or mastery of a skill. Artifacts are organized in a way that a prospective employer can see a candidate's best work. Powell and Jankovich (1998) maintain that portfolio creation increases self-esteem, which can be beneficial to candidates as they interview.

Many two-year colleges implement portfolios to aid students in transitioning from school to the workplace. With the influx of enrollments currently happening in two-year colleges, portfolios become the avenue with which students compete with other graduates of four-year institutions. According to Powell and Jankovich (1998), portfolios act as a verification of education, training, performance, skills, and accomplishments. Verification is then compiled into an organized and ordered fashion for a prospective

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employer. Potential candidates have a way to market themselves to a prospective employer using their best work showcased within a portfolio. With advances in technology, the invention of the e-portfolio has allowed students to quickly and easily distribute their information to employers as well.

Portfolios allow potential candidates to showcase their best work and verify a number of skills and accomplishments, but portfolios can also assist a potential candidate in an interview. Priest (2010) states that using a portfolio to answer an interview question can be beneficial in that the portfolio leads to a well thought out answer with an immediate example. Prospective candidates with portfolios may not have to frantically think about answers and examples because the process of creating a portfolio has already allowed for reflection and selection of best work. While a portfolio may be helpful in creating thoughtful responses to interview questions it may also assist candidates in the communication of their professional goals and future objectives.

Portfolios can give potential candidates the confidence to not only explain and discuss where they've been, but to also communicate where they want to go in the future.

One of the last advantages of portfolios is their versatility as not only an assessment tool but as a professional workplace portfolio. Portfolios can also assist an employee who already holds a position in a company. A workplace portfolio or professional portfolio can assist an employee in compiling projects or tasks that he or she

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has completed from all areas of a company. An employee that works in marketing, but that also worked on a project in a different area, accounting for instance, may want to incorporate proof of those experiences into a professional portfolio. The portfolio may be used further down the road to gain a pay raise or promotion. An employee's ability to showcase versatility and their ability to perform a variety of different functions within a company will definitely be able to negotiate for a higher wage or a better position.

Disadvantages

Advocates for portfolios make a considerable argument for their effectiveness as assessment and hiring tools. Strengthened interpersonal, organizational and technical skills are just some of the more positive benefits gained from the creation and use of portfolios. Many educators and career service advisors alike use portfolios as a way to assist the two-year college student in the classroom and in an interview setting. There may, however, be some disadvantages to the use and implementation of portfolios.

Attempts to assess students in an authentic way by showing progress over time, may have compromised the effectiveness of the portfolio. Revisions and multiple attempts to complete assignments may not present a true or authentic picture of what a student can do. Lombardi (2008) states that the emphasis on best work may misrepresent a candidate's work so as not to give a true picture of competency. Some educators and employers might tend to focus on the finished product, sweeping over the revisions that

show the steps of progress toward the goal. The tendency to focus on the finished product can also be uncomfortable for students.

According to Tartwijk et al (2007), reflection may be hampered because students may be reluctant to show their less successful efforts at specific tasks and reflect on what they can do to improve. While in many cases portfolios are used to showcase students' best work, portfolios can also be used to show progress in a task over an interval of time. Students may be bothered to show a rough draft to a teacher or a prospective employer over the flawless finished product. When utilized as a product portfolio alone, the portfolio may be used only as a way to show off instead of showing the stages of progress made. Lombardi (2008) states that one disadvantage of a portfolio is that it can become an exhibition piece, losing effectiveness as an evaluation tool.

Students may be choosing interesting topics and taking control of their own learning, but another disadvantage is that while topics are interesting and students are more engaged, students cannot write or orally communicate how they think or feel about that interesting topic. According to Mathews (2004), students may choose great topics, but if the student doesn't know how to say something regarding the topic, isn't that the more important issue? Mathews says that having students display their strengths is fine,

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as long as they learn to read, write, and do math capably before they graduate. The portfolio is a great way to showcase learning, and many believe that learning does happen throughout the portfolio process; however, there is a possibility of losing sight of learning objectives.

Choosing interesting topics for a portfolio can be both an advantage and disadvantage, but selecting items for display that are trivial or incohesive can also be a disadvantage. Students who create electronic portfolios can sometimes be guilty of too much personalization which can lead to a confusing collection of items that do not work together to demonstrate competency. The same is true for students compiling a traditional portfolio. Selection of items that help to create a cohesive picture for a prospective employer may be the most effective use of the portfolio. Careful selection of items is encouraged as a traditional paper portfolio can be cumbersome to carry.

Since portfolios are student centered, many of the disadvantages are focused on students and their choices. The final disadvantage of portfolio use deals with how portfolios and employers assess the value of a portfolio. According to Del Principe (2010), teachers and employers alike have different ways of approaching the assessment of portfolios. The nature of the portfolio process is creative and open, allowing a number of options for which testing doesn't allow. Portfolio assessment then can be subjective and open to interpretation based on the assessor. According to Brown (2002) one of the

disadvantages of portfolios is that inter-rater reliability is not always evident. Teachers and employers have their own opinions of what types of documents in a portfolio are the most valuable. Differences of opinion may not be considered when portfolios are assessed by more than one person. A rubric is used in portfolio assessment, but rubrics can be more subjective than the right or wrong answer on a test.

Del Principe (2010) discusses the impossibility of creating a truly holistic assessment of a portfolio because instructors inevitably consider one text in light of another. Instructors make decisions grounded in weighing the parts, rather than gathering a dominant impression of the whole. Employers may also consider several documents in a portfolio over the whole. Resumes, letters of recommendation, or examples of work may overshadow the entire portfolio and its cohesive statement. While the stakes in an interview with an employer may seem high, classroom grades and the differing assessments of teachers can have lasting consequences.

