

Making Student Learning Visible: FrogFolio and the TCU Student Experience

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What does it mean to be a learner in the 21st century? We live in a world of technological and cultural revolution. Change is ubiquitous. It is everywhere, like the air we breathe. Ideas, insights, and information come at us so quickly that it can be a challenge to sift through it all to make connections and draw thoughtful conclusions. To flourish in such a world, students must be able to reflect on learning experiences, assimilate new ideas, make adjustments in thinking and action, and identify and articulate connections between seemingly disparate ideas. The ability to make connections between ideas and apply those ideas to real life situations is sometimes called *integrative thinking*. TCU has adopted the ePortfolio as a learning tool that promotes reflective learning and integrative thinking in students.

An ePortfolio is a digital (online) portfolio that contains evidence of student learning. At TCU, our ePortfolio program is called *FrogFolio*. FrogFolio essentially functions like a website by creating an online space for you (the student) to tell the story of who you are as a learner—your knowledge, your skills, your competencies, your experiences, and your capacity to reflect upon all of these. This story is told by displaying and reflecting upon *artifacts* from your college experience. What are artifacts, exactly? An artifact can be almost anything that tangibly represents your learning, both inside and outside the classroom—presentations, projects, blogs, video and audio files, photos, papers or essays, work samples, sketches, stories, letters, etc. Artifacts are the means by which you demonstrate your learning and what that learning means to you.

FrogFolio is much more than a “warehouse” of artifacts from your student experience. It is a tool that allows you to reflect on important learning experiences, explore what those experiences mean in the context of your education, and make connections between those experiences and the TCU mission. It is also a place to display specific skills and competencies related to your emerging professional identity. While having an archive of artifacts from your student experience is certainly a benefit of FrogFolio, it is in reflecting on the meaning of those artifacts where learning truly deepens and takes on new meaning. FrogFolio captures this learning process and makes it visible to others so that they can see what you know and what you can do.

As its creator and author, you determine what artifacts and learning experiences to include in FrogFolio. The choices you make regarding the artifacts to include will tell your audience something about your most impactful learning experiences in college. Creating a FrogFolio is a way to assume ownership and take responsibility for your “learning career.” While FrogFolio provides a broad structure within which to document your learning, the content and its presentation is completely up to you. The learning experiences are yours. It is up to you to determine what learning experiences to display in your portfolio and how you will represent those experiences. The FrogFolio template prompts you to document learning that occurs both inside and outside the classroom. We have known for some time that high-impact learning experiences occur just as

often outside the classroom (co-curricular experiences) as they do within the walls of a classroom. For this reason, FrogFolio is organized around the learner rather than around specific courses or just the curriculum. Learning is learning, no matter where it happens. You are encouraged, therefore, to document and reflect on both course-based learning experiences and co-curricular learning experiences. The structure of the portfolio and the prompts embedded within it also encourage you to connect your learning experiences to the mission of TCU.

In his book *Experience and Education* (1938), educational philosopher John Dewey suggested that we do not learn from experience alone. Rather, we learn because we have reflected on experience. More than eighty years later, today's cognitive science about how we learn reveals Dewey's philosophy of learning to be remarkably accurate. To be a learner in the world is to thoughtfully explore the meaning of what we experience and then (re)consider who we are and what we know in light of that experience. Through this process, new insights emerge. This is the process of deep learning and development. It is the "site map" of how people change and grow. FrogFolio provides a space for this learning to happen by inviting students to consider the meaning and importance of their learning experiences, and then display those experiences for others. Doing this reveals intellectual development and one's emerging professional identity. As one upperdivision TCU student put it, "As a result of building my portfolio, I am more aware of what I know and why it's important to me. I was asked to think about my learning and the best experiences I've had at college, and now I can talk about those things with people at a deeper level than before. I really get the 'big picture' of my education in a new way."

FrogFolio is both a *process* and a *product*. More specifically, it is a learning process that yields a product. The process of creating, building, and maintaining a portfolio can be summarized this way:

- **Reflecting** on goals and desired outcomes for college
- **Collecting** learning artifacts and **selecting** artifacts for reflection and display
- **Connecting** the meaning of artifacts to one another, to personal learning goals, and the university's mission.

