

# Improving Students' Skills in Creating Professional Portfolios

Department of Communications

By Karen Russell, Professor of Communications

Tennessee State University



With one of the largest departments on the campus of Tennessee State University, the Department of Communications is focused on student learning and preparing our students for careers in media, entertainment, theater, and corporate communications. This goal could not be reached by the efforts of just one person or even a committee of people. This task requires full faculty buy-in and participation...and that starts with assessing student learning and using those results for improvement in our curriculum and our course-based objectives.

Because of the importance we place on student portfolios as they begin their careers, our faculty changed the focus of our assessment of student learning to focus on developing the portfolio as students matriculate through our program. Our student learning outcomes assessment changed from a theoretical method of assessment to a combined method of assessment of theory and practice.

After this shift, we soon realized that some areas of our curriculum did not focus on the elements of the portfolio rubric we had established for assessment. For example, Student Learning Outcome 1 (SLO1) states that “ Students will be able to create professional content for the media industry.” In 2018-2019, analysis of results found that of the 34 students enrolled in the senior capstone course, only 26 students (76%) completed their portfolio for review. Those 26 students averaged a score of 72% on their portfolio assessment. While this score was sufficient to meet our criteria for success, it highlighted two very significant areas of needed improvement. First, all students should have a portfolio as they leave the university and second, it should be career ready.

The 2017-2018 assessment indicated students did not have the five (5) high-level projects required on the rubric. In response the following action was taken to address improving student learning and the student learning experience. In 2018, we implemented course-based projects with real-world professionals to better prepare the students for the level of work required. We also implemented a system for portfolio reviews at the sophomore and junior levels as well. This was to ensure a higher level of completion.

After implementing this intervention, the next assessment cycle showed not only an increase from 76% to 82% in portfolio completion, but also the average score on the rubric had increased from 72% to 85%. Faculty also observed a noticeable improvement in writing skills as we implemented multiple portfolio reviews throughout the curriculum. Students were more engaged and have found the results valuable to their post-graduation endeavors.

The use of results for improvement is a team effort. It takes participation, accountability, and dedication from our entire faculty. At the end of each semester, we meet as a group to discuss the results of our assessment report and how best to address the shortfalls. Through this

collective effort, we can best decide what is best for our students, our department, and in the end, the university.