While training and well defined assessment criteria may assist assessors in coming to a consensus regarding the assessment of a portfolio, other factors can affect grading as well. Similar to many other areas of life, past experiences, cultural and social differences, as well as physical or emotional factors like fatigue can affect how portfolios are graded or assessed. According to Johnson (2008), assessor judgments might be influenced or framed within the context of their experience which might help to explain

any observed differences in perspective. Instructors who have developed a relationship with students on a more personal level or instructors, who want to create more positive relationships with co-workers, may be swayed in their assessments, based on outside knowledge or pressure. Thus, assessment of portfolios is not always as objective as what some tests scores may be.

The advantages and disadvantages of portfolio use are definitely something to consider when discussing their effectiveness as assessment and hiring tools. Two-year colleges implement portfolios to assist students in obtaining employment, but portfolios may not always be a positive tool for students or prospective employers. Literature suggests both positive and negative aspects of portfolios as hiring tools. Similar studies have been done, but none have looked specifically to graduates and their true results from interviewing.

My study will hone in on the two-year college graduate who created a portfolio and interviewed for a position to find out real results. In a majority of cases a portfolio may be very beneficial, but in other cases a portfolio may be a time consuming and ineffective waste. The history of two-year colleges is a rocky one with many revisions and policy changes developing in the past twenty years. Are two-year colleges and their implementation of portfolios really assisting students in obtaining employment? Only two-year college graduates truly know the answer to this question.

Methodology

Similar studies about two-year colleges have been conducted using surveys or questionnaires and interviews as well. Many studies have focused on portfolios and the students' feeling about the process of portfolio creation. Other studies have focused on inter-rater reliability and consistency of portfolio assessment, while other researchers have focused specifically on employers and their familiarity with the electronic portfolio. In all of these studies, researchers have used both interviewing and surveying as viable ways to obtain research data.

Introduction to the Method

My study will be a mixed method study using both a qualitative interview and a quantitative survey. Using interviews from employers, I hope to gain insight into several factors that assist in hiring two-year college students. Employers are presented with a portfolio in some cases, but do portfolios make any kind of impression when a hiring

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decision is made? In my study, I will question employers about the factors that most influence their hiring decisions.

The second part of my mixed method study will focus on two-year college graduates and their portfolios. I will be using a questionnaire to allow students to express attitudes and beliefs about the portfolio and its use as a hiring tool. My questionnaire will allow for concise information from two-year college graduates and their experiences using a portfolio in the interviewing process with potential employers. Previous studies have looked at employers specifically or career services specifically, very few have looked at students specifically. The studies that have been done regarding students and portfolios looked at how the process of creating portfolios enriched a student's experience by increasing self-esteem and confidence. In my study, I will look at these perceived advantages and disadvantages to find out what is really happening when a two-year college grad leaves school to enter the competitive workplace.

Rationale for the Method

A mixed method study was chosen to allow for different kinds of data to be collected. While other studies that have been done have been conducted in similar ways, the flexibility to interview and survey participants gives the best chance of uncovering very real information regarding portfolios and student perceptions. No previous study has truly questioned students about whether or not a portfolio has helped them in their job

search. And while many employers have been asked about portfolios in general, none have been asked specifically about two-year college graduates.

Rosenbaum (2007) states that new research data is needed in regards to two-year colleges. Not only do we need to research and analyze the effects of delayed enrollment, the use of college prep or remedial courses, the reasons for mobility from school to school, the fields where there are labor market payoffs, but we need new data about two-year colleges and their preparation of students for the marketplace. My study will look at one aspect of this needed data; two-year colleges and their preparation of students for future employment.

Rosenbaum (2007) states also that the research of many of these issues requires institutional information that is often difficult to gather and interpret. Rosenbaum further states that research needs to examine a great number of issues that are not being studied at all or are studied in insufficient detail. The mixed method study allows for data collection from two distinct groups who can contribute distinct data.

Two-year college graduates may feel more strongly one way or another about portfolios as hiring tools. A survey will allow students to share those stronger opinions without the ability to offer unwanted information about disappointments with schools, teachers, or employers. A structured survey will allow for a more focused response that solely relates to portfolios.

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Employers and human resources personnel may have varied experiences with portfolios. An interview of prospective employers allows for the free flow of information that may uncover themes or trends in portfolios and their use as hiring tools. Employers have more years of experience as well as a number of varied experiences that may have exposed them to portfolios in many different formats from many different institutions. A survey would not reveal the same amount or type of information that an interview would reveal. For these reasons, my study will be mixed method with a quantitative survey of students and a qualitative interview of employers.

Population of the Study

My target population for my mixed method study is two-year college graduates who completed a portfolio, and their prospective employers. The students I will survey come from the West Central Ohio area and have graduated from a two-year career or community college and have completed a portfolio for graduation. Many of these students will have studied disciplines like landscape design, graphic design, medical assisting, licensed practical nursing, paralegal studies, and many other fields.

The population I will be interviewing is prospective employers that hire students who are graduates from these fields of study. Many of these employers partner with schools in the area to obtain new employees with the necessary training and credentials to

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perform specific jobs. Gaining access to these employers may be a challenge in such tough economic times. Many employers have been inundated with calls about open positions due to the recent numbers of unemployed workers, which has made some employers opposed to receiving and cooperating with research interview requests.

Sample

For my survey, I am interested in studying two-year college students who have completed their portfolio. My sample will be pulled from this population of students. According to Rosenbaum (2007) about 30 percent of college students nationwide attend a two-year school or community college. Other statistics about enrollment and attendance suggest that from right after high school up to eight years later, students who initially attended a two-year college, a majority do not graduate.

The rationale behind selecting this sample of the population is born out of the idea that students from two-year colleges, who have completed a portfolio, would have some kind of experience to share in regards to their portfolio. While career services representatives can assist students with their job searches, many do not have firsthand experience of interviewing with a portfolio in hand. Students do have this experience and will hopefully share some insight into whether or not portfolios help them to be more successful in an interview. Rosenbaum (2007) states that simply asking students would be one of the best ways to gain new research data.

