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Electronic Portfolios as Job Search Tools: Perspectives from Students, Career Counselors, and Human Resource Professionals

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A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

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In

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Abstract

Electronic portfolios have traditionally been used by artists as a means of showcasing and organizing projects and accomplishments. Within academia, colleges and universities have implemented electronic portfolios as a way for students to showcase and share their papers, projects, and course work. Universities and colleges typically license e-portfolio software and distribute the platform to students. The eFolioMinnesota software is free for all students and residents in the state through the Minnesota State Colleges and Universities System (MnSCU). Unfortunately, little has been researched about the use of e-portfolios in career development or employee recruiting. Never before have e-portfolios integrated with workforce development efforts nor aided in business and industry development. My research was intended to find the impact of electronic portfolios in hiring practices. Through an anonymous survey, 66.7 percent of human resource representatives and career counselors admitted to seeking candidate information online. While 70.7 percent said they view online resumes, only 29.3 percent are viewing electronic portfolios. On a scale of one to ten, the average rating for value in a resume was 6.34 while it was only 4.66

for electronic portfolios and 44.7 percent of respondents found little to no value at all in electronic portfolios. The biggest weakness of using electronic portfolios in the hiring process was time, or rather a lack of time. Some considered it an extra step in the review process and questioned if using that extra time was worth it. If we want students and job seekers to develop electronic portfolios as job search tools, employers will also need education and training on the best practices for incorporating this new tool into their screening and hiring process.

Table of Contents

Introduction

The rise of social media has brought many jobseekers online, but very few realize that employers are online too. Nearly eighty percent of employers say they look at job candidates online while only seven percent of jobseekers think that online data affects their job search (Microsoft Privacy, 2010). What are employers finding? Facebook pictures from Friday night, Twitter posts about a miserable job, and that long-forgotten MySpace account are among the top results.

Online reputations influence hiring decisions. As an instructor, I promote the idea of college students building a professional online reputation by developing an electronic portfolio. As electronic portfolios become more common tools in college assessment and evaluation practices, they are also being promoted as employment tools for college students transitioning into job seekers, but we need to research if an electronic portfolio can function as an employment tool.

While students are being encouraged to create online portfolios, are human resource professionals using the content? Electronic portfolios did not even make the list of types of websites used by recruiters and human resource professionals (Microsoft Privacy, 2010). It is now likely that Facebook profiles may get more traffic than online resumes, professional accomplishments, or biographies.

Online reputation monitoring via search engines has increased. Fifty-seven percent of adult internet users now use search engines to find information about themselves online and take steps to limit the amount of personal information available by changing privacy settings, deleting unwanted comments, and removing their name from photos (Madden, Fox, Smith and Vitak, 2007).

The increase in online reputation monitoring may or may not mean that job seekers are acknowledging the presence of employers online, but it does demonstrate that individuals are starting to take control of their Internet personas. Research shows that recruiters are looking at information online via search engines, social networking sites, photo and video sharing sites, personal websites, blogs, online gaming sites and more (Microsoft Privacy, 2010). As electronic portfolios appear to have a place in this growing trend, I wanted to know how people currently involved in the hiring process view their use as an employment and communication tool. In my research project, I asked college students, career counselors, and human resource professionals about the impact of electronic portfolios in hiring practices.

My research focuses on career and technical program students at Mesabi Range Community and Technical College and extends to human resource professionals, career counselors, and workforce development professionals throughout northeastern Minnesota. I teach a one-semester Job Search Strategies course that includes the development of an electronic portfolio and the opportunity to use the portfolio in a mock interview with business and industry representatives. I have integrated my experience with the students into my

research on the use of electronic portfolios as well as data gathered through a voluntary online survey. To gather data on the employer perspective of using electronic portfolios in the hiring process, I requested survey participation through the following agencies: Arrowhead Human Resource Association, Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training, Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency, and the Department of Employment and Economic Development.

For this thesis, I began with a literature review and searched for journal articles and other projects related to the use of electronic portfolios. I found that it was already a popular topic in the education field from degree requirements to job applications, so that was my starting point for the literature review. After reviewing research in the field of education, I expanded my focus to other career fields and then moved to employment and career counseling journals, but could not find the impact of electronic portfolios in the hiring process. I could see the value in education, but my students were preparing for technical careers and I wanted to know if they could use an electronic portfolio after graduation. I could teach students how to use electronic portfolios not only as communication tools but also as job seeking tools; however, I wanted to know if employers would use electronic portfolios in their hiring processes.

Portfolios in Employment and Career Advancement

An e-portfolio has the ability to demonstrate what is learned both inside and outside the classroom. The development of the e-portfolio requires reflection, which in itself is a learning process. When students are the site owners, they are then able to decide how to use their e-portfolios beyond a course or program. When employers want to see examples of students applying their knowledge and addressing problems, an e-portfolio can provide multi-dimensional evidence that integrates life and academic experience.

One study found that forty percent of college campuses in the United States report using student e-portfolios (Rhodes 2011). That number includes all campuses from public and private to research, liberal arts, and community colleges. Perhaps more relevant to my research, a 2008 survey conducted by Peter S. Hart Research Associates asked employers what evidence of student learning they would like to see when hiring college graduates. Thirty-five percent wanted to see student work in e-portfolios (Rhodes 2011).

The idea of sharing our life and academic experience on a personal website is not new. A 2004 article noted that new graduates can use e-portfolios to showcase their accomplishments and gain an edge in the job market (Cohn and Hibbits 2004). Along those same lines, career centers in universities can use e-portfolios to link academic outcomes to the workplace.

As we look at the idea of electronic portfolios linking academics to the workplace, Mark Rowh (2008) argues that e-Portfolios go further than traditional

resumes by displaying information through more than one medium, but differ from social networking sites due to the targeted audience of employers and other professionals. He went directly to the source and interviewed college students seeking internships and employment opportunities to get their opinions as they had already created electronic portfolios and were now experiencing the role they played in their job searches. Rowh notes that electronic portfolios are ideal for artists, designers, and other creative individuals, but unlike many other articles, he acknowledges that "almost anyone" can use an e-portfolio, including high school and college students. His idea of using e-portfolios is not limited to any particular field. He envisions the experiences of a camp counselor or a student's science fair project displayed in an e-portfolio (Rowh 2008, 27).

Regardless of their chosen career path, when college students develop electronic portfolios for job seeking purposes, it is crucial for them to consider the audience. Electronic portfolios can support not only real-time exchanges with chatrooms, blogs, and social networking embedded in the site, but also asynchronous interactions that expand the size and variation of the audience. For example, a job candidate could share his or her electronic portfolio during a live interview whether it is in person or online. Asynchronous interactions promote richer reflections, which result in more informed and thought-provoking exchanges. In this example, a job seeker might post a description of his or her involvement in a previous work or volunteer project. The posting would remain in their electronic portfolio for viewers to read at any time. They must present the information in a way that can be understood without an explanation. In a sense,

students are able to perform and reflect on their performance at the same time (Ramirez 2011).

The idea that others may view, evaluate, or use their work motivates students to create a higher quality product and the interactive capabilities allow them to share and view more content. The power of ePortfolios is the ability to function as a rehearsal and presentation space that "facilitates a process of making learning visible" (Ramirez 2011, 3).

In recent years, electronic portfolios have been increasingly promoted as essential tools for employment and career advancement as technology has become more digital. Electronic portfolios are more efficient, flexible, and convenient than paper-based portfolios. Previous studies found that school administrators felt portfolios provided a more comprehensive understanding of teaching abilities (Deering, Hardy, Jones, and Whitworth, 2011). While electronic portfolios are currently required in many teacher education programs for use in the employment process, they are not being used as often as expected. One study indicates that nearly half of teacher educators believe their graduates are using digital portfolios, while less than twenty percent of school administrators report them being used in the hiring process (Deering, Hardy, Jones, and Whitworth, 2011).

Possible reasons for teacher candidates still presenting paper-based portfolios rather than digital portfolios were cited as programs not stressing them as employment tools and candidates not feeling comfortable using digital

portfolio technology in job interviews. Study results also found that the majority of schools do not require portfolios as part of the hiring process and very few gave preference to hiring candidates with portfolios. While teacher educators and school administrators agreed that portfolios are given some weight in hiring decisions, they are not given much consideration in the overall hiring process (Deering, Hardy, Jones, and Whitworth 2011). Portfolios ranked seventh in importance to the hiring process by teacher educators and eighth by school administrators showing that portfolios are considered useful, but not as useful as direct observation, responses to interview questions, actual experience, reputation, information from previous employers and other direct sources (Deering, Hardy, Jones, and Whitworth 2011).

Teacher educators and school administrators with hiring responsibilities agreed that portfolios can "accurately reflect a teacher candidate's teaching ability and skills" and both groups agreed on the "quality of portfolios in terms of their appearance, format, and technical components" (Deering, Hardy, Jones, and Whitworth 2011, 99). While school administrators found value in using portfolios to make hiring decisions, they did not believe that they provided accurate information on teaching ability (Deering, Hardy, Jones, and Whitworth, 2011). One of the perceived barriers of using portfolios in the hiring process is a lack of time for review and, in regards to this barrier, some administrators remarked that electronic portfolios would be preferred to paper-based portfolios.

If there is concern that education programs do not stress the use of electronic portfolios as employment tools and, therefore, students are not

comfortable using them in interviews, I wanted to find a program that provided a more well-rounded learning experience with technology. Physical education students at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology (RMIT) used electronic portfolios to enhance their employability by "identifying discipline specific graduate capabilities, mapping those capabilities within the existing program, identifying areas for renewal, and embedding the identified capabilities into a renewed program" (Temple, Allan, and Temple, 2003, 4). Within the system, students developed a "working portfolio" which was integrated throughout the degree program and several specific portfolios including an employment portfolio which contained a cover letter and curriculum vitae.

After developing an electronic portfolio, students felt "very confident they could successfully address elements of a job application" and they indicated that the process of developing an electronic portfolio contributed significantly to their abilities (Temple, Allan, and Temple, 2003, 6). Students agreed that the "electronic portfolio would enhance their employment prospects" and 25 out of 33 students said the assignment was useful and good preparation for job interviews (Temple, Allan, and Temple 2003, 7).

A focus group interview with four principals or vice-principals, one representative of the Department of Education and Training, and three representatives from the Australian Council for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation felt there was too much information in the portfolios to use for initial screening of applicants. They preferred students collect evidence in an employment portfolio, or specific job application portfolio, in order to select

relevant examples to meet the selection criteria of a particular school, noting that they might be more interested in examining portfolios already on the short list of applicants. One element in an electronic portfolio of particular interest as an employment tool was evidence of teaching experience via video clips. The idea of an electronic portfolio was more enticing to the focus group if they could see something that they could not see on paper and multimedia components filled that gap.

With this research to support the fact that electronic portfolios are viewed by teachers, faculty, principals, educational administrators, parents, and peers, users may also be "employers, managers, and others wishing to examine evidence concerning the competencies of a person to undertake a job or the competencies of a person once hired" (Abrami and Barrett 2005).

Abrami and Barrett examined criteria to determine the success of electronic portfolios. The criteria include:

- scalability (the extent of wide use)

- satisfaction (user sustainability and long-term maintenance)

- cost versus benefit, worthiness, efficiency, or return on investment

- learning gains and effectiveness (personal enrichment)

- the number of accurate prior learning assessments and successful job
  placements or advancements.

They discussed another criterion that could examine if learning the technology needed for an electronic portfolio builds competence in online communication

with new media. There is concern that new technology is moving at a pace where students may be more competent than teachers in the use of new media. One example for this criterion could be a project that introduced non-native speaking teachers from New South Wales and Australia to the process of creating a reflective, professional ePortfolio in English to familiarize themselves with new technology while honing their language skills. They were given the choice of preparing for the Professional English Assessment for Teachers (PEAT) through a test-focused form of study or through a full-time course in Career Development.

The reflective ePortfolio project was embedded in the course. It required a career objective, a two-page curriculum vitae, a generic cover letter, a detailed lesson plan, reflections on the ePortfolio process, and a critique of a work experience, but only four out of more than forty students completed the course (Cross 2012). When given the choice, less than ten percent of students elected to take the full-time course and, therefore, they were the only students to create electronic portfolios. This group became part of the reflective ePortfolio project focused on project development, career evaluation, sustainability, and emerging technologies in an accredited Certificate IV Course in Career Development.

