

Reflections on a Digital Portfolio

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Abstract

Employers and admissions offices are increasingly asking for evidence of skills, ability, passion, and knowledge when students apply for a job or a graduate program. A digital portfolio is a convenient, creative, and effective way to house a living resume that consists of samples, artifacts, and past projects. This presentation and article will feature a few samples from my own digital portfolio with reflections on how each sample highlights my work ethic and research interests. My samples fall into the categories of creative works, research interests, design elements, and professional writing.

A digital portfolio is a great tool students can use to reflect on the work accomplished during their college courses and to provide tangible proof for skills and expertise listed on a resume. Miller and Morgaine (2009) note that reflections in a portfolio are extremely valuable to student learning. The authors argue these reflections can help students build their professional and academic identities, facilitate learning across a span of courses, develop self-assessment abilities, and identify personal academic pathways. E-portfolios represent a shift to student-centered active learning in higher education, where the student is asked to reflect on their educational experiences and connect classroom learning to life goals (Clark & Eynon, 2009). My digital portfolio uses four categories to showcase my academic abilities and organize my reflections that span from my freshman to senior year: creative works, research

interests, design elements, and professional writing.

To introduce myself, I am currently a senior English: Writing Studies major with two minors in Government & Political Affairs and History. After I graduate, I plan on attending a master's program for History and Archival Studies. My academic interests include women's history, transitional justice strategies, and gender politics. This portfolio will serve as my personal website as I work through graduate school and into the job market. I will link my portfolio to my LinkedIn and any professional social media accounts I make in the coming years. I am hoping I can add a link to my portfolio in every resume/cover letter I send to a potential employer to further market myself as a valuable candidate.

My first section, creative works, showcases two samples of creative writing. My first sample is from a course called The

Craft of Writing, where my classmates and I were tasked with writing a prologue for a nonfiction novel on any topic; I decided to write a prologue for a book about knitting. My creative writing and language skills are demonstrated in this piece, which may distinguish me from other academics working in the History field. The second sample in this section is a collection of postmodern poems created in a Creative Writing class that focused on postmodernism and invention; one of these poems can be found in Appendix A. Each piece in this category uses a different technique: collage, denaturalization, synoptic novels, or projectivism. I gained a deeper understanding and appreciation for language and writing throughout this course. The samples highlight my love for playing with language and meaning. I approach history with a postmodern mindset: the definition of truth and knowledge is always up for debate.

The second section of my portfolio highlights my research interests. Throughout my college career, whenever I've had the option to choose my own research topic, I always explore something to do with women's history or gender politics. While my portfolio will include six samples under this category, I want to highlight one that has helped me reflect on my learning and connections to my goals. My first sample is a visual essay titled "Women in Reality" which was created Summer 2019 following my study abroad experience in Dublin, Ireland. The class' focus was on women in 20th century Ireland and how we could deconstruct many of the common, accepted historical narratives that either ignored or erased Irish women. This sample, a portion of which is in Appendix B, highlights my analysis and writing skills because I take complicated issues and historical moments and synthesize the connections into one essay. Like other samples in my portfolio, this essay demonstrates my research interest

in women's rights and women's experiences as relayed through our historical narratives as well as my writing skills and analysis abilities. This sample represents the kind of academic work I would love to do someday as an archivist or historian.

The third category of my digital portfolio is related to the many design projects I have worked on throughout my college career. This is a category that makes my skill set unique and is something that I want to showcase as I move on in my career. The collection of advertisements found in Appendix C showcases a variety of posters directed at students about upcoming events, new courses, reminders, and new degrees related to the English department. I worked closely with English faculty as well as graduate and undergraduate students to create posters/flyers that best fit their message. My samples highlight my ability to work effectively with other members of my department as well as my ability to cater to specific audiences. I hope that these design samples will make me stand out as I apply for graduate assistant positions in graduate school.

The final category of my digital portfolio showcases my professional writing samples, which includes blog posts, a report, and a newsletter. The newsletter was written and edited with a publishing audience in mind for an Editing for Publication course; the first page can be found in Appendix D. The newsletter covers topics such as why we need more women in publishing, the organization WISP, the history of women journalists, the gender gap in publishing, Ms. Magazine, and women publishing women. This sample, like many others in my portfolio, focuses on women's experiences. There are also some design elements that match my design category. While creating this sample, I learned much about the process of writing and designing a print newsletter. I could have just as easily written these kinds of articles

for an online publication without the strict limitations of a page, but this format forced me to be especially intentional with space and language. This sample highlights my ability to write for a professional audience in a professional format, such as a newsletter, which is a skill that could serve me well in a graduate assistantship in graduate school.

Working on my portfolio has helped me reflect on all the work I have completed during my four years at Millersville

University. I entered college at 18, right out of high school, and now I am 22, heading to graduate school after completing my degree at Millersville University. Over that four-year span, I learned what it means to be an academic, a writer, and a creator through the coursework and job opportunities I have worked through. This portfolio highlights some of my best work and my growth into someone who can achieve her goals.

References

- Clark, J. E., & Eynon, B. (2009). E-portfolios at 2.0 – Surveying the field. *Peer Review*, 11(1), 18-23.
- Miller, R., & Morgaine, W. (2009). The benefits of e-portfolios for students and faculty in their own words. *Peer Review*, 11(1), 8-11.