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Employers have a unique perspective as well, knowing what factors can truly influence hiring decisions. Employers see two-year students and how prepared they are for the interview process. While some factors cannot be controlled by career services or by portfolio creation, some employers may be privy to factors that are stronger than others of which we may not be aware. The semi-structure interview will be a way to uncover important insights and information.

My study involves surveying a specific population, so my method of sampling began at those two-year colleges or institutions. My study uses the purposive sampling method where those participants who did not meet the criteria were rejected. The selective sampling, while not convenient, allows for a specific group of people to be studied and those who do not belong to that group are not included in my study. I will contact 77 two-year college students from five well known two-year institutions.

Since my study involves surveying two-year college students and interviewing prospective employers, both methods of sampling were purposive, targeting just those participants meeting the required criterion. I will be contacting 77 employers of two-year college graduates who completed portfolios.

Statistical power in conducting a survey that has 27 questions with a 4 point Likert-type scale will come from a response rate similar to other studies that have been conducted. Brown's study (2003) was conducted on a much larger scale surveying 1,227 students and having 348 responses, or a 28 percent response rate from students who were

non-traditional college students that had completed a portfolio. Brown's study was 24 questions with a four point Likert-type scale that looked at students' portfolio experiences in regard to communication and organizational skills, as well as emotional impacts, like an increased understanding of themselves. Brown partnered her quantitative study with a case study of 8 students. My quantitative study will be paired with a qualitative round of interviews involving employers of two-year college graduates.

Procedure

The instrument that I will be using in my study to measure data is a 27 item survey with a four point Likert-type scale using Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree, Strongly Disagree. Questions that measure similar content are grouped and similar answers are expected to be given for those items. Since there will be only one administration of the survey, and no time will pass or changes will be made, the test of reliability using internal consistency works best with my study. The same will be true for my interview questions. Similar questions are grouped to maintain consistency.

A mixed method study will allow for more in-depth data that may give more detail than just a statistical measurement. Using a focused questionnaire, my study will provide the numbers that many feel help to validate a scientific study, while the interview and qualitative study will provide description that may not otherwise be present.

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Pilot Study

For my pilot study, I interviewed three career college graduates who had completed a portfolio. One student was gainfully employed, and the other two students were not employed. Asking similar questions to those on the survey instrument, I was able to see results that were similar to what was expected. The instrument used for the pilot study had 30 questions that were semi-structured for the interview. Interviews were recorded and transcribed.

Data Collection Methods

Data for my complete study will be collected by both survey and interview. Interviews will be conducted by one other assistant and me, and will be recorded digitally and transcribed, then coded by my assistant and me to help ensure inter-rater reliability. Consistency in coding will be constantly evaluated and calibrated as the study moves into completion.

The mixed method study will involve no harm to participants. Survey participants will be asked to complete the survey, and will have a consent or release statement on the survey itself. Employers who will be interviewed will not be exposed to any danger or harm, and will be given an informed consent in written and verbal form before the interviews take place. All participants have agreed to participate and have

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agreed to the release of information verbally or with written consent. No other ethical considerations need to be addressed.

Many two-year schools have implemented portfolios to assist students in the competitive marketplace. Many employers suggest portfolios as a way to stand out from other candidates. In my study, I will see what student perceptions really are when it comes to portfolios and gaining employment. The employers I will be interviewing will offer insights into what kinds of portfolios are being presented in which fields, and if in fact portfolios are beneficial in the hiring process.

Safeguards to validity include the generation of a data trail. Interviews will be digitally recorded and transcribed. Some forms of member checking were used during the interview process with paraphrasing of answers to confirm understanding, as well as discussion off the record as a whole. Many employers and students alike have opinions on the effectiveness of portfolios as hiring tools.

Based on the research that has been conducted previously, many two-year colleges seem to offer a similar college experience, including training, job placement assistance, and the implementation of a portfolio to assist students in not only assessment, but in obtaining employment. My sample population, I feel, is representative of the larger population. Similar return rates on surveys and interviews in comparison to other studies that have been conducted may help in justifying conclusions for generalization to the larger population. Reliability and validity measures that strengthen the significance

or power of my study are in place and should assist in the allowance of comparison, the sample population to the whole.

Results and Analysis

A study was conducted to determine whether or not portfolios assist two-year college students in gaining employment. The mixed-method study involved interviewing potential employers of two-year college students as well as surveying two-year college students who had completed a portfolio.

Seventy seven individual students from a variety of two-year institutions were contacted as well as the career services departments of five two-year institutions. Of the 77 students contacted, 20 responded to the survey. All respondents were two-year college graduates who had completed a portfolio. Surveys were done in person and by electronic mail to specific individuals. The 27 question survey was divided into three sections: questions about forming the portfolio, questions about portfolios and interviewing, and questions about portfolios and the participant's school. Participants in the survey were given a four point Likert scale with the following options: Strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree. Demographic information was also collected in regard to institution, program, age, sex, ethnicity, and income level. Twenty students responded from a variety of two-year institutions. Respondents studied a variety

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of disciplines as well, including Paralegal Studies, Law Enforcement, Private Investigation, Business Management, Medical Assisting, Medical Billing and Coding, Landscape Design, and more. The table below shows the breakdown of demographic information, focusing on the number of students from each institution and discipline area.

Disciplines	Institutions						
	Miami Jacobs	Columbus State	Harrison College	ITT Technical	DeVry	Power Sport Institute	Other
Legal Studies	4						
Criminal Justice	1			1			
Business			1	1	1		1
Medical Studies		2					2
Mechanical/ Industrial						1	1
Other							4

Table 1. Survey Demographic Information

N = 20

A space was also left available for personal opinions or other information to be expressed. Survey results will be organized in a table divided in the same way as the survey design. Survey data was analyzed using the central tendency measure of mode. Percentages of acceptance or rejection are also shown with Strongly Agree and Agree being combined and Strongly Disagree and Disagree being combined.