For the participants in this project, their preparation for the PEAT was supported by recording their learning in an ePortfolio that was accessible, flexible, and portable, but it remains that less than ten percent of students were interested in completing the project. Since the project, however, enrollments and completions have increased in the full-time Career Development ePortfolio

option. While this project is an example of integrating electronic portfolios into a career development course, I wanted to see results on a larger scale. My research focused on the integration of electronic portfolios in a job search strategies course that could reach a larger number of students.

Excellent research is available on the use of electronic portfolios in the teacher hiring process and includes perceptions from students, instructors, and administrators; however, this issue reaches beyond the field of education. Research from Microsoft Privacy and the PEW Internet and American Life Project shows that many hiring managers are searching for candidate information online and the content currently available is dominated by social media sites.

There is minimal research on the use of electronic portfolios in other career fields. In particular, there is a need to investigate the impact of electronic portfolios in the job search process for technical career programs. Prior to the development of electronic portfolios, art and design students were already building collections of work to display their skills and accomplishments. Now that technology has made this process easier, it has spread to other fields.

While reading about other research projects, I learned that instructors found the need to learn ePortfolio technology can interfere with other benefits of developing an ePortfolio. In other words, the time needed to learn the technology was taking away from the time used to develop content. For this reason, they chose to use simple website authoring tools with their students (similar to the public tools provided by Google Sites) and focus on ePortfolio

(Eliot, M., Kilgore, D., Mobrand, K., Sattler, B., and Turns, J. 2012). I chose more complicated software for my research project because I did not want the students' content to be limited by technology and I felt that I had the resources to instruct them on the software.

In particular, I wanted technology with multi-media capabilities. Current electronic portfolio software offers many tools for users to display (and demonstrate) their experience, but I selected eFolioMinnesota, a Web-based portfolio designed to create a living showcase of educational, career, and personal achievements. It is a free resource for Minnesota residents, students, and workers provided by Minnesota State Colleges and Universities. The technology offered through eFolioMinnesota includes text, photos, videos, hyperlinks, documents, feedback, and web-based sharing tools. Some of the suggestions for new users include:

- Use word processing techniques to check spelling and add color, tables, or text.
- Choose from many colorful and professional portfolio designs.
- Attach résumés, work samples, audio, video, and photos.
- Use interactive tools such as feedback, reflections, and surveys.

Due to its large-scale deployment as a single, statewide system, eFolioMinnesota focused on the technology and its capabilities more so than the development of a portfolio. The company provides technical support and resources on how to use the software, but not guidance on how to develop the

content within the portfolio. I designed the curriculum in the Job Search Strategies courses to provide the necessary guidance for building content. I believed this combination would provide the best results in developing an electronic portfolio as a communication and employment tool.

If I expect students to create an electronic portfolio for the final project in a Job Search Strategies course, I want to know if it will function as a communication tool for employers after graduation. More research is needed to find the value of electronic portfolios in career fields other than education and to connect the gap between completing a college project and applying for a job.

To explore the value of electronic portfolios in the hiring process, I surveyed human resource representatives, career counselors, and college students preparing to become job seekers. In the next section, I describe my methodology for conducting the surveys. Then I discuss the results and offer suggestions for further research on the topic.

Methodology

To examine the impact of electronic portfolios in hiring practices, my research investigated whether college students thought the development of an electronic portfolio would benefit them in the application and screening process. I also investigated whether recruiters in current hiring processes use electronic portfolios. The Institutional Review Board at Minnesota State University, Mankato approved my research project under number 317821-3.

I explored my research questions from three different perspectives. The stakeholder groups were: 1) college students, 2) human resource professionals, and 3) career counselors. Using Survey Monkey, quantitative data was collected to rate the use and value of electronic portfolios in the hiring process. Open-ended questions to gather qualitative statements that supported and explained the quantitative results were included in the survey. (The human resource and career counselor survey is in Appendix 1 and the college student survey is in Appendix 2.)

Students were directed to a voluntary online survey through the GECL 2175 Job Search Strategies course website at Mesabi Range Community and Technical College. Career counselors, workforce development professionals, and human resource representatives were contacted via email through their respective agencies to complete an online survey, which took approximately ten minutes. Information about the study and participant rights were provided in the

email invitation as well as the first screen of the online survey. By clicking "next"

to enter the survey, a participant gave consent.

Conducting the Survey with College Students

Career programs at Mesabi Range Community and Technical College are designed to prepare students for immediate employment in a career by providing technical skills that can be acquired in one-year Certificate, two-year Diploma, or two-year Associate in Applied Science (AAS) programs. Students at Mesabi Range Community and Technical College are required to complete a one-credit course called Job Search Strategies (GECL 2175) that focuses on the development of résumés, cover letters, and interview skills as well as an electronic portfolio. The description for the course is described as follows in the course catalog:

> This course introduces the student to a process for developing self-awareness, considering career opportunities, constraints, choices, and consequences; identifying career-related goals; and planning of work, education, and related experiences to attain specific career expectations. Students will also learn how to create job application correspondence and prepare for and participate in job interview questions.

This group represents a sample of convenience as I teach the Job Search Strategies courses. Traditional and non-traditional students in my sample represent the following career and technical programs:

- Carpentry
- Graphic Design Media
- Electrical and Industrial Automation Technology (process automation)

- Industrial Mechanical Technology (maintenance mechanic/millwright)

- Industrial Technology (mining, process, and manufacturing technology)

- Mobile Equipment Service Technician

- Nursing

- Welding

- Wind Energy

To invite student participants from Mesabi Range Community and Technical College, I posted the survey link in the Job Search Strategies (GECL 2175) course website. Through classroom presentations, the students learned about social media by using various search engines to examine their online reputations. They navigated through the results of Google, Spokeo, and PeekYou search engines to see what content a prospective employer might find about them online and discussed the difference between social networking and professional networking. Students in the classroom were then directed to the voluntary and anonymous survey link. Students in the online section of the course received the same information through Desire2Learn and participated in a discussion board on the topic. The survey link was posted on the home page of their course.

I invited 86 college students to participate in the survey and 64 students submitted complete surveys for a completion rate of 74 percent. Ninety-five percent of respondents were male and 73 percent were under twenty-four years of age. (See figures 1 and 2.)
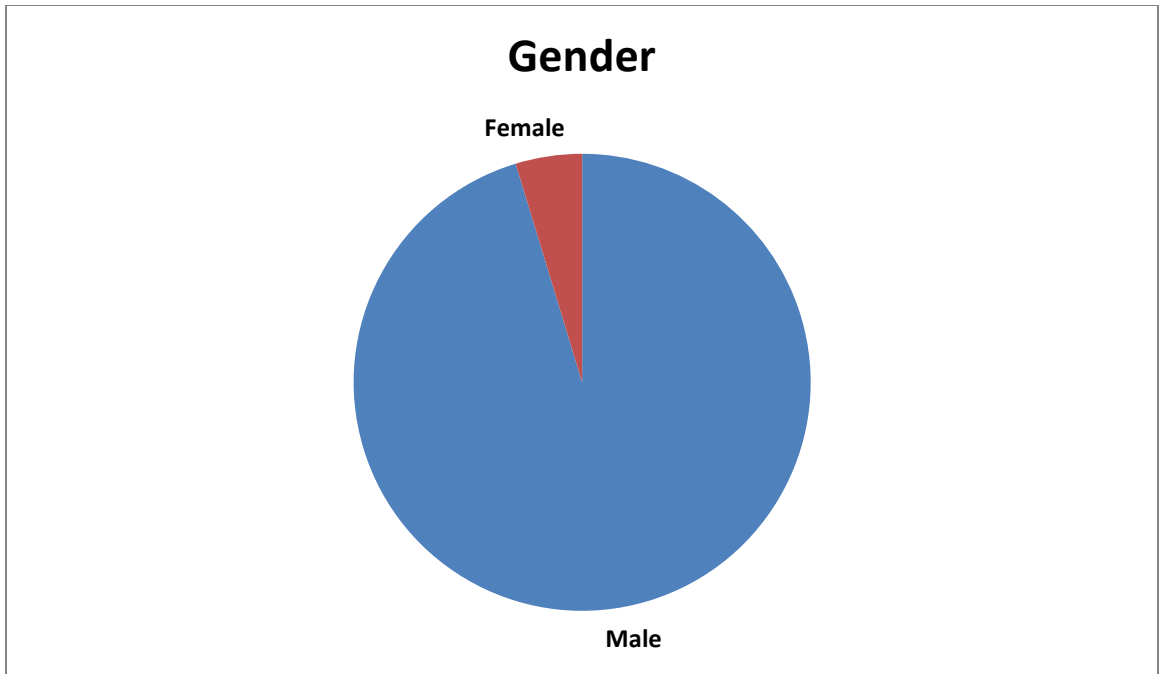
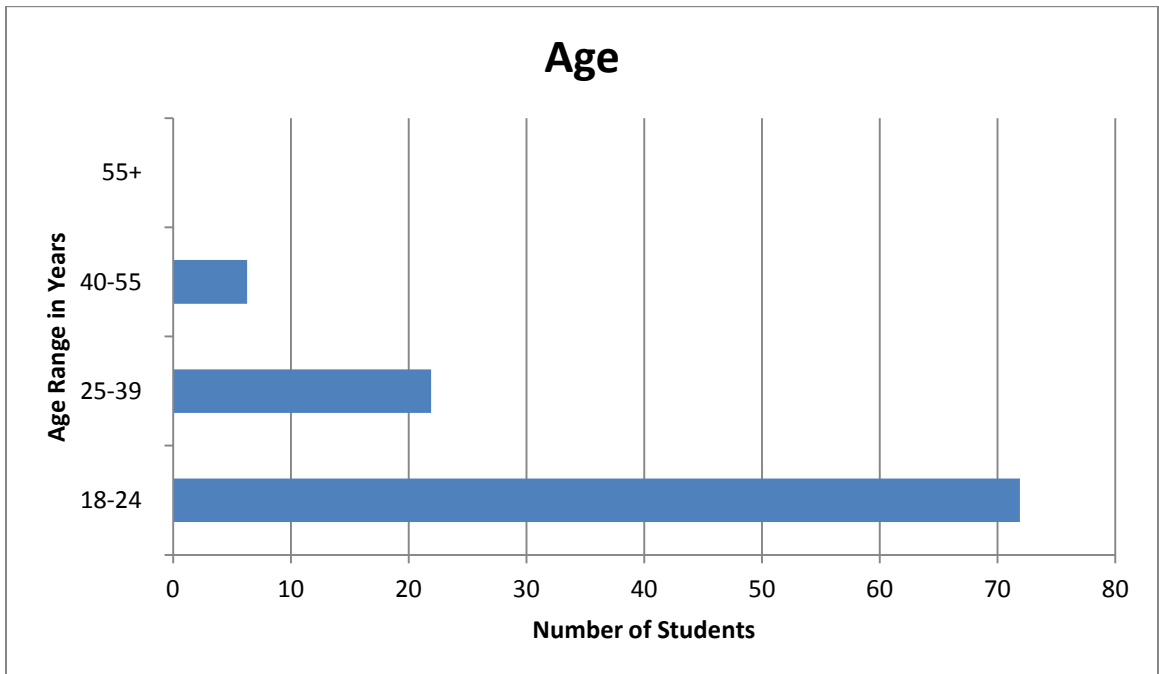*Figure 1: Gender of college student participants*

Figure 2: Age of college student participants

The most unexpected demographic was the distribution of participants among occupational fields. Once again, I expected more diversity due to the number of programs represented in the sample, but 42 of the students were enrolled in an Industrial Mechanical Technology program. (See Figure 3.) While Job Search Strategies is a required course, students are given some flexibility on completing the course during fall or spring semester; however, I expected a higher participation number from other programs that might be considered more traditional fields in terms of using electronic portfolios. For example, graphic design and nursing programs often require electronic portfolios in their coursework where it is still a new addition in the Industrial Mechanical Technology program. It should be noted that Industrial Mechanical Technology is one of the largest programs at Mesabi Range Community and Technical College, but this was only the second year the electronic portfolios were included in the curriculum.