Appendix A

Excerpt from WOMAN by Rachel Hicks

_____riters G_ive V_ice t_ their R_ge
 _r_ft _f b_ks, b_th ficti____d ____ficti____, ex__i_ed ____e_'s ____ger fr__ pers____l ____d
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By P_ul Seh_g_l

____v. 24, 2019

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Appendix B

Excerpt from Women in Reality by Rachel Hicks

Section 3: Erasure

Women in Irish history have been purposefully erased from the canon of history. Until recently, the historical attention in Ireland has focused on the Irish narrative through the white male perspective. These two photos argue that in multiple instances, women have been censored or removed from the larger Irish narrative in a way that is harmful to women living in Ireland today. The first photo was taken in the EPIC museum in an exhibit about Margaret Sanger and the history of women's reproductive health in Ireland. Sanger was born to Irish immigrants in New York City and spent much of her life fighting the effects of censorship on women's health. First as a nurse Sanger saw the effects of lack of information about reproductive health through the rampant spreading of STDs in the tenement houses and the aftermath of botched self-abortions. Later, Sanger spearheaded the fight for the end of censorship surrounding contraceptives, abortion, and women's health. This image highlights the amount of censorship Sanger's Birth Control Review faced throughout its publication. While Sanger herself was not erased from history, her information was most definitely kept from women living in Ireland. This lack of information continues to effect present-day women: the most restrictive abortion laws in the whole world existed in Ireland's Eighth Amendment which was only reversed in the 2018 abortion referendum.

The second photo is a more literal example of women's erasure in Irish history. This photo was taken on Saturday, 29 April 1916 as Commandant-General Patrick Pearse surrendered to Brigadier-General William Lowe. However, this is not the real photograph, but the image published and distributed throughout Ireland at the end of the 1916 rebellion. Elizabeth O'Farrell, the person who carried the white flag and the message of surrender, was standing next to Pearse, though her feet were ultimately airbrushed out of the picture. There is no reason for her absence from the picture besides the purposeful removal of women from the narrative of the rebellion. Today, the 1916 Easter Rising is portrayed as a man's fight; women have yet to receive the amount of recognition they deserve for their part in the fight for independence. It is discouraging for women living in Ireland to not see their peers creating history, but as objects acted upon or mere cheerleaders. When placed side by side, these photos argue that the erasure of women from the larger narrative of Irish history harms modern-day women who are actively creating the history of tomorrow.

Sources:

Left: Rachel Hicks, Censored Birth Control Review in the EPIC Museum (2019)

Right: The Irish Story, "Airbrushed out of history? Elizabeth O'Farrell and Patrick Pearse's surrender, 1916" (2016)

Appendix C

Examples of English Department Advertisements

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Thanks to Millersville and the MU English department, when faced with the question, “What can you do with an English degree?” I can answer confidently, “Everything.”

SUSAN CHERIE BEAM

Read more about MU English Alumni on the blog!

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FREE EVENT

Keynote Speaker

Meghan Kenny

MILLERSVILLE UNIVERSITY LITERARY FESTIVAL

Thursday, November 7 | 7:30-9pm
Myers Auditorium, McComsey Hall



Spring 2020: ENGL 425

MODERN AMERICAN FICTION

The literature in this course will be from between the two World Wars (1920-1945). The writers will include Fitzgerald, Hemingway, and Faulkner. Also included will be non-canonical writers—women, African American, gay & lesbian, etc.

Appendix D
Excerpt from Women in Publishing Newsletter

SPRING 2019, ISSUE 1.

PUBLISHING TIMES

WOMEN IN PUBLISHING

WHY DO WE NEED MORE WOMEN IN PUBLISHING?

BY RACHEL HICKS

Diversity varies perspective and a wide array of perspectives in media builds empathy, communication, and understanding. Publishing covers a multitude of medias, from books and magazines, to journalism and web content. In all these areas, women's perspectives are necessary to accurately represent the world we live in.

Arguments for diversity are not difficult to find. As America begins to re-orientate in the wake of #MeToo, questions of where women are allowed to occupy public and private spaces are all the more important to tackle.

According to NPR, gender and ethnic diversity in the newsroom has barely changed over the last decade. Alice Meadows from Scholarly Kitchen notes, "there are still woefully few women at the top of scholarly publishing." Jane Gregory, co-founder of Women in Publishing, says, "there wasn't a glass ceiling; there was a concrete one." There are myriad accounts of the need for women's perspectives in the publishing arena from a wide array of fields.

Diversity is important in every facet of publication. Women need to be editors, reporters, newscasters, copy-editors, peer-reviewers, heads of departments,

CEOs. Women's perspectives are needed on every level of management and publication.

With the rise of the internet, women deal with an "increasingly hostile political environment," according to Kristal Brent Zook of Women's Media Center. This must change.

Kate Angus, writer for VIDA: Women in Literary Arts, notes, "While many editors of all types absolutely do look for diverse voices, those with life experiences and identities different than the hegemonic narrative may often be better able to recognize these writers' merits—either because they may be making a more consistent, conscious choice to support diverse voices or because they don't have to make an imaginative leap to be inside these other stories."

When editors represent a diverse group of people, different, new stories get published that challenge the idea of what "good literature" looks like. Women are largely absent from the Canon, especially women of color. The only way to change this is to change the way the publishing industry represents women.

We need more women in publishing because women deserve to be heard. ■

FEATURED MAGAZINE: THE RIVETER

Editors: Joanna Demkiewicz and Kaylen Ralph.

Founded by two college students who noticed the huge gender disparity in journalism.

Online and quarterly print magazine featuring narrative journalism by women.

Currently in hiatus.

FEATURED PUBLISHER: LINEN PRESS

Head Editor: Lynn Michell.

The last women's indie publishing house in the United Kingdom.

Established in 2005.

Pushes for the diversification of books by publishing works written by women of varying writing styles, ages, and cultures.

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