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Survey Results

A full listing of survey items including the original survey can be found in the Appendix. The first eight survey items were questions about forming the portfolio. The following table shows the percentages of respondents' answers that accept or reject attitudes as well as the mode or most given answer to questions about how their portfolios came together.

Item	Percentage Accept	Mode
More than 5 hours on portfolio	80	n=11 agree
More than 1 opportunity per assignment	75	n=9 agree
Best Effort	100	n=12 strongly agree
Every assignment included	75	n=12 disagree
Graded assignment	85	n=10 agree
Given a rubric	65	n=7 agree
Items that did not go	55	n=10 disagree
Resume is most important	75	n=11 agree

Table 2. Survey Results for Survey Items 1-8

N = 20

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The second set of survey items, 9-19, dealt with portfolios and the interviewing process. The table below will show the percentages of respondents' answers in regard to their experiences in an interview and their perceptions of a portfolio as a beneficial or futile.

Survey Item	Percentage Accept	Mode
Prepared for interview	90	n=10 agree
Employers ask to see portfolio	50	n=8 agree
Shown portfolio even when employer didn't ask	50	n=7 disagree
Two interviews after completing program	85	n=11 strongly agree
Disappointed if not shown to potential employer	60	n=10 agree
As important as any other factor in hiring	70	n=9 agree
A portfolio would influence my decision if I were hiring	80	n=11 agree
Positive response when shown	80	n=10 agree
Not important to have portfolio in an interview	80	n=13 disagree
Prospective employer commented on portfolio and contents	65	n=11 agree
Some items in portfolio were more important to interviewer	70	n=9 disagree

Table 3. Survey Results for survey items 9-19

N = 20

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The final set of survey items dealt with questions about the portfolio and the institution that students attended. Items 20-26 and the respondents' percentages of acceptance or rejection are listed in the table below:

Item	Percentage Accept	Mode
True reflection of knowledge	60	n=9 agree
Other ways to showcase work	75	n=11 agree
Electronic components	75	n=10 disagree
Utilized career services department	75	n=8 agree
Prepared for the competitive marketplace	90	n=13 agree
Offered job placement	60	n=8 agree
Portfolios vs. test scores	70	n=13 disagree

Table 4. Survey Results for Survey Items 20-26

N = 20

Several questions from the survey instrument yielded very interesting responses. Item three in table number two had a response acceptance rate of 100 percent. When asked if students put their best effort into their portfolios, the answer is a resounding yes. The second item that received a sweeping response was item 5 in table two. Eighty-five

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percent of students surveyed said that their portfolios were graded assignments, though not as many said that they were given a rubric about grading criterion.

A majority of students said they felt prepared to interview in today's competitive job market, and a majority have had two or more interviews since completing their programs. Even though 75 percent agree that there are other ways besides the portfolio to showcase work, 80 percent of our respondents felt like they had received positive responses when showing their portfolios. In regard to readiness, 90 percent credited their schools with preparing them for the competitive marketplace.

Item 27 was a prompt allowing for any comments that students may have wanted to share. The chart below lists the positive and negative themes that came from those answers:

Positives	Negatives
Does help in an interview to organize thoughts	Not asked for usually, may have to be initiated
Shows strengths of training, hours of practice	Don't have to have it
Like process, organizing thoughts/confidence	Not the only way to showcase talents

Table 5. Most Frequently Given Responses from Open Ended Survey Item #27

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Interview Results

Interviews were also conducted as part of the mixed-method study. For the study, 77 employers were contacted as well as five two-year institutions. Ten responded for interviews. The table below gives a demographic breakdown of the employers interviewed.

Disciplines Number	Legal Studies	Business	Education	Mechanical/ Industrial
	Employers Interviewed	1	4	1

Table 6. Employers Interviewed and their fields of expertise

N =10

These ten participants, who have hired two-year college students previously, were interviewed to discuss what factors assisted them in the hiring process. Employers were asked about portfolios and if their use in an interview can be effective. Responses were transcribed and coded to analyze data. Themes that emerged from our interviewee responses are listed below and will be addressed more fully in the paragraphs following the bulleted list.

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- Portfolios help in organizing the interviewee in forming interview answers. Students who have created a portfolio have taken time and prepared for an interview just through the process of creating the portfolio. While portfolios do have positive features, they are not the only way to showcase talents and abilities.
- Portfolios and two-year schools do prepare students in the marketplace.
- Portfolios help to show a student's capability to learn in the future, which is important to prospective employers who plan to further train employees.
- Portfolios may be welcomed in some fields but not in others. In fact, those hiring candidates in the business field felt that a portfolio could positively affect a hiring decision.
- Portfolios are tangible and can give insight into character, work ethic, and personality that grades cannot give.

Portfolios Organize the Interviewee

One of the most significant themes that emerged from our prospective employers was the idea of portfolios and their use as an organizational tool. Each one of our employers felt like portfolios were a great tool to assist prospective candidates in providing well thought out answers. Portfolios helped candidates organize their thoughts

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making them seem better prepared over other candidates. While a majority of our employers felt that portfolios were a good tool for organization, many also mentioned that there have been some portfolios presented to them that were unimpressive. One employer said that, “You can’t just slop something together and call it a portfolio.” Not only does organization matter, but the way content is presented is also important. Employers appreciate a portfolio that is compartmentalized, making it easy to access the most important documents. An employee who shows care in how his or her portfolio is presented can say more about that person than the contents of the portfolio itself.

Portfolios Not Only Factor

All of our employers said that there were other ways for students to showcase their work abilities apart from portfolios. Several of our employers mentioned wanting to see more professional letters of reference, as well as a list of grades and course descriptions. While resumes are useful in presenting some kind of personal biography, employers also agree that resumes can be manipulated and ‘beefed up’ to the point that other forms of verification are needed, including letters of recommendation, grades, and awards.

In the interviews, all of the employers gave examples of other ways for potential candidates to showcase skills and abilities. Grades can be skewed either by instructors

and curved grading, or by students who may have cheated to get the grade that they needed. A portfolio provides something tangible that prompts questions about courses and gives insight into knowledge that a grade on a piece of paper cannot offer.