Occupational Field/Program of Study

Program of Study (y-axis): Industrial Mechanical Technology, Mobile Equipment Service Technician, Process Automation, Graphic Design, Nursing, Welding

Number of Students (x-axis): 0, 5, 10, 15, 20, 25, 30, 35, 40, 45
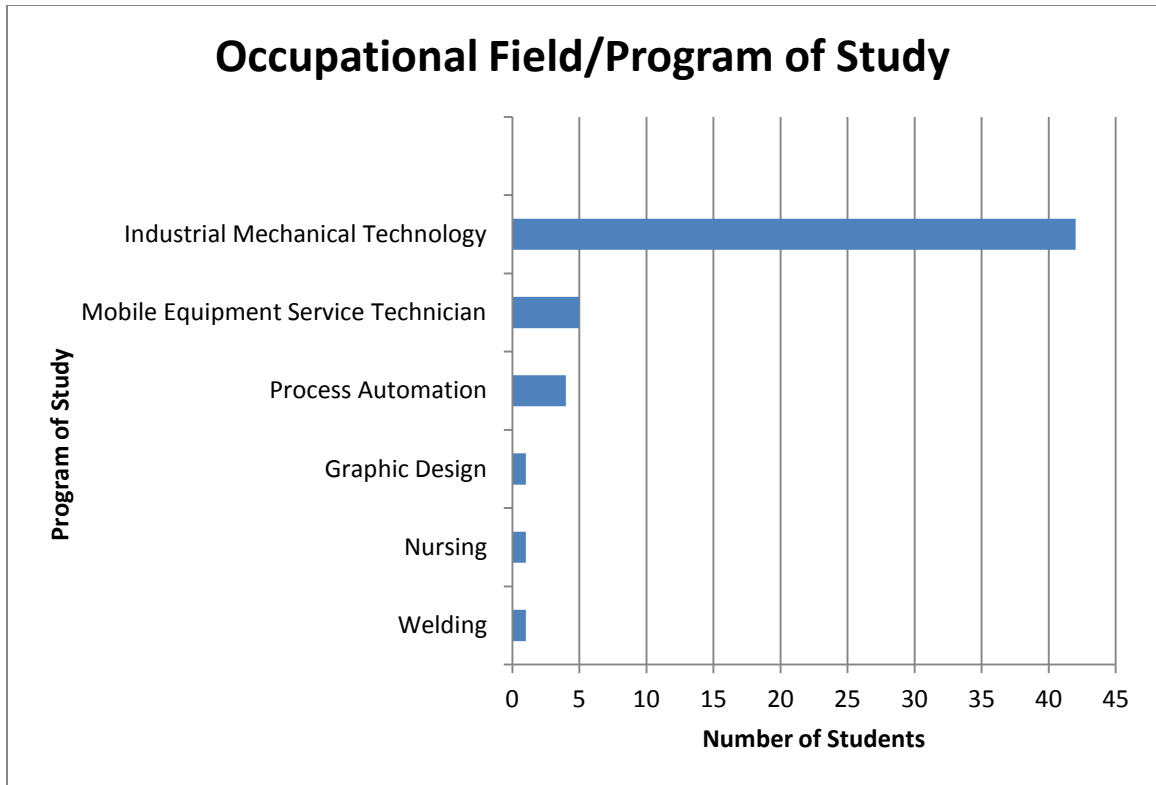
Figure 3: Industrial Mechanical Technology is one of the largest programs offered at Mesabi Range Community and Technical College. Students may opt for the diploma or Associate of Applied Science degree.

Conducting the Survey with Human Resource Professionals and Career Counselors

The Arrowhead Human Resources Association (AHRA) is a group of business professionals from the Iron Range and Arrowhead region of Northeastern Minnesota and an affiliated chapter of the Society of Human Resource Management (SHRM). Their mission is "to explore Human Resources issues while providing support and resources for the growth and development of the HR profession and practices."

With permission and approval from the AHRA President, all members received the survey link in an email with a description of the research and agreement to share the aggregate results while all individual surveys remained anonymous.

The Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training is a regional unit of government established under a joint powers agreement among the seven counties of Northeast Minnesota. It is the grant recipient and administrative entity of federal Workforce Investment Act (WIA) funds as well as state grants and private donations. The Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training is a partner agency within Minnesota WorkForce Centers located in Aitkin, Cloquet, Duluth, Grand Rapids, Hibbing, International Falls, and Virginia, Minnesota.

With permission and approval from the executive director, all career counselors on staff with the Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training received the survey link in an email with a description of the research. There was also an

agreement to share the aggregate results while all individual surveys remain anonymous.

The Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency (AEOA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization established as a Community Action Program (CAP) for St. Louis, Lake, and Cook counties in northeastern Minnesota. Service delivery also extends to Aitkin, Carlton, Itasca, and Koochiching counties. Career counselors with AEOA also received the survey and a description of the research project by email through permission of the department director.

I did not have direct contact with the human resource professional and career counselor sample. Instead, I sent out three emails with information about my research project and instructions for using the survey link. The emails were sent to the President of the Arrowhead Human Resource Association, the Executive Director of the Northeast Minnesota Office of Job Training, and the Assistant Director of the Arrowhead Economic Opportunity Agency. Each agreed to forward my survey link. The survey was distributed to a sample frame of approximately 110 individuals.

After the initial email invitation to participate in the online survey, I waited two weeks and sent one reminder email to the three agency representatives to distribute to staff members. After two more weeks, for a total of one month, 51 people had completed the survey for human resource and workforce professionals for a response rate of 46 percent. Seventy-four percent categorized themselves as career counselors or workforce development

professionals while 26 percent were human resource representatives. (See figure 4.) Nearly three-quarters of the respondents were female and everyone was over twenty-five years of age, however, they were evenly spread out among the other age categories. (See Figures 5 and 6.)
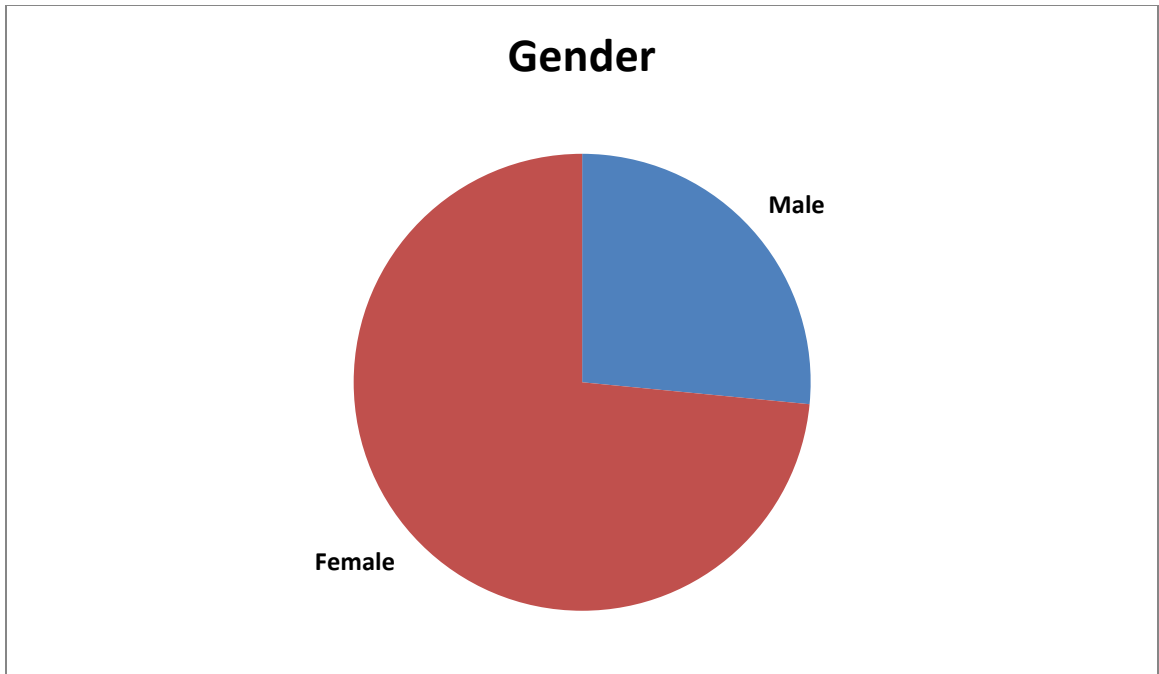

Which status best reflects your current position?

Workforce Development Professional

Human Resource Representative

Career Counselor
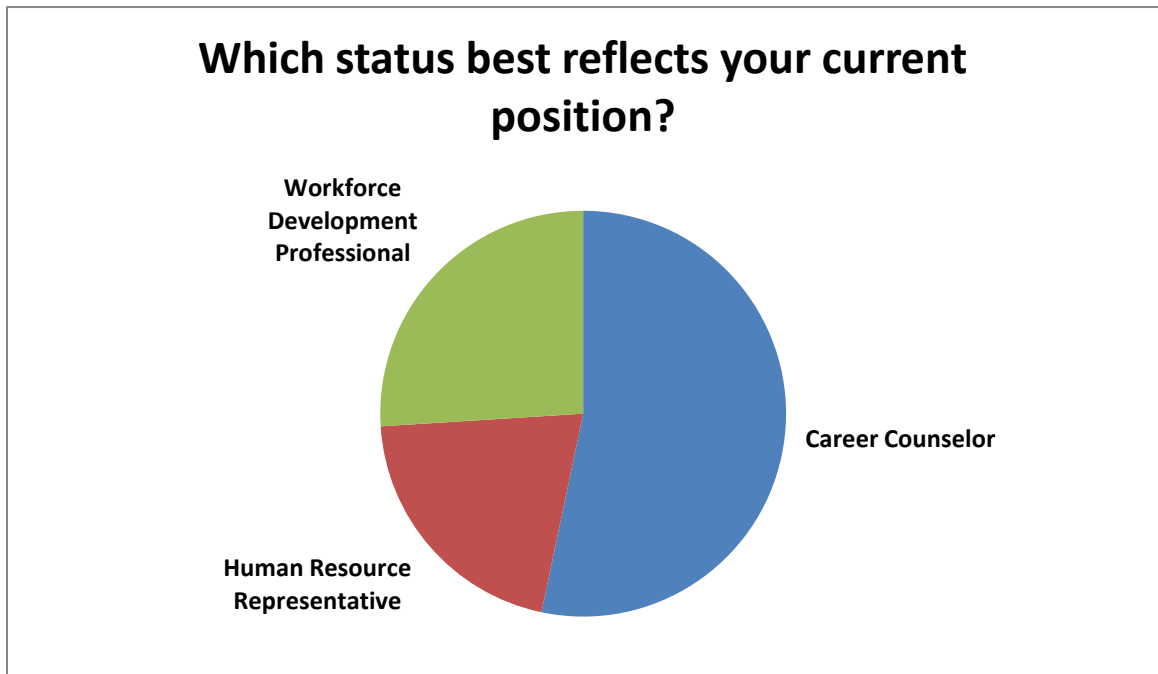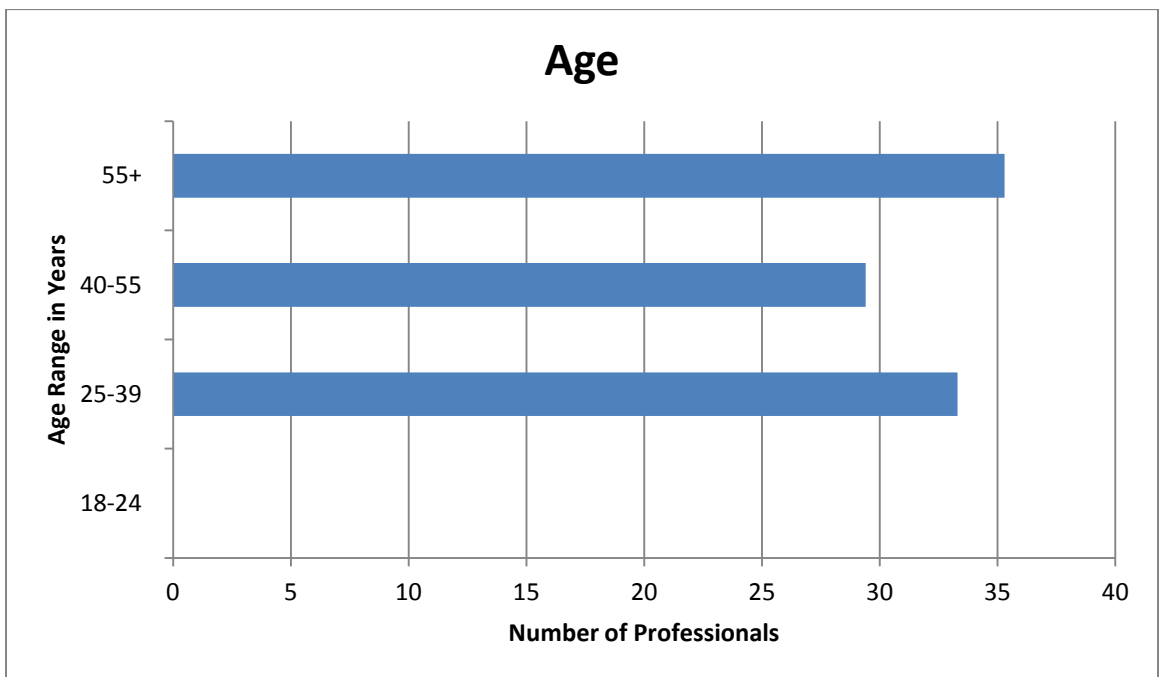
Figure 4.

