Choosing the Right Assessment Method: Portfolios

Definition:

A collection of multiple student artifacts that displays a student’s cognitive and/or affective learning in a course or in a sequence of courses. Colleges typically utilize portfolios in assessment to examine a student’s development and change over time. There are two types of portfolios: Hardcopy portfolios and E-portfolios.

- **Hardcopy Portfolios:**
  - An attractive collection of printed artifact samples which could be packaged in a three-ring binder, leather attache case, or portfolio case.
  - Typically the pages of the portfolio are printed on high-quality paper.

- **E-Portfolios**
  - A collection of student artifacts with the potential to display not only writing samples, but also design skills and professional images in an online format.

Advantages:

- Can be used to view student learning and growth over a period of time.
- Multiple components of a program’s curriculum can be measured (e.g., writing, critical thinking, creativity).
- The grading of portfolios provides instructors with an excellent opportunity for program feedback and discussion amongst faculty members on how to improve their program.
- Issues that may cloud assessment results, such as student test anxiety or one shot measurements, are avoided.
- Provides students with a record of their own work and growth throughout a sequence of courses or program.

Disadvantages:

- Time-consuming for faculty to assess.
- Because a rubric is used, establishing reliable and valid grading criteria is challenging.
- Different content in student portfolios makes evaluation difficult and faculty may require training.
- If a hardcopy portfolio is collected, the artifacts are bulky to manage and transport.

Ways to Reduce Disadvantages:

Derived from Reedley College’s Assessment Workbook and the University of Connecticut’s SLO webpage.
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• Require students to submit portfolios as part of a course requirement at the end of a program.
• Collect a representative sample of portfolios, instead of collecting portfolios from all students in all sections of the courses included in the assessment.
• Establish inter-rater reliability before the commencement of the assessment. Faculty who will be scoring the portfolios should meet and each assess 5 to 6 of the same portfolios using the rubric. Whenever faculty grading differs on a portfolio, the differences should be discussed and faculty should come to a consensus on what level of work constitutes a score in each category of the rubric. Essentially, by the end of the meeting, all faculty should be grading the portfolios in the same way and ending up with the same scores for each.
• Recognize that if faculty do not specify specific artifacts to be included in the portfolio and students are allowed to choose what to include, students may only include their best work.