While many offered examples of ways to showcase talents and abilities, some other factors were mentioned as hiring influences. Body language and appearance were mentioned, as well as attitude, personality, and politeness. While many may think that organization, qualifications, and work references are the most important factors, in many cases, the ability to communicate future goals and show initiative can also influence a hiring decision.

Two Year Schools Do Prepare Students for Marketplace

When asked if two year schools prepare students for the competitive marketplace, all of our employers agreed that two year institutions do an acceptable job of training and educating students. Two year degrees are beneficial and in many cases are a good place to start, however, our employers also spoke of the importance of continuing education and the importance of goals and life plans. One employer said, "I know four-year graduates who don't work well, and I know two year college graduates who are phenomenal workers, length of schooling is not a good basis for a hiring decision."

Our employers found two year students to be comparable to four-year students or to some as well who have had no further education. Specific training in a specific field

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where a portfolio may be valued is where a portfolio may be the most effective.

Students, who have two year business degrees and are applying for positions, may want to showcase projects or awards from classes in business, human resources, and accounting. While students who are aspiring graphic designers or fashion designers may want to showcase some of their more creative talents and abilities in a portfolio. There are some fields of study, like the legal or the mechanical or industrial fields, however, where a portfolio seems unnecessary.

Portfolios Show Learning Capability

Another theme that emerged from the interviews dealt with attitude and willingness to learn. Not only were prospective employers concerned with attitude and willingness to learn the nuances of a profession, but employers were also concerned with a prospective candidates' capability to learn. All of our employers mentioned the importance of training and being open to learning. Employers felt that two years schools that offered a specific training did a good job of educating and preparing students for the workplace, however, other fields could benefit from the full four-year college experience.

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Portfolios and Effectiveness by Discipline

Several of the interviews were excellent, offering strong insight into the perception of two year college students as candidates, and the use of portfolios as hiring tools. The employers who hired business candidates seemed to encourage the use of portfolios, while the other fields were focused more on resumes and previous work experience. Portfolios, according to all of our interviewees, are a great way to show what a candidate can do. Business employers seemed to be interested in the professional aspects of a portfolio and how a portfolio can include client letters, blueprints or drawings, pictures, created documents, and a variety of other materials that can demonstrate a kind of professionalism that goes beyond a resume. One of the interviewees said that, "Anybody can write anything down on paper as far as a resume goes, but if you can actually see the body of work then it's much easier to make a hiring decision that way."

When asked about hiring a two year degreed person with a portfolio or a four-year degreed person without a portfolio, one of our interviewees said, "Anyone can get a four-year degree, I guess, but we look for more of what is your skill set and what is your experience. In the landscape industry we look more at what you've done and as far as documentation, I can't think of anything that would make a difference." According to this employer, the documentation of a certain skill set, through a portfolio can make a

difference in the hiring decision. The portfolio may very well be a factor that gets a two year degreed graduate hired over a four-year degreed graduate.

Other employers, who were not in the business field, seemed to have little or no opinion on portfolios as hiring tools. Four of the ten employers said that they would hire a candidate without a portfolio; this includes employers from the legal field and the mechanical or industrial field.

Portfolios Give Insight into Personality

The final theme that was uncovered in the interviews was the fact that portfolios give insight into a candidate's personality. Looking at a potential candidate's grades or a resume is great, but the information does not lend itself to insight into a person's character or personality. Portfolios, because they allow for some creativity, can shed insight into a potential candidate's personality that may help to influence a hiring decision. Even the smallest things may influence hiring, newspaper clippings from a local paper, where a candidate received recognition of some kind, may show a potential employer what kind of personality, character, and work ethic a new hire may have. One of the employers interviewed said, "Even if it's something small in a portfolio that shows compassion, or a little bit about their personality, that's something that I can't train; I can't train somebody to be who they are." Not only does a portfolio offer insight into a

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potential candidate's character, but the portfolio does help candidates stand out in a prospective employer's mind. According to one employer, "The portfolio that a potential candidate shows makes a difference and puts a stronger focus on who they are in my mind over someone who doesn't show a portfolio, that person is moved to the forefront of my mind." Portfolios not only offer insight, but they can potentially show an employer that a candidate may want the position more than other candidates.

Discussion and Implications

Portfolios seem to be a positive addition to the educational experience whether they are implemented as an assessment tool or a hiring tool. Two-year schools are now more widely chosen by college-age students for their affordability, their mobility options, and their specific training that is less time consumptive. While students need to have some training to be successful in such a competitive job market, many are looking for a cheaper and more streamlined alternative to the traditionally exhaustive and expensive four-year option.

Due to this influx of two-year college students, previous research has suggested a need for new data in areas that address mobility, attendance rates, job market trends, and if in fact two-year students are being employed. The need for new research data in this area prompted my study. Brown's study (2003) looked at students and their feelings throughout the process of creating and completing their portfolios. Much of her research was positive, stating that the process gave students confidence and feelings of empowerment. My study has taken this research a step further, looking at the aspects of portfolio creation that are positive and negative, while attempting to gain a new

perspective from students demonstrating for us what really happens between graduation and gainful employment.

Interpretation of Results

The results from my study were consistent with what was discussed in the literature that I reviewed. Not only were the responses what I expected to see, they were resounding. The literature discussed how time-consuming portfolios are to create, but also how personally rewarding they are for students. My study shows that 100 percent of students put forth their best effort in compiling their portfolios.

The literature that I reviewed also discussed the positives of portfolios as hiring tools. Not only did my survey responses confirm this fact, but the employer interviews did as well. Ninety percent of students feel prepared to interview, and that same number of students feel like the institution they attended prepared them to be successful in the competitive marketplace. The employers I interviewed said similar things. While many did say that a portfolio is not a necessity, the benefits of having a portfolio far outweigh the benefits of having only a resume. Those employers in the business field encourage portfolios in addition to a resume.