Figure 5.

Figure 6.

College Student Survey Results

The students were surveyed in the fourth week of a sixteen-week semester. The students in Job Search Strategies had been introduced to the skills they would learn during the course. They would develop resumes, cover letters, electronic portfolios, and interview skills. My survey was intended to gauge their opinions as job seekers prior to completing a preparation or training course.

With an average rating of 7.19, the students feel confident as job seekers. None of the respondents selected "not at all" when asked about their confidence. The numbers changed significantly when the students were questioned more specifically about confidence in their resumes. Seventeen percent of students said that they were not confident at all with their resumes. I asked how much more confident they would feel as a job seeker with an electronic portfolio and the average rating increased to 6.23, though the responses were fairly dispersed on the scale. (See figure 7.)

How much more confident would you feel as a job seeker with an electronic portfolio?
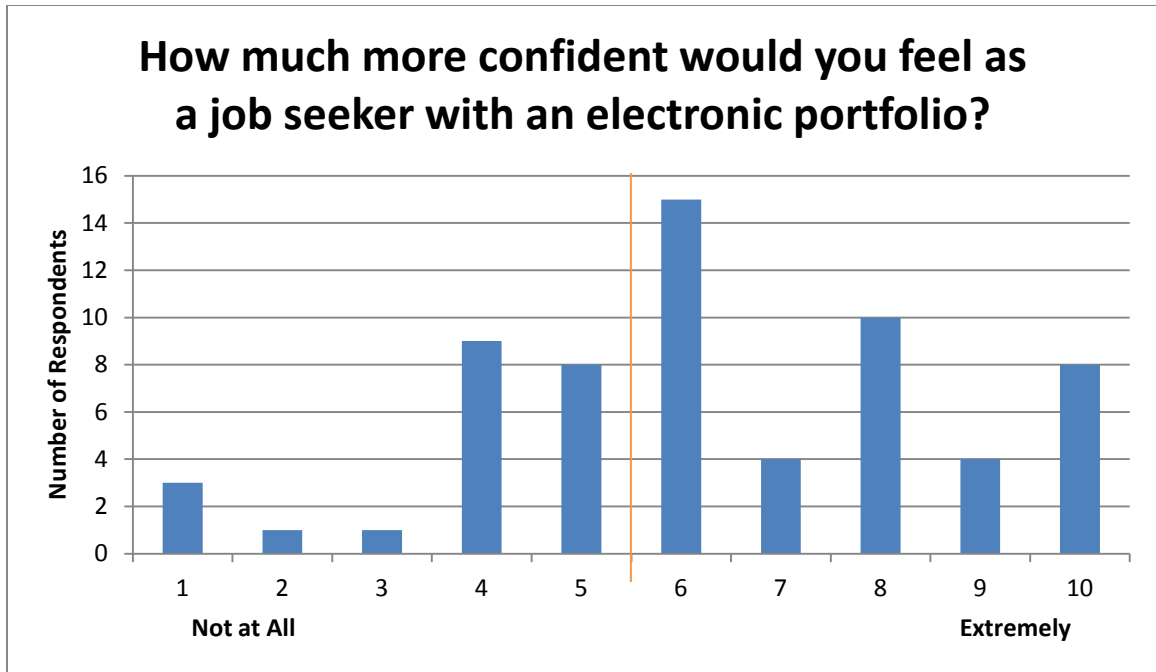
Figure 7: College students rated their level of confidence as a job seeker with an electronic portfolio.

On a scale of one to ten, the average rating was 5.80 on the level of confidence in creating and using an electronic portfolio. Forty-six percent of college students selected five or lower on the rating scale indicating that training is required to use this as job search tool. Training is provided on the technology used to develop an electronic portfolio, but this question also referred to "using" an electronic portfolio, which means students need more information on how to share their work with prospective employers.

TABLE 1: Confidence and preparation with electronic portfolios				
	Mean	**Median**	**Mode**	**Standard Deviation**
How prepared do you feel for the job search?	6.78	5.5	8	5.44
How confident do you feel as a job seeker?	7.19	6.5	8	4.67
How confident do you feel about your resume?	5.66	5.5	6	2.63
How confident do you feel about creating and using an electronic portfolio?	5.80	5.5	5	3.86
How much more confident will you feel as a job seeker with an electronic portfolio?	6.23	5.5	6	4.40
How confident do you feel about the preparation for your job search?	6.78	5.5	6	4.65
How likely are you to use your resume in the job search and application process?	8.33	6.5	10	7.71
How likely are you to use your electronic portfolio in the job search and application process?	6.97	5.5	10	4.72

In regards to the actual job search and application process, the college students were asked how likely they are to use their resume and their electronic portfolio. On a scale of one to ten, the average rating for the likelihood of using a resume was 8.33 while the average rating for using an electronic portfolio was 6.97. More than half of the respondents were "extremely" likely to use a resume

and 28.5 percent were "extremely" likely to use an electronic portfolio. (See

figures 8 and 9.)

How likely are you to use a resume in the job search and application process?
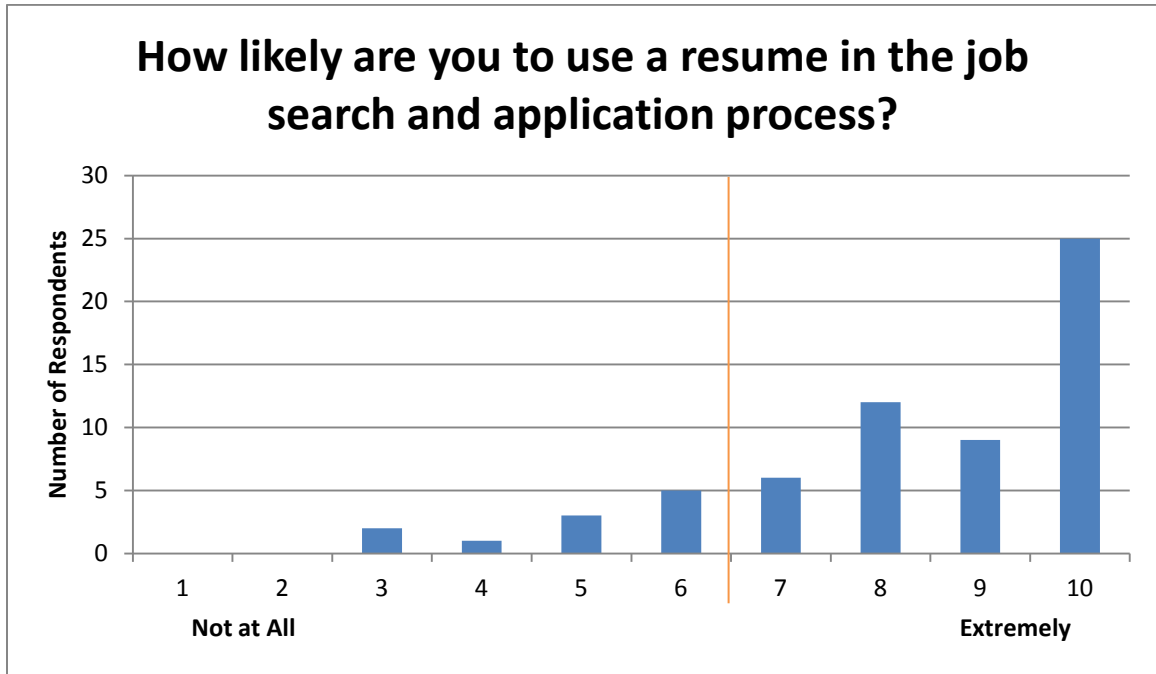
Figure 8: The likelihood of college students using a resume in the job search and application process
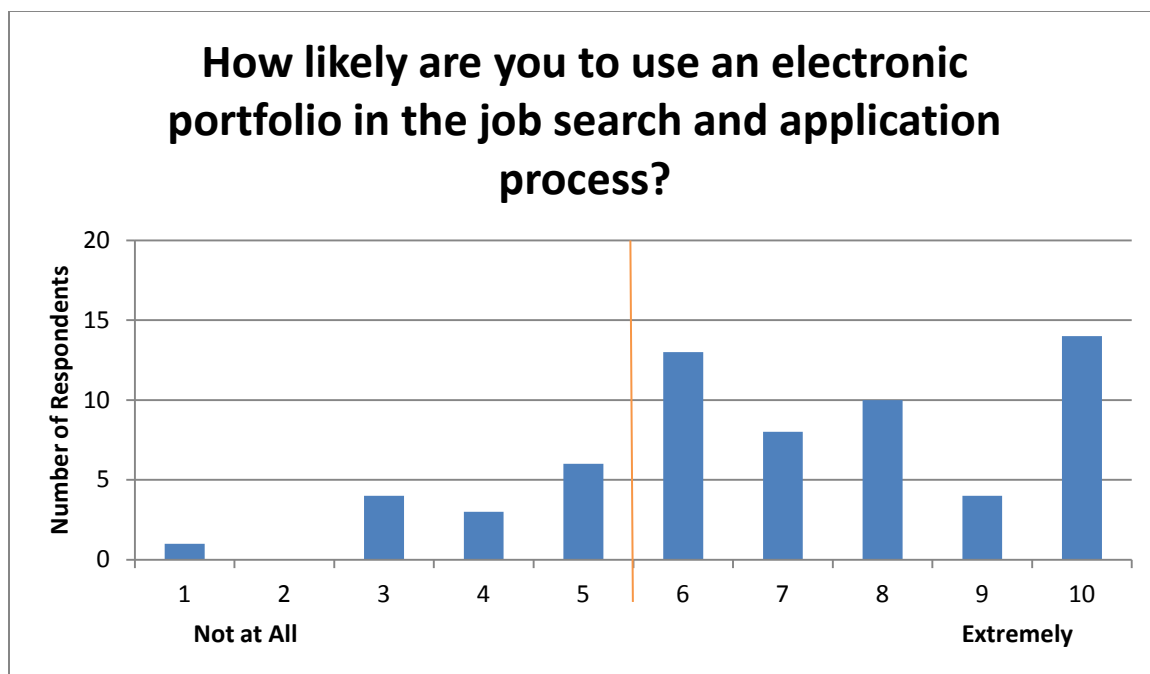
Figure 9: The likelihood of college students using an electronic portfolio in the job search and application process.

Compared to other stages in the application process, students were most likely to include a URL linking to their electronic portfolio in a resume with an average rating of 6.81 on a scale of one to ten. More than half of the respondents (58.8 percent) were "very likely" to include an electronic portfolio at this phase of the application process. They were least likely to include the URL for an electronic portfolio in a thank you note with an average rating of 5.08.