The learning process of creating and building a portfolio over time yields a dynamic product that makes learning visible to others. Your FrogFolio can be shared with many audiences—professors, staff, administrators, peers, parents, advisors, prospective employers, recruiters, graduate schools, etc. By viewing your FrogFolio, others will get a sense of who you are as a student and as an emerging professional. Eventually, you can use your FrogFolio as a showcase piece that essentially functions as a digital resume. Within FrogFolio, a student can create multiple portfolios. The FrogFolio Student Template provides the 3 structure for your primary portfolio, but you may eventually want to create another or several other portfolios depending on your audience and the specific collection of learning artifacts you want that audience to see.

A hallmark of the FrogFolio program at TCU is an emphasis on mentoring. We have found that students who receive a portfolio within a course and then work with a mentor in the early stages of building their portfolio, tend to build stronger, more effective portfolios. Learning is enhanced and deepened when the learning process is shared with another person who asks questions and assists in reflecting on what we have learned and why we think it is important. Some people assume that reflecting on learning is a private matter, but this is not necessarily true. Reflecting on learning has its deepest impact when we articulate and represent our learning to others.

Your FrogFolio is organized to assist you in reflecting upon your learning while also creating a product that makes your learning visible to others. Below you will find descriptions of the major sections of FrogFolio. Each section serves a purpose in helping create a picture of who you are as a learner and as an emerging professional.

Home/About Me

Your Homepage is your opportunity to introduce yourself to the learning community at TCU. Take the time to craft an engaging introduction—your major, hometown, interests, passions, and commitments. Consider your audience as you create your Homepage. Your peers will certainly read this page, but so will many faculty and staff. Eventually, prospective employers and/or graduate schools may look at this as well. You will therefore want your homepage to communicate a sense of professionalism. Choose a photo of yourself that communicates the type of image you want to portray to others in the TCU community and beyond.

Personal Learning Goals

Having a sense of *purpose* and *direction* is critical in any journey. Without them, it can be difficult to know when you arrive at your destination. This section of the portfolio asks you to reflect on what it is that you actually want from the college experience. What kinds of learning experiences do you want to have? What skills or competencies do you want to develop? What ideas, subjects or topics do you want to explore? What challenges do you anticipate encountering as you pursue your goals? Explore these questions in this section of the portfolio and articulate a handful of goals that you have as you start your college career. You will certainly revise your goals along the way. What is important at one stage, may no longer make sense at a later stage. But that's okay. The important thing is to frequently explore and reflect upon what's important and what you are working toward.

Classroom Learning

The Classroom Learning section is where you can reflect upon, archive, and display learning “artifacts” that represent significant learning experiences in your courses. You might consider organizing this section by academic year, as shown in the template. Under Year 1, you might choose a number of classes to represent. Each class page is a space where you can briefly describe the course, then reflect on what you learned in the course and how it was helpful. This works best when you show us examples or artifacts of your work—things like photos, links to videos, papers, presentations, work samples, projects, etc. Include as few or as many as you’d like in order to reflect what you learned and accomplished in the course. Also, be sure to “tell the story” of your artifacts. Rather than simply uploading a file or link to the page, say something about the artifact and why you chose it.

Co-curricular Learning

In the Co-curricular Learning section, you have the opportunity to reflect on significant learning experiences that occur outside the formal classroom. This is really important learning and it shows your audience who you are and what you care about. Create subpages or slides for organizations, clubs, honor societies, leadership programs, volunteer work, etc. For each experience, students should use stories, photos, and examples to describe and reflect upon the impact of that experience on your learning and growth.

The TCU Mission & Me

In the TCU Mission & Me section, you can make connections between learning experiences and different parts of the TCU Mission Statement. Doing this helps you understand the “big picture” of their education as it relates to values and mission of TCU. Typically, students have been at TCU a while before starting to work on this section.

Different slides on the page correspond to different learning outcomes for all TCU students; such as “learning informed by the liberal arts,” “ethical leadership,” “responsible citizenship,” and “global community.” A TCU education produces students with knowledge and ability in these four areas. For each area, you will find prompts that describe examples of the kinds of artifacts or experiences from inside and outside the classroom that might apply. Take your cues from the prompts in this section.

Resume

The Resume section should contain a current resume. Some students embed their resume on the page itself as an image or pdf file. Others recreate their resume on the page and include a downloadable version. For assistance with crafting your resume, visit the [Center For Career and Professional Development](#) on campus.

Attributions

The Attributions section is where you document the sources used in creating your FrogFolio. Be sure to provide credits and links to all media/images utilized in the portfolio. See the prompts and examples in the template for directions on this.

References Dewey, John. 1938. Experience and Education. New York: Macmillan