Employers felt like a portfolio was beneficial to a prospective employee because it offers a way to organize and tangibly present skills, talents, and abilities. Students did

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convey a concern regarding employers and the portfolio discussion. Half of the students from the survey said that employers did not ask to see their portfolio. Additionally, half of the students said that they initiated the portfolio discussion when an employer did not. While several students suggested that a portfolio was their way to shine over other candidates, the fact that employers do not always ask to see the portfolio can be disappointing. Sixty percent of the survey respondents stated that they would be disappointed if a prospective employer did not ask to see their portfolio.

The literature suggested that portfolios were an alternative way to assess students apart from standardized testing. My study seems to confirm this fact as well. Not only did 85 percent of the survey respondents have their portfolio as a graded assignment, several students discussed the effectiveness of the portfolio as a tool to show hours of training and practice time. One student mentioned that the portfolio was a tangible showcase of her strengths and is beneficial to her in her present career. In my review of literature, I found that portfolios may more accurately measure a student's achievement over a standardized test and more directly relate to workplace skills. Both survey participants and interview participants confirmed this fact. Students agreed that the portfolio was one way to showcase talent, but not the only way. Employers felt like the portfolio was one way to showcase ability, but that professional references were a better way to gauge a candidate's ability. While 75 percent of students I surveyed feel like a

resume is important, employers suggest that resumes can be manipulated, and are not the only factor that helps them in making a hiring decision.

Much of my findings in the review of literature were confirmed or corroborated by the survey participants' responses and the employer interview responses. For a prospective employer, and a recent graduate in a job search, an organized presentation of training, practice, skills, and abilities can only be a positive addition to the preparation that goes into education and the subsequent job search.

Potential Applications of Findings

There are many potential applications of the findings from my study. While employers are familiar with many two-year institutions, several expressed an interest in forging those employment relationships for the convenience of having potential candidates with training and a capability to learn. Many employers could benefit from beginning to foster relationships with two-year colleges and vice-versa. Two-year college students are trained in a more specific way and fit best into several specific fields of study like business. Employers may also be encouraged to more frequently ask to see a portfolio. From the employers that were interviewed, many expressed their positive regard for students with portfolios, but because not every student has one, many have become accustomed to not requesting a portfolio.

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Many two-year schools might also like to take this information and do further studies – even on a larger scale - due to the increase in two-year college enrollment. Not only are the numbers for two-year college enrollments increasing, but the demand for an educated and driven work force is even more prominent now in the competitive job market. For this reason alone, many schools might benefit from some kind of portfolio implementation. The positives associated with portfolios as both assessment and hiring tools can only further assist two-year college students.

Schools may use this information to increase the effectiveness of their portfolios based on the comments made from the potential employers interviewed in my study. Schools may also want to look at portfolios and how they are being used as assessment tools. The one disturbing response from my study was that only 65 percent of the 85 percent that were graded received a rubric detailing grading criterion. Clear expectations for a portfolio may make them more effective as assessment and hiring tools.

Biblical Integrative Component and Implications

Portfolios as assessment and hiring tools in many ways seem to be accommodating to a Biblical worldview. Everyone has innate talents and gifts of the Spirit. Whether students are being graded, or judged as candidates for positions of employment, the freedom to express and showcase their talents is an integral driving

force behind portfolios and their implementation. Portfolios can also assist those who have differing levels of abilities in competing with other students or candidates. Instead of focusing solely on what a student can do on a test, portfolios allow a kind of freedom of expression and creativity that again is accommodating to the Biblical worldview.

As Christian educators, assessment can be a challenge. Many struggle with giving students failing grades or zeros. While many are forced into grading structures that are not accommodating of the Biblical worldview and Image of God, portfolios offer an assessment option that meets students on their own levels of ability. Much like Christ meets each one of us where we are.

Strengths of the Study

The main strength of my study is the in-depth look at a unique population of students. Not only did my study involve contacting two-year college students, but two-year college students that met a certain criteria. The fact that employers were interviewed to offer another perspective only strengthened what data was collected from the college students. According to Rosenbaum (2007) new research data is needed to gain insight into the two-year college students and two-year college practices.

My study was founded upon solid literature and conducted in parallel fashion to another study that considered non-traditional college students. My study was conducted

and designed with several issues in mind that have been previously addressed including ethical considerations, validity issues, and reliability issues. Rosenbaum (2007) states a strong need for new research data in regards to the two-year college student, and my review of literature corroborated this statement. Not only does this demonstrate a need for new data, but also it strengthens my study by communicating the lack of present data, and the need or importance of any findings regarding two-year college students and employability.

Limitations of the Study

Though my study was limited, there are several strong findings that others could continue to build upon in the future. My study was limited because, even though portfolios may assist students in gaining employment, there are many other factors that affect those hiring decisions. Presentation, goals, attitude, politeness, and the manner in which interview questions are answered are just some factors that may influence hiring outside of preparation and portfolio creation.

Several other limitations are the fact that the sample sizes were smaller, and with larger sample sizes, findings could possibly change. A changing job market with increased employment opportunities may also change answers if this study was ever replicated under different economic circumstances. Even though portfolios in some ways

can assist in assessing students who have different levels of ability, in some cases, a student's lowered ability may still be glaringly obvious, making null some of the strengths of assessment.

Suggestions for Future Research

Since every study has some form of limitation, further research in this area can only be that much more beneficial. From my study and review of current literature, I can recommend that there be more research conducted in this area, only because the current data is lacking. One concerning factor was the lack of communication of clear expectations with a rubric that usually accompanies a portfolio. Many students and employers alike may benefit from the communication of clear learning or performance objectives. Portfolios can be a great benefit, but care must be taken in the implementation. One student surveyed said that portfolios were implemented for her two months before her graduation. Haphazard implementation not only makes for messy or poorly organized portfolios, but rapid implementation without foresight can also be damaging to students' and the school's reputation.