With an average rating of 6.52 for applications and 6.49 for cover letters, college students are also likely to share their electronic portfolios in these phases. Including their URL in an email to an employer received an average rating of 6.35; however, more than 40 percent of students were "very likely" to

share the link in email correspondence. The average rating for sharing an

electronic portfolio during an interview was 6.05.

How likely are you to share/include your electronic portfolio in each phase of the job search process?
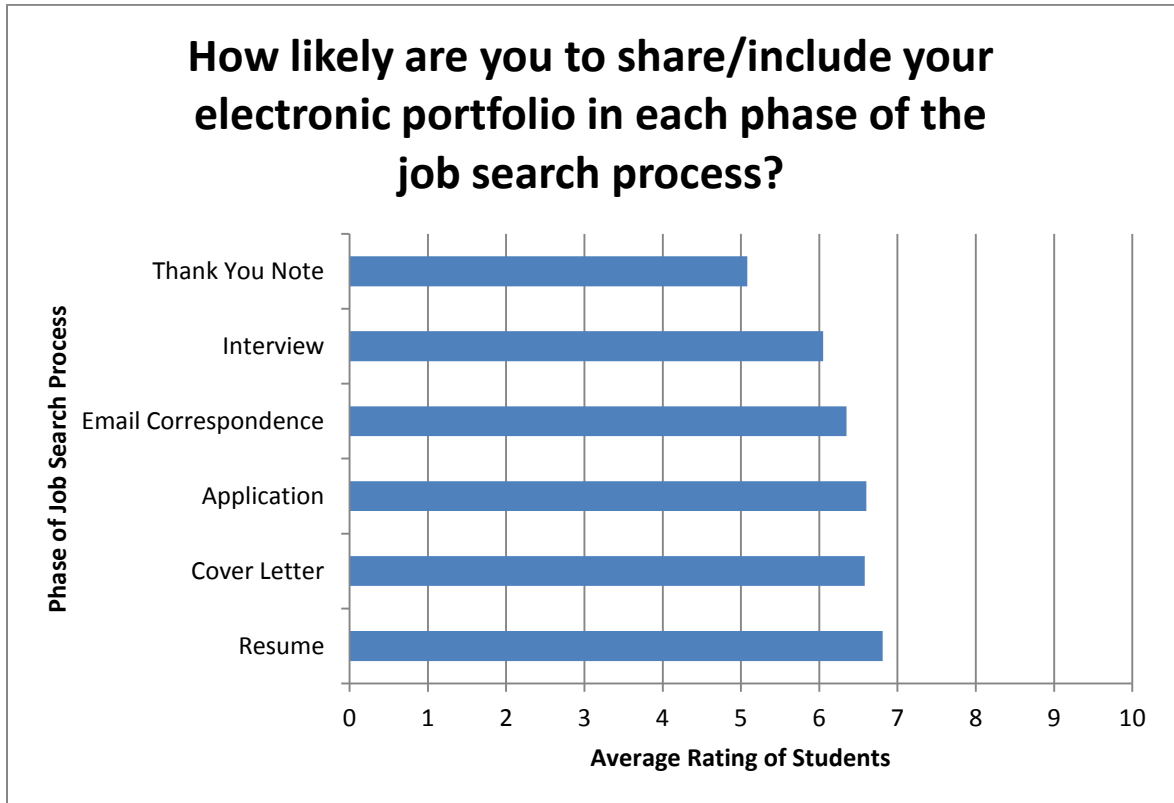
Figure 10: The likelihood of college students sharing an electronic portfolio at each phase of the job search and application process.

TABLE 2: Likelihood of students providing URL to electronic portfolio				
How likely are you to include your electronic portfolio URL in a…	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Resume?	6.72	5.5	10	3.34
Cover letter?	6.49	5.5	8	3.50
Application?	6.52	5.5	8	4.27
Email to an employer?	6.27	5.5	8	3.27
Thank you note?	5.02	5.5	5	3.44
Interview?	5.97	5.5	5	3.47

College students identified several skills or competencies that they expected to develop during the creation of an electronic portfolio. The majority of responses (25.5 percent) listed basic and moderate computer skills. Some responses were more reflective of the overall benefits of creating an electronic portfolio:

> *"It gives you the chance to reflect on your skills and accomplishments better preparing you for your interview."*
>
> *"Better job seeking skills, greater comfort relating to the overall process."*
>
> *"Confidence in understanding one's skills and strengths."*
>
> *"It gives you a good idea of what you really know about yourself."*
>
> *"You gain skills not only on the computer, but in general employment."*

Eighteen percent of the 52 responses stated that they did not know what skills would be developed.

Students mentioned accessibility for themselves and the employers and creating a more professional image as strengths of using an electronic portfolio in their job search. In terms of accessibility, they liked having immediate access to their employment information and related content from anywhere and being able to easily share the sites with employers.

> *"Having your own web page for employers to find you on is great for you and the employer."*
>
> *"You can make them public and share them with as many people as you can at once.*
>
> *"To create an online [portfolio] is a means of getting my name and work experiences to several employers."*
>
> *"Quality, detailed reference, quick access."*
>
> *"Allows the interviewing team access to information about yourself, lets them view professionalism, and match up your records."*
>
> *"It will make it easier for employers to find out who you are."*
>
> *"It is a well-prepared, formatted design created to better sell yourself to a potential employer."*
>
> *"Maybe an advantage over other job seekers, can cover more details on it than maybe you could in person."*
>
> *"Versatility, portability, multi-media capabilities."*
>
> *"Visualizations, shows the work that you are doing instead of just talking about it. In an interview, you do not have all the time in the world to tell them about everything. If you use the electronic portfolio, they can look at it in their own time."*

"You can show them who you are all in one place."

Forty-one out of 56 student respondents did not list any weaknesses in using an electronic portfolio in their job search. For the remaining students, weaknesses included creating and maintaining the site, not liking it, sharing inappropriate information, not having regular access to it, and the concern that employers would not use or know how to access the site. Only one out of 56 responses worried that employers would not use it, but a small amount of responses were concerned that someone might not know how to access it.

Some comments were:

> *"May not have enough information to be useful especially someone with little or no job experience or extracurricular activities."*

> *"Have to constantly update it according to your work record, not really a weakness unless you don't update it."*

One of the responses from college students on the weaknesses of using electronic portfolios as job search tools might actually be the greatest obstacle in this process; however, it is something that can be eased through education and training.

> *"It is a new way of showing yourself. Some people do not like the new ways and prefer to stay the way things are now."*

Human Resource Professional and Career Counselor Survey Results

Participants used a rating scale to define their perceptions of the preparedness and confidence levels in job seekers. For each question, they could respond on a scale of one to ten with one meaning not at all and ten meaning extremely. Seventy percent of respondents found the average job seeker to be unprepared for the hiring process with 83 percent indicating that the average job seeker is significantly unprepared.

In comparison to the average job seeker, a prepared job seeker has used job search tools and resources to develop a resume and research employment opportunities. They are prepared to apply for open positions and present their qualifications in an interview. From the perspective of career counselors and human resource representatives, the average job seeker is slightly more confident than prepared for the hiring process. On a scale of one to ten, the average rating for preparedness was 4.36 and the average rating for confidence was 4.56. The numbers increased significantly when I asked about the perceived level of confidence in job seekers prepared for the hiring process. The average rating was 6.96 for the level of confidence perceived in a prepared job seeker. The highest percentage of respondents (26 percent) rated the confidence level at nine out of ten for the prepared job seeker. In relation to that topic, I asked the human resource professionals and career counselors to rate the perceived confidence level of job seekers with electronic portfolios and the highest percentage of respondents (22.9 percent) also rated them at nine out of

ten. The average rating for perceived confidence in job seekers with an electronic portfolio was 6.08.

TABLE 3: Human resource and career counselor perspectives of confidence				
From your perspective…	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
How prepared is the average job seeker for the hiring process?	4.36	5	3	6.07
How confident is the average job seeker?	4.56	5	5	5.1
How much confidence do you see in job seekers prepared for the hiring process?	6.96	6	9	5.03
How much confidence do you see in job seekers with an electronic portfolio?	6.08	5.5	9	3.05

Since human resource managers and career counselors can recognize increased preparation and confidence in job seekers with electronic portfolios, I wanted to know if they viewed the content in electronic portfolio sites. From my literature review, I knew that a good percentage of employers at a national and worldwide level were viewing online content in their hiring practices, but it was crucial to know if and how much that trend impacted the predominately rural region of northeastern Minnesota where I was conducting my research. The numbers are significantly less in this region compared to the international statistics, but 66.7 percent of respondents reported seeking candidate information online occasionally or frequently. (See figure 11.)
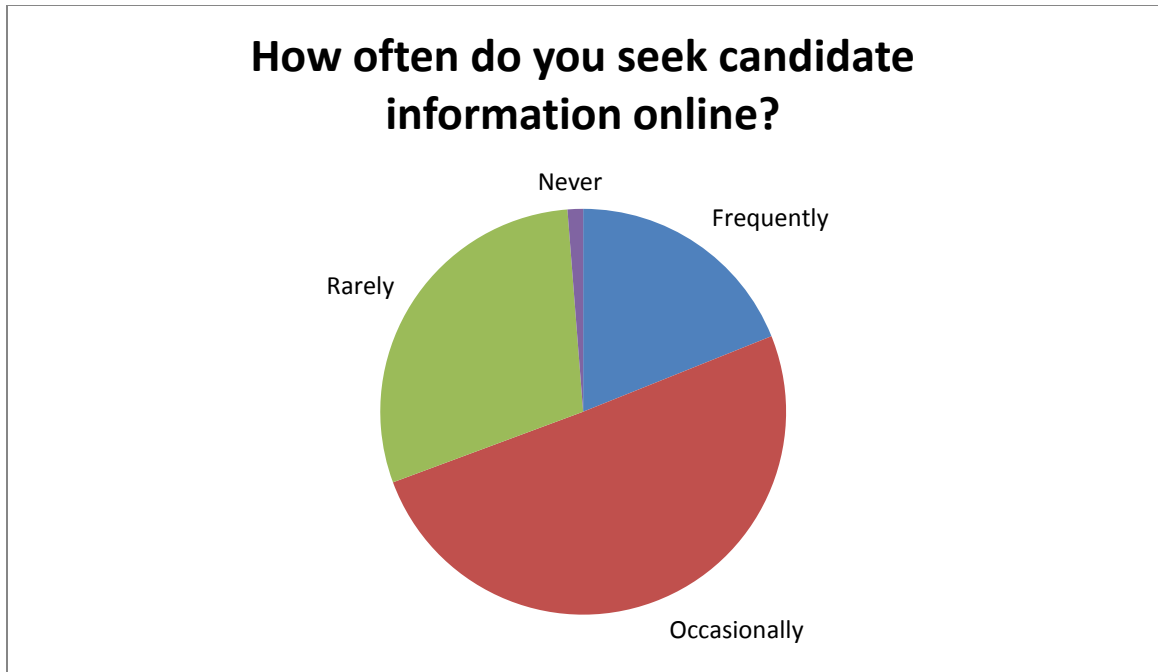
Figure 11.

A positive discovery on this topic was that the majority of respondents (70.7 percent) are viewing online resumes. More than half (53.7 percent) are viewing Facebook, a social networking site. Professional networking sites, such as LinkedIn, were also viewed by 53.7 percent of the respondents and electronic portfolios were the third most popular source for candidate information with 29.3 percent of the responses. (See figure 12.)