While Rosenbaum (2007) states his concern about the need for more research of two-year college students, I concur. As a professional working in the two-year college

environment, I definitely see a need for more research data in this area. Student enrollment in two-year colleges is steadily, if not rapidly, rising. Completion rates for two-year schools are not favorable and some of the reputations of schools are failing. A future researcher could study the reputations of failing two-year colleges and how their students are affected in the job market. One two-year school in the area has been brought before some of the governing bodies and state policy makers to explain why their graduates cannot get jobs in the local marketplace. Another school in the area changed its name to create a new reputation for itself, even though ownership of the institution did not change. Another avenue of research could be the necessity of reform of these proprietary schools, since twenty-five plus years has passed since the last overhaul.

Two-year college students have been recently flooding the job market and the trend may be increasing in the years to come. Not only does further research need to happen for when these students enter our job market, but continuous research should be encouraged, as every two to three years graduates from the two-year colleges will be entering the job market and changing its dynamics once again.

Appendix

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Survey Instrument

Portfolios As Hiring Tools Questionnaire

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<i>Questions about forming the portfolio</i>				
1. I spent more than five hours on creating my portfolio.	1	2	3	4
2. I was given more than one opportunity to complete assignments for my portfolio.	1	2	3	4
3. I put my best effort into my portfolio.	1	2	3	4
4. Every assignment that I completed was included in my portfolio.	1	2	3	4
5. My portfolio was a graded assignment.	1	2	3	4
6. I was given a rubric for my portfolio that outlined grading criteria	1	2	3	4
7. There were items that I wanted to include in my portfolio that didn't go.	1	2	3	4
8. My resume is the most important item in my portfolio.	1	2	3	4

Question	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<i>Questions about portfolios and interviewing</i>				
9. I feel prepared to be in an interview.	1	2	3	4
10. When I have interviewed, prospective employers have asked to see my portfolio.	1	2	3	4
11. I have shown my portfolio in an interview even though the employer did not ask to see it.	1	2	3	4
12. I have had at least two interviews after completing my program.	1	2	3	4
13. I would be disappointed if a prospective employer did not ask to see my portfolio.	1	2	3	4
14. Portfolios are just as important in an interview as any other factors that influence hiring.	1	2	3	4

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15. If I were an employer, a portfolio would influence my decision to hire a candidate.				1	2	3	4
16. I have had a positive response each time I've shown my portfolio to someone.				1	2	3	4
17. A portfolio is not that important to have in an interview.				1	2	3	4
18. My prospective employer commented on my portfolio and its contents.				1	2	3	4
19. There were items in my portfolio that were more important to the interviewer than others.				1	2	3	4
Question				Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
<i>Questions about portfolios and your school</i>							
20. A portfolio is a true reflection of my knowledge.				1	2	3	4
21. There are ways to showcase work other than a portfolio				1	2	3	4
22. My portfolio has electronic components.				1	2	3	4
23. I utilized the career services department when I was in school.				1	2	3	4
24. My school prepared me for a job in the competitive marketplace.				1	2	3	4
25. My school offered job placement.				1	2	3	4
26. In my opinion, test scores are a better indicator of workplace ability than portfolios.				1	2	3	4
27. Please use this space to share your experience with portfolios and interviewing.							
<i>The following questions are demographic, please choose which one best describes you:</i>							
28. Gender						Male	Female
29. Marital Status					Other	Single	Married
30. Income level				\$0-25,000	\$25000-50,000	\$50000-75,000	\$75000-over
31. Age				18-25	26-36	37-48	49-over
32. Ethnicity	Other	Native Hawaiian	Asian	Caucasian	African American	Native American	Hispanic

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You are being asked to take part in this study by completing this questionnaire. Information given on this document will be used in the thesis project of Andrea Webb. Your participation will take approximately 10 to 15 minutes. Please be aware that you are not required to participate in this research and you may discontinue your participation at any time without penalty. You may also omit any items on the questionnaire you prefer not to answer. Your responses will be provided anonymously to protect your privacy.

Sign and date if you choose

Survey Data

Disciplines	Institutions						
	Miami Jacobs	Columbus State	Harrison College	ITT Technical	DeVry	Power Sport Institute	Other
Legal Studies	4						
Criminal Justice	1			1			
Business			1	1	1		1
Medical Studies		2					2
Mechanical/ Industrial						1	1
Other							4

Demographic Information

N = 20

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Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
More than 5 hours on portfolio	5	11	4	0
More than 1 opportunity per assignment	6	9	4	1
Best Effort	12	8	0	0
Every assignment included	1	4	12	3
Graded assignment	7	10	0	3
Given a rubric	6	7	6	1
Items that did not go	1	8	10	1
Resume is most important	4	11	4	1

Survey Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
Prepared for interview	8	10	2	0
Employers ask to see portfolio	2	8	5	5
Shown portfolio even when employer didn't ask	4	6	7	3
Two interviews after completing program	11	6	0	3
Disappointed if not shown to potential employer	2	10	7	1
As important as any other factor in hiring	5	9	6	0
A portfolio would influence my decision if I were hiring	5	11	3	1
Positive response when shown	6	10	4	0

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Not important to have portfolio in an interview	2	2	13	3
Prospective employer commented on portfolio and contents	2	11	4	3
Some items in portfolio were more important to interviewer	5	9	5	1

Survey Item	Strongly Agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
True reflection of knowledge	3	9	7	1
Other ways to showcase work	5	11	4	0
Electronic components	0	5	10	5
Utilized career services department	7	8	3	2
Prepared for the competitive marketplace	5	13	2	0
Offered job placement	4	8	6	2
Portfolios vs. test scores	1	4	13	1

Demographic Item 1	Male	Female
Gender	6	14

Demographic Item 2	Other	Single	Married
Marital Status	0	15	5

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Demographic Item 3	\$0-25,000	\$25,000-50,000	\$50,000-75000	\$75,000 - over
Income Level	8	8	3	1

Demographic Item 4	18-25	26-36	37-48	49-over
Age	7	9	4	0

Demographic Item 5	Other	Native Hawaiian	Asian	Caucasian	African American	Native American	Hispanic
Ethnicity	2	0	1	17	0	0	0

Demographic Item 6	Business	Legal Studies	Industrial Studies	Law Enforcement or Security	Medical Studies	Communication	Other
Area of Study	4	4	2	2	4	1	3

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Employer Interview Instrument

Release of Information and Disclosure Form

I voluntarily agree to participate in the interviewing process for Andrea Webb and the Cedarville Graduate program. I understand that this interview is being conducted by Andrea Webb, the researcher, or one of her assistants to improve portfolios and hiring processes at two year colleges. This research is also the basis of her master's thesis.