When viewing candidate information online, what do you find?
Check all that apply.
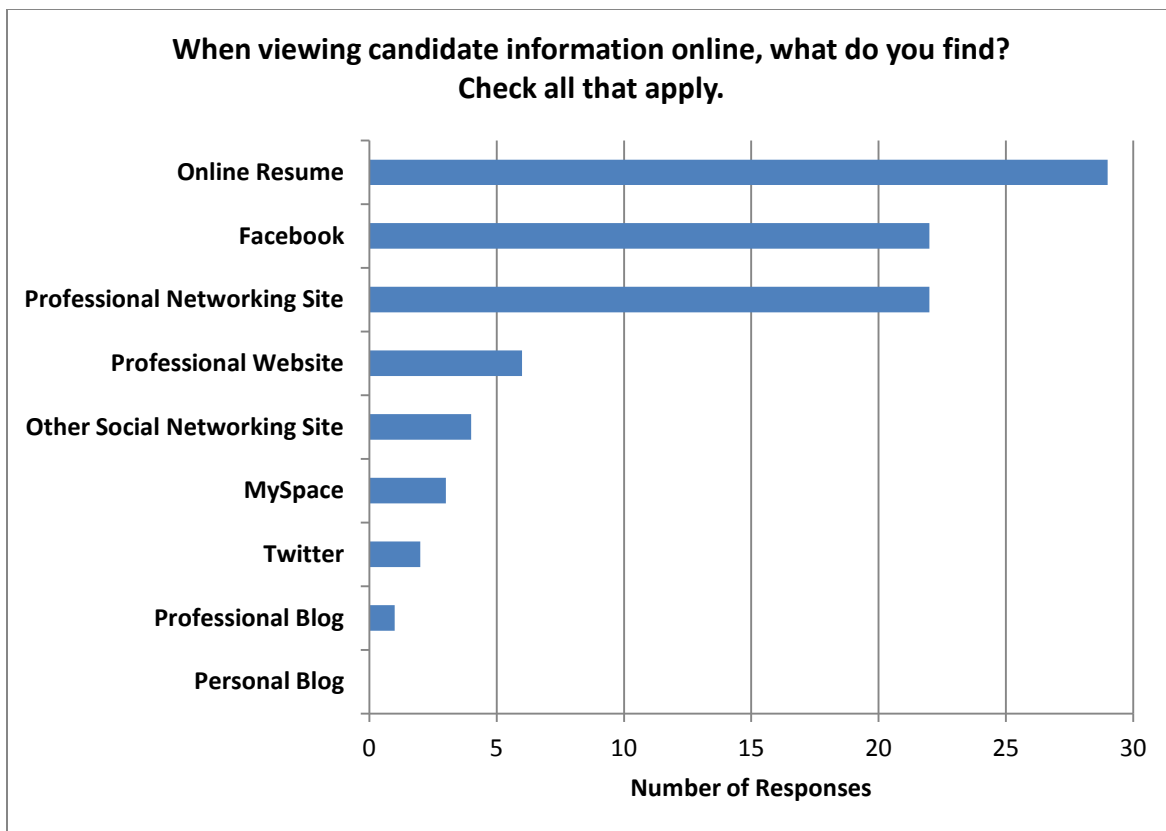
Figure 12:   The Internet sources used by human resource professionals and career counselors when searching for applicant information.

It was important to know if anyone involved in hiring practices was viewing electronic portfolios, but I also wanted to understand the value of electronic portfolios from their perspective. I asked how much value they found in candidate resumes and, comparatively, electronic portfolios. On a scale of one to ten, the average rating for value in a resume was 6.34 while it was only 4.66 for electronic portfolios and 44.7 percent of respondents found little to no value at all in electronic portfolios.

By comparison once again, I asked the human resource managers and career counselors how likely they were to consider resumes and electronic

portfolios in their application and hiring process. On a scale of one to ten, the average rating for considering resumes was 8.22 and it was 6.23 for electronic portfolios. In regards to the likelihood of considering resumes in their hiring process, 79.6 percent of respondents selected eight or higher on the scale of one to ten. When questioned about the likelihood of considering electronic portfolios in their hiring process, 39.7 percent of respondents selected eight or higher on the scale. Another contrast in responses to this question was that all of the participants were willing to consider resumes while 18.9 percent of the respondents would not consider an electronic portfolio in their hiring process.

TABLE 4: Value and consideration of resumes and electronic portfolios				
	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
How much value do you find in candidate resumes?	6.34	6.5	7	3.86
How much value do you find in candidate electronic portfolios?	4.66	5.5	3	2.95
How likely are you to consider resumes in your application and hiring process?	8.22	7	8	6.38
How likely are you to consider electronic portfolios in your application and hiring process?	6.23	5.5	8-9	2.3

If we break the hiring process into phases, what would be the best time for a job seeker to present an electronic portfolio? The following results distinguish

between resumes, cover letters, applications, email correspondence, interviews, and thank you notes as each phase of the hiring process.

Human resource representatives and career counselors were most likely to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in email correspondence. On a scale of one to ten, the average rating was 6.83. This is possibly related to convenience as the individual may click directly on the link to view the electronic portfolio and they are already online. At other phases of the hiring process, the individual may not necessarily have easy access to a computer.

With an average rating of 5.5, they were least likely to consider electronic portfolios in the interview process; however, more than a quarter of the respondents to that question were "very likely" to consider electronic portfolios in the interview process.

On a scale of one to ten, 6.65 was the average rating for viewing an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in a resume. Nearly half of the respondents (47.9 percent) were "very likely" to view an electronic portfolio at this phase of the hiring process.

The average rating on the likelihood of viewing electronic portfolios included in a cover letter or application was 6.47. While the average rating to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in a thank you note was 6.30, over 40 percent of the respondents were "very likely" to view an electronic portfolio at that final stage in the hiring process after reviewing resumes and conducting interviews. With an average rating of 5.02, which was the lowest

among phases in the hiring process where students would share the URL for their electronic portfolio, this was the largest difference between students willing to share an electronic portfolio and employers willing to view it.
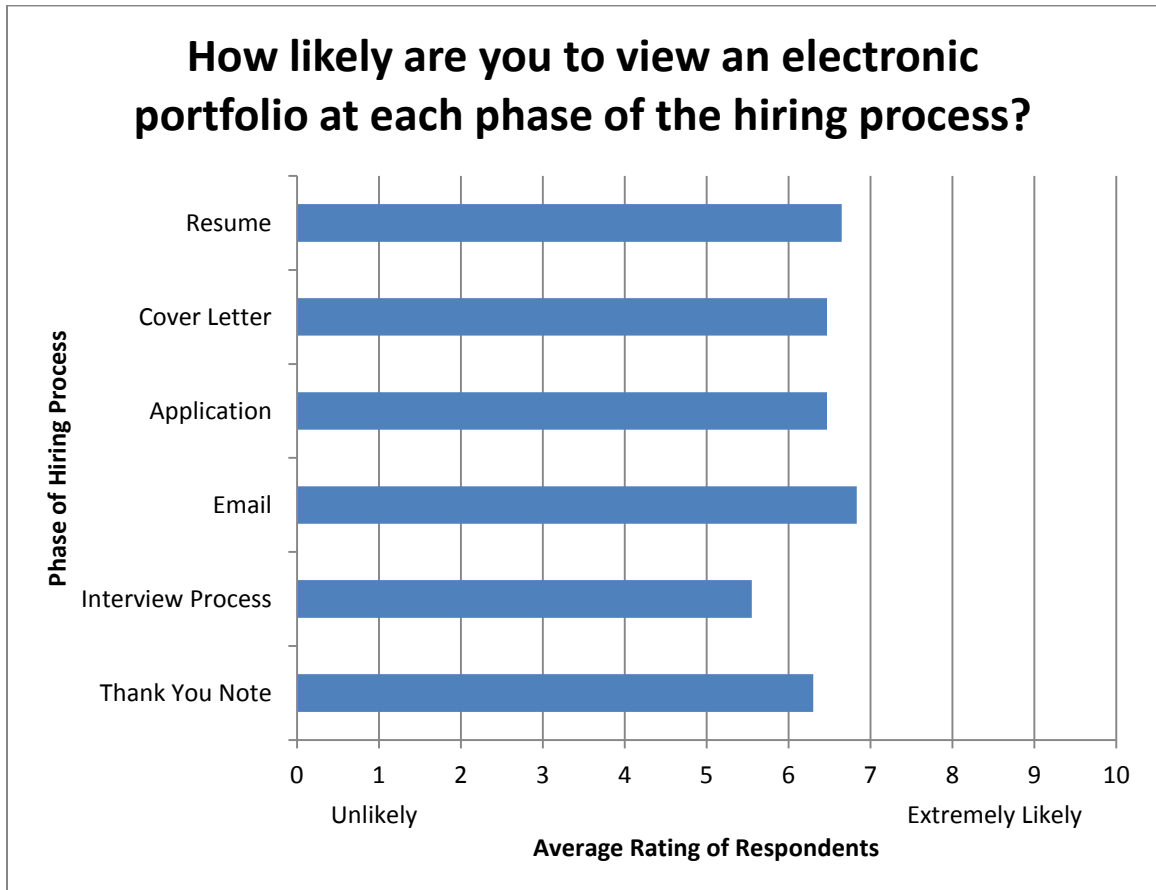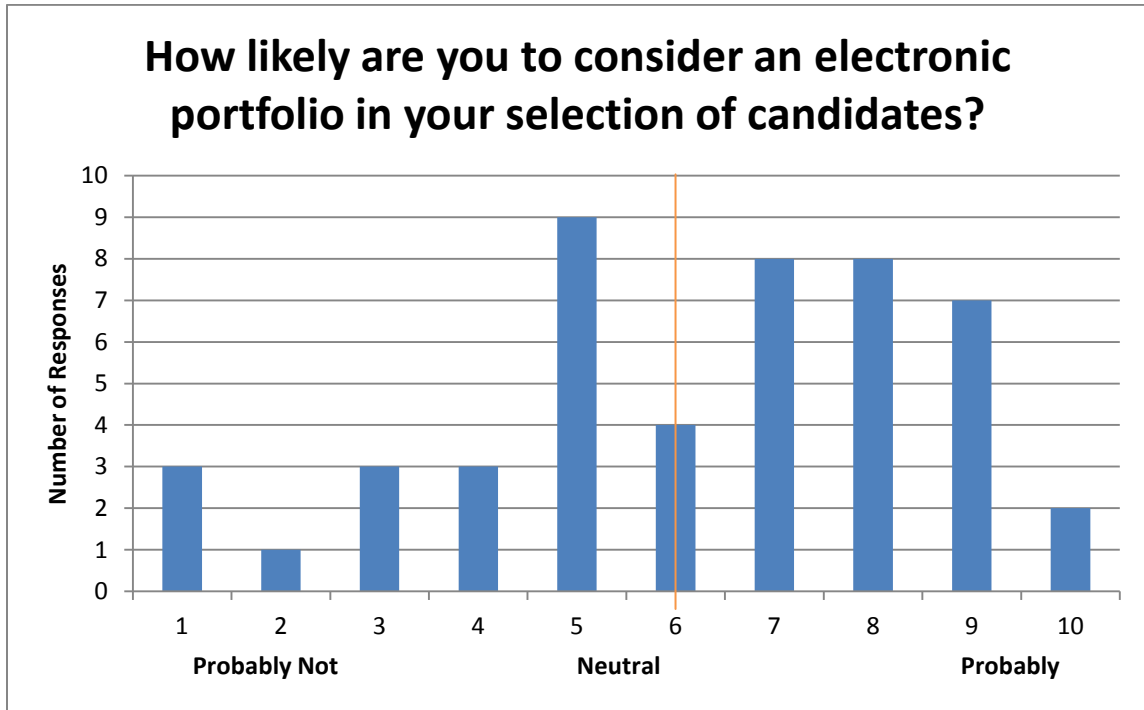

Figure 13: The likelihood of human resource professionals or career counselors viewing an electronic portfolio at each phase of the screening process for applicants.

TABLE 5: Likelihood of viewing an electronic portfolio				
How likely are you to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in the…	Mean	Median	Mode	Standard Deviation
Resume?	6.65	5.5	8	2.9
Cover letter?	6.47	5.5	7	3.27
Application?	6.47	5.5	8	3.43
Email?	6.83	5.5	8	2.95
Interview?	5.55	5.5	5	2.67
Thank you note?	6.30	5.5	8	3.34

After addressing the likelihood of human resource representatives and career counselors viewing electronic portfolios during the hiring process, I wanted to know if they would be considered in the selection of candidates or the final hiring selection. It is valuable to know how electronic portfolios are viewed, but even more crucial to know if they are being used in the actual selection process.

On a scale of one to ten, the average rating was 6.21 to consider electronic portfolios in the selection of candidates and 6.24 in the final hiring selection. The fact that the majority of respondents selected five or higher on the scale of one to ten shows that human resource representatives and career counselors are likely to consider electronic portfolios in hiring decisions including the selection of candidates to be interviewed and the final selection. These

results, however, contradict the average rating of 4.66 when I asked the

respondents how much value they find in electronic portfolios. (See table 4.)