I understand that the interviewing methods which may involve me are:

1. the researcher's questions followed by my digitally recorded responses regarding hiring two-year college students with portfolios in a 20-30 minute interview
2. my understanding and agreement to terms discussed on this form

I grant permission for the interview to be tape recorded and transcribed, and to be used only by Andrea Webb for analysis of interview data. I grant permission for the research data generated from the above methods to be published in a report to Andrea Webb and the Cedarville University Graduate Program in the form of a thesis and for future publication(s).

I understand that any identifiable information in regard to my name and/or agency name will only be used for Andrea Webb's research purposes, that is, this information will *not* be listed in the thesis or any future publication(s). Materials will be stored for two years then destroyed.

I understand that at any time during this process, I am free to choose not to participate or terminate participation.

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Interview Questions for Master's Thesis Project – Employer

1. What are some of the factors that help you to make a hiring decision?
2. In your opinion, does a prospective employee with a portfolio have a stronger chance at gaining employment than a prospective employee that has a resume and no portfolio?
3. Do you have any kind of close working relationships with two year schools that allows you to easily hire their qualified students?
4. Are there documents that you would like to see in a portfolio that some two year college students may not have in theirs?
5. Do you feel that two year schools prepare students for the competitive marketplace?
6. In your field, how important do you think a portfolio is for a new hire?
7. In about how many interviews would you say that you ask to see a portfolio?
8. Has a prospective employee ever shown you a portfolio without you first initiating the sharing of that material?
9. Does a traditional portfolio hold any more weight in hiring than an electronic portfolio? Do you have a preference?
10. Do you find that prospective employees that do have a portfolio put together much better and more thought out answers than others who do not have a portfolio?

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11. Have you ever found a prospective employee's portfolio to be a negative influence on the hiring process?
12. What are some skills that you think go along with the creation of a portfolio?
13. In your opinion, between having test scores and grades, or having a portfolio, which do you feel gives the best or truest representation of a candidate's knowledge?
14. Do you believe there may be other ways to showcase work other than a portfolio?
15. Competitively speaking, which is the better equipped candidate, one who has finished a four year degree or one who has completed a two year degree and holds a portfolio?
16. What three items do you feel are the most important items in a portfolio?
17. Are there professions that you typically hire that do utilize portfolios?
18. How many years have you been in a position to interview and hire?
19. Age
20. Ethnicity
21. Gender
22. Highest level of education completed

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Employer Interview Data

Disciplines		Legal Studies	Business	Education	Mechanical/ Industrial
		Employers Interviewed	1	4	1

N = 10

1 Factor in hiring	Personality, attitude, polite, how they answer questions, desire for the job, prepared, willingness to work	Organization, qualifications, work reference, background	Body language, appearance, presentable	Communicate goals and show initiative
2 Portfolio vs no portfolio	No, resume, experience, and how they answer questions	Yes, and organization matters (9) shows body of work, anyone can write something on a resume, but portfolio is verification		
3 Close w two year schools	No (6)	Yes (4) with a four year school, not opposed to a relationship with 2 yr college, tech school, Columbus State, Ohio State, Sinclair		

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4 Documents in portfolio	Nothing specific (8)	Yes (2) Qualifications, list of courses with syllabi, grades or awards, past employer letters, show body of work		
5 Two year schools do prepare students	No (3) Depending upon position	Yes (7)		
6 Important for new hire	No (4) Not that important cause I would still hire someone without a portfolio	Yes (6) Very important, critical		
7 Ask to see it?	No (3)	Yes (7)		
8 Shown without initiating	No (3)	Yes (7)		
9 Tradition vs. electronic	No preference (6)	1 Electronic	3 Traditional	
10 More thought out answers		Yes (10) More professional, more prepared, know more about job, skills already present, absolutely, definitely, can say what they can do and show it too		
11 Negative influence	No (7)	Yes (3) Too much info, unorganized or messy, watch presentation		

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12 Skills for portfolio creation	Care for how they want to present themselves, learning the prospective employer, knowing what you have	Creativity, Microsoft Word, Organizational skills, composition, work experience	Completed program, writing, organization and job specific tailoring, communication and confidence, logic	Tells a lot about the person
13 Grades/scores vs portfolio	Grades not so important at executive level, grades and test scores (2)	Performance, portfolio yes when done correctly, grades can be skewed (6)	Both (2)	
14 Other ways to showcase work	No(3)	Yes Resume, awards, examples of previous work, resume and professional references, experience, presentation (7)		
15 Four yr degree or two year with portfolio	Two year with history and portfolio (3)	No difference or doesn't matter (5)	Four Year (2)	
16 Three items	Resume, list of accomplishments, work history, list of classes,	Skill level, knowledge of job, drawings, photos, client letters	appearance	
17 Professions that have portfolio	Management positions (2)	Business and accounting, sales and fashion design, technicians, counselors, designers and estimators (7)	None (1)	

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18 Years of hiring exp.	20, 25, 15, 5, 8, 10, 14, 35, 15, 46			
19	56, 68, 63, 48, 48, 32, 33, 50, 32, 41			
20	Caucasian 10			
21	6 males	4 females		
22	High school 3	College 5	Masters 1 Masters plus	Other 1 Juris Doctorate

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