How likely are you to consider an electronic portfolio in your selection of candidates?

Figure 14: The likelihood of human resource professionals and career counselors considering an electronic portfolio in their candidate selection.

How likely are you to consider an electronic portfolio in your final hiring selection?
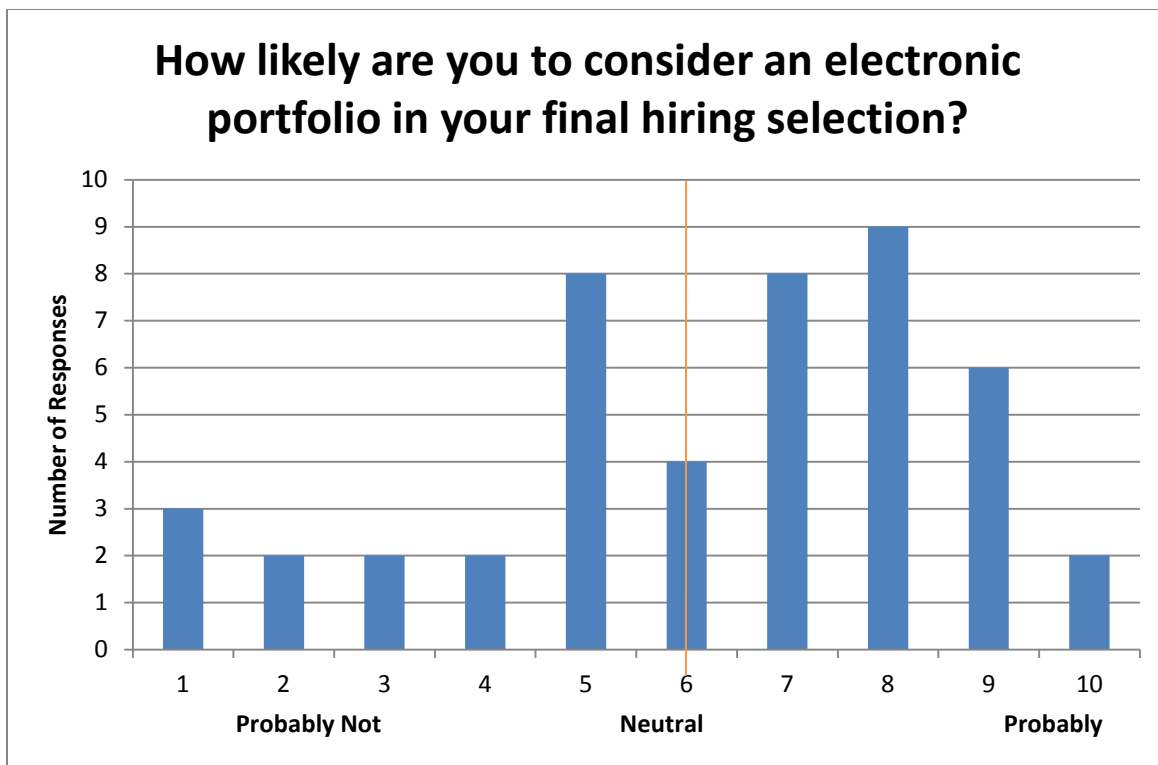
Figure 15: The likelihood of human resource professionals and career counselors considering an electronic portfolio in their final hiring decision.

TABLE 6: Likelihood of considering an electronic portfolio				
How likely are you to consider an electronic portfolio in…	**Mean**	**Median**	**Mode**	**Standard Deviation**
Your selection of candidates?	6.21	5.5	5	2.90
You final hiring selection?	6.24	5.5	8	2.86

Human resource professionals and career counselors participating in the survey explained that electronic portfolios showcase skills from basic computer abilities to demonstrations of core competencies. One respondent described it as follows:

> *"By developing an electronic portfolio, they show their computer knowledge, writing ability, attention to detail, as well as organizational skills. The skills shown in an actual electronic portfolio include a candidate's transferable and job specific skills and knowledge, education and training backgrounds, and certifications. In some cases, it can also include hobby/interest/activity skills and knowledge."*

Another respondent shared:

> *"Technical skills (ability to manipulate and present information), organizational skills, motivation as measured by taking the time to complete a portfolio."*

Thirty-eight respondents shared answers on the skills and competencies portrayed in an electronic portfolio. The following list summarizes their answers:

- Composition/Writing Style

- Marketing Skills

- Technical Knowledge and Ability

- Creativity

- Organization Skills

- Responsibility

- Initiative

- Communication

- Job Specific Skills

- Soft Skills

- Social Networking Skills

- Work Samples (documents, reports, projects, presentations, etc.)

The human resource representatives and career counselors described the strengths and weaknesses of using an electronic portfolio in their current hiring process. A prominent topic in the responses on strength was ease of access, instant access, and a "one-stop shop" for comprehensive candidate information that streamlines the process.

> *"Shows the candidates strengths and abilities; all of the candidates employment information, educational history, certificates and degrees are all in one place! Easy to access!"*

Respondents also saw strength in the opportunity to gain a better understanding of applicants through past experience and personal goals. They appreciated visual demonstrations that prove skills and abilities along with the inclusion of awards, honors, and certifications.

> *"Additional information about a candidate can be provided, technological competency is a very in demand skill, and it shows that the candidate is organized and professional."*

> *"You learn much more about the overall skills/experience/knowledge of candidate than what you see on a resume with concrete examples (i.e. photos, brochures, videos, and slideshows of work they have done) in some cases."*

> *"You instantly have access to work samples and additional information that would not necessarily be included on a traditional resume."*

> *"It gives the hiring agency an opportunity to view examples of work that the applicant has stated as skills prior to the interview and any questions about the portfolio can then be addressed in the interview."*

The biggest weakness of using electronic portfolios in the hiring process was time, or rather a lack of time available for viewing them. Some considered it an extra step in the review process and questioned if using the

extra time it takes to access each individual electronic portfolio and to read

the information was worth it. They also worried that applicants might provide

more information than necessary, including some irrelevant information.

> *"Too much information to look through. If you have many applicants to review, it needs to be a quick review."*

> *"You never know just what you are going to get or if it will be worth the time it takes to get through them."*

> *"Electronic portfolios may contain more information than needed to determine hiring decision."*

> *"Sometimes too much background information on a potential job candidate is a bad thing.......Overwhelming at times!!!!!!!"*

> *"Time. It is one extra step. (But one that can pay off in the long run by hiring the highest qualified candidate.)"*

An interesting note is that respondents were not only concerned if all job

seekers would have equal opportunity based on varying levels of ability to

use the software of an electronic portfolio, but also if employers had a

sufficient amount of knowledge to navigate the final product.

> *"A weak link is the employer not knowing what and how to access along with being open to changing hiring process mindset from old."*

> *"Potential of employers not being computer literate."*

> *"Candidate does not know how to use an electronic portfolio."*

> *"If it is difficult to access, then I do not use it."*

> *"Not all candidates are able/willing to do the eportfolio, especially older workers."*

Two out of 38 respondents were hesitant that electronic portfolios are "just another fancy tool" and only one mentioned the possibility of technical glitches, but added that such an issue was unlikely. I anticipated more concern over technical glitches and also the fact that many organizations have an already established hiring process, but only one respondent mentioned that as well.

> *"We have a set process as part of a large organization. The e-folio is not an aspect of that process and does not get much consideration."*

Something that I predicted to be the greatest weakness was the need to change the mindset of those not willing to adapt to new practices with the advancements in technology, but only one response even touched on that idea.

> *"May miss a very good candidate that has not completed an electronic portfolio. Technical knowledge is not always the most important attribute in a candidate."*

It is promising to know that so many are willing to experiment with new technology even in a rural area that may not necessarily be current by comparison to larger, urban regions.

Out of forty submitted answers, twenty-eight respondents were willing to consider electronic portfolios in their hiring process. Ten stated that the question was not applicable in their current position. If we look at the recordable answers, 28 out of 30 means that 93 percent of participants are willing to consider electronic portfolios in their hiring process.

> *"Yes, it offers additional information that can save everyone in the hiring process ... 'time'."*

"Yes, things are moving that way and it may be time for all to get on board with electronic portfolios."

"Definitely. They give a more in-depth look at a candidate's qualifications."

"Yes-- more relevant and concrete than the traditional resume and application verbiage."

One of the employers has already implemented the use of electronic portfolios in their hiring practices.

"Yes, we already do because it can give us more information on an individual than just experience and education."

Human resource professionals and career counselors saw electronic portfolios as an "added bonus" with corroborating information particularly if it was "pertinent to the job description" or desired skills. Respondents mentioned that it would not be a requirement, but it could be used in the screening process. Technology upgrades were briefly mentioned as well as the fact that larger employers already have a hiring process in place.

"It would not be a pre-requisite for applying; however, it makes candidates stand out among their competition."

"Yes, however, not as a requirement at this time. Would consider if everyone was required to have an electronic portfolio. I don't want to miss a skill set that I need because of lack of an e-portfolio."

"Possibly, but our technology in the hiring process needs to catch up in order to make that beneficial."

"It could be considered, but not likely very highly as it is not part of our current process. We place more weight on our testing and interview process."

Those who did not want to consider using electronic portfolios put more weight on the in-person interview or were trying to fill labor-intensive positions that don't require computer skills. Only one respondent said that paper copies would be more convenient. The results show that survey participants are interested in learning more about using electronic portfolios in hiring practices.

> *"I would be curious to see a portfolio of someone seeking to enter the human services field. Admittedly, I more often associate the effectiveness of portfolios with more hands-on work where pictures of projects and accomplishments are key (and not typically part of a traditional resume)."*

More information, marketing, and training are needed for respondents to consider including electronic portfolios in their hiring process. A desire for more information shows that there is interest in learning more about using electronic portfolios.

> *"Employers would need information and training to become comfortable with electronic portfolio."*

> *"A higher level of awareness of their benefits. Do they really streamline the process or is it something that takes up my time to learn and the potential employee's time to do in order for us to find one another?"*

> *"Additional information is always helpful! Success stories/testimonials from employers."*

> *"More information/marketing about them... They are here and will continue to grow..."*

> *"That all people have knowledge and access to developing an electronic portfolio. Many have not heard of one yet."*

Four respondents are only waiting for an opportunity to try using an electronic

portfolio. This could mean that they are already willing to accept candidate

portfolios or that it is not yet part of their company's screening process.

> *"The candidate needs to supply their link so I can view their electronic portfolio. I am comfortable with my skills otherwise."*

> *"For an applicant to send us one and we can try it. I have never had anyone apply to a job with an electronic portfolio."*

> *"For the efolios to become more the norm in the hiring process. Right now, efolios are not being used from my experiences."*

> *"Our company needs to accept electronic applications/resumes and, at this time, we don't."*

Others offered some very plausible suggestions for integrating the use of

electronic portfolios in hiring practices.

> *"Make it a requirement for departure from high school and colleges."*

> *"Ability for the applicant to transfer/upload the data to an agency's electronic application system."*

The integration of electronic portfolios in high school and college programs is an

ongoing process, but one that continues to grow and expand in northeastern

Minnesota. The college students participating in this survey will graduate with

electronic portfolios ready for the job search process. These electronic portfolios

include an introduction along with content relating to education and employment

history. A print version of their resume will be embedded as well as other

documentation of their skills ranging from diplomas and certifications to work

samples and video demonstrations.

Discussion

The lack of human interaction when using an electronic portfolio was an interesting concern among college students. The topic was not mentioned in the survey, the preceding presentation, or any course resources prior to conducting the survey, but it appeared more than once in the results.

"You don't have the human contact with the electronic portfolio."

"You might rely on it as a crutch when it comes to a face-to-face interview."

Surprisingly, similar concerns appeared in the human resource representative and career counselor survey results. They were worried that an electronic portfolio would be an inadequate replacement for an interview.

"It's electronic and not a replacement for in-person interviewing."

"It is just another marketing tool and the true character of a person comes out in the interview. It is also dependent upon an applicant's ability to develop a good e-folio."

"I don't think candidates should solely rely on electronic portfolios. It is still important to realize that a candidate has a limited chance to make a good first impression."

It is important to note that this topic was never introduced to either sample. The students feel that they can better represent themselves in a face-to-face interview because creating resumes, cover letters, electronic portfolios, and other application materials are new to them. They are not comfortable with these phases of the job search process yet and not ready to rely on new tools. I think the same concern comes from human resource representatives and career

counselors because introducing a new tool takes them away from the comfort of a familiar process. With so much of the hiring process moving online and the capabilities of communicating and demonstrating skills in an electronic portfolio, they want to protect the in-person interview.

Electronic portfolios are not intended to replace face-to-face interviews, so more information should be provided to students and employers on how to use this job search tool during the screening and application process along with current methods.

From the perspective of human resource representatives and career counselors, the average rating for perceived confidence in job seekers increased with an electronic portfolio. The increased perception of confidence could be related to the preparedness felt upon completing a project at the level of an electronic portfolio. The final product is another tool that promotes their skills and abilities. The confidence could also be related to the process of examining and reflecting on their experience and assets to develop a portfolio.

Weaknesses from the college students and the human resource representatives included creating and maintaining the site, not liking it, sharing inappropriate information, not having regular access to it, and the concern that employers would not use or know how to access the site.

These responses demonstrate the need for education and training during the development of an electronic portfolio, which will increase student confidence in using their final product as a job search tool.

Nearly 45 percent of human resource representatives and career counselors found little to no value at all in electronic portfolios. While the development of electronic portfolios is a growing trend in higher education, it is not necessarily carrying over as an employment tool after graduation. Colleges value electronic portfolios for assessment and evaluation, but employers will not take the time to review something when they find little to no value at all. We need to understand value from the employer perspective if we are promoting electronic portfolios as employment tools.

In regards to the likelihood of considering resumes in their hiring process, 79.6 percent of respondents selected eight or higher on the scale of one to ten. When questioned about the likelihood of considering electronic portfolios in their hiring process, only 39.7 percent of respondents selected eight or higher on the scale. Resumes have been more commonly used as an employment tool longer than electronic portfolios, so the difference in those results could be expected; however, 18.9 percent of total respondents said they would not consider an electronic portfolio in their hiring process.

The majority of respondents were likely to consider electronic portfolios in hiring decisions including the selection of candidates to be interviewed and the final selection. These results, however, contradict that 44.7 percent of respondents found little to no value in electronic portfolios and I expected a similar, if not lower, response to considering an electronic portfolio in hiring decisions. It is possible that they find more value in resumes, but are willing to consider other resources when necessary or if they need further information;

however, we need to remember that 18.9 percent are not willing to consider an electronic portfolio in their hiring process.

Human resource representatives and career counselors are most likely to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in email correspondence and least likely to consider one during the interview process. Over 40 percent of respondents were "very likely" to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in a thank you note. At this point in the hiring process, students were less likely to share the URL. In fact, compared to other stages of the application process, college students were least likely to include the URL for an electronic portfolio in a thank you note, which makes that point the largest difference between students willing to share an electronic portfolio and employers willing to view it.

Areas for Future Study

Future research is needed to gather more information regarding the topic of electronic portfolios in the job search process. I suggest two more phases to build on the results of these surveys. At the end of the Job Search Strategies course, the college students complete mock interviews with human resource representatives and career counselors. These same individuals already completed the surveys. I would like to provide computers and Internet access during the mock interviews that allow students to use their electronic portfolios. The mock interviews would not only give students the opportunity to practice their interview skills, but also find the best way to incorporate their electronic portfolios. Perhaps they have content to share throughout the interview in response to specific questions or they might prefer to use it in a more presentational format to display work samples at the beginning or end of an interview. I would survey the human resource representatives and career counselors again after the mock interviews. The interviewer completes an evaluation for each student and I would include the following questions at the end of the evaluation form:

- Did the student bring a copy of his/her resume?

- Did the student use his/her eFolio?

- If yes, what are your overall thoughts about using an eFolio during the interview?

- Would the applicant's eFolio affect your hiring decision? Why or why not?

The final phase I would recommend is to conduct the same survey with the same group of college students at the end of the semester after they have completed resumes, cover letters, mock interviews, and several weeks of development on electronic portfolios. It would be interesting to compare the results from the survey prior to and after their training, development, and use of electronic portfolios as job search tools.

This completed research project along with the two suggested phases would create one comprehensive study that could be repeated with different students, human resource professionals or career counselors, college courses or majors at another institution.

Conclusion

The eFolioMinnesota software training sessions that I provided to students dedicated a significant amount of time to learning the technology; however, I developed written instructions and video tutorials to better share my time with content development. With the proper resources, it is possible to find a balance between content and technology in developing an electronic portfolio as an employment tool.

When we focus on the content, I like the idea of using argumentation in regards to the function of an ePortfolio. In the discussion of developing content versus learning technology, ePortfolios can be viewed as a tool for making claims and then providing evidence to support the claims. A professional statement can be used to create the home page and annotated artifacts will became additional pages (Eliot, Kilgore, Mobrand, Sattler and Turns 2012). I often ask students and jobseekers to think of how their cover letters address job postings. Yes, I have that skill. Yes, I meet the qualifications. An ePortfolio should go beyond that and actually display their abilities. If you are certified to operate a piece of heavy equipment, attach your license or certification and add a video demonstration to prove your qualifications.

While the college students were more likely to use a resume in the job search process, they were willing to share their electronic portfolios with prospective employers and saw the benefits of reflecting on their skills and accomplishments, building confidence in their strengths, and creating a more professional image. Through classroom presentations on social media and

online reputations, students learned about the importance of creating a professional image and they discussed the difference between social networking and professional networking. Prior to building content in an electronic portfolio, it is crucial for students to understand how human resource representatives will view the content. With the proper resources and instruction, students can create an electronic portfolio with the most appropriate content for employment, but they first need to learn the difference between putting information online and building a professional portfolio online.

The overall results show a willingness of human resource representatives and career counselors to consider electronic portfolios in their hiring practices, but 44.7 percent of respondents found little to no value at this time and 18.9 percent are not willing to consider an electronic portfolio in their hiring process. The difference shows that while they currently find more value in resumes, human resource representatives and career counselors are willing to consider other resources when necessary or if they need further information and it is possible that electronic portfolios could become more valuable as employment tools in the future.

There remains a need for further education and training on both sides to improve the process. For example, there was a common concern about the lack of human contact with electronic portfolios from the perspective of students and human resource professionals. This is a legitimate concern; however, I am not suggesting that an electronic portfolio should replace any portion of the application process. I am asking if integrating an electronic portfolio into a

process that already includes resumes, cover letters, and interviews will create a stronger candidate or improve the hiring process. That might be better understood if the second phase of research was complete. Mock interviews would allow both the human resource representatives and college students to experience the integration of electronic portfolios rather than the replacement of face-to-face interviews. The second phase of research would also demonstrate potential issues with the usability of electronic portfolios as an employment tool shared between job seekers and prospective employers.

The results are relatively even between which phases of the hiring process students are willing to share electronic portfolios and human resource representatives and career counselors are likely to view electronic portfolios when the links are included in resumes, cover letters, and applications. The largest difference is in sharing the link in a thank you note. (See figure 16.) Human resource professionals and career counselors are more likely to view an electronic portfolio when the link is included in a thank you note than the college students are likely to share the link. Human resource representatives could be more apt to view electronic portfolios at this point because their candidate pool is already narrowed down to the finalists after an interview process. It is unclear if the college students do not feel that a thank you note is a good time to share their electronic portfolio or if they do not plan to write a thank you note at all. Once informed on the likelihood that their electronic portfolios would be viewed at this phase in the hiring process, it would be interesting to see if the student percentage increases on including their link in a thank you note.
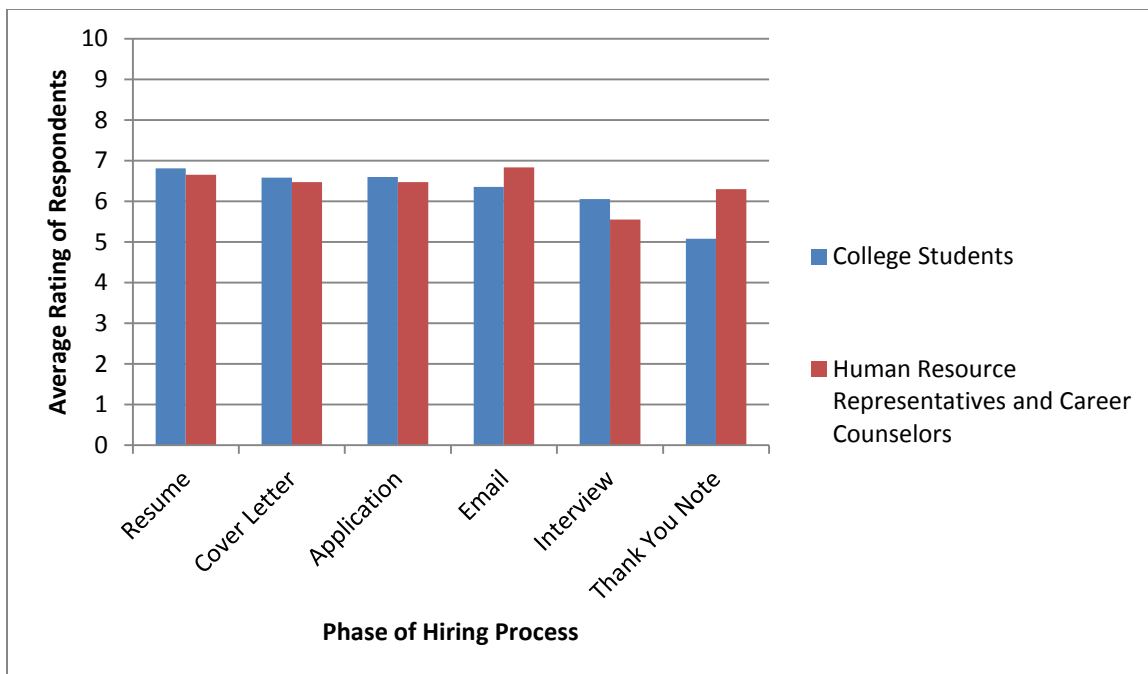
Figure 16: The likelihood of when college students will share an electronic portfolio and when human resource professionals and career counselors will view an electronic portfolio based on each phase of the hiring process.

The goal of my research was to investigate if college students thought the development of an electronic portfolio would benefit them in the job search process and whether prospective employers were using electronic portfolios in their current hiring practices. College students saw the benefits of the reflective process needed to create an electronic portfolio in preparation for the job search process and were willing to share their electronic portfolio with prospective employers, but the data shows that nearly half (44.7 percent) of employers did not see the value and nearly one fifth (18.9 percent) would not consider an electronic portfolio in their hiring process.

By investigating the impact of electronic portfolios in hiring practices through the perspectives of college students, career counselors, and human

resource professionals, I learned that students are willing to develop electronic portfolios as employment tools, but employers are not ready to use them in hiring practices. I discovered a willingness from human resource representatives and career counselors to explore the possibilities of using electronic portfolios that demonstrates the need to educate employers, as well as students, on new employment tools and technology.

The human resource representatives and career counselors saw strengths in the ease of access and "one-stop shop" for comprehensive candidate information including visual demonstrations to prove skills and abilities, but they also felt that electronic portfolios contain too much information to review in a reasonable amount of time when they have many applicants.

Through my literature review, it is clear that many see the necessity of education and training for students to develop competent electronic portfolios. It appears common knowledge that there is no place for electronic portfolios in hiring practices or any other situation if users are not creating a worthwhile and meaningful product. By focusing on the development side; however, we have forgotten the need for training those expected to view this online content. Employers, human resource representatives, and career counselors also need a thorough understanding of electronic portfolios to find value in using them during the hiring process. In a sense, if we are teaching job seekers to write a new language, we must also teach employers how to read it or we risk our efforts turning into "just another fancy tool" that goes unused.

Resources

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Appendix 1

Human Resource Representative and Career Counselor Survey

Demographic Information

Which status best reflects your current situation?

- Career Counselor
- Human Resource Representative
- Workforce Development Professional

Gender:

o Male
o Female

Age:

o 18-24 years old
o 25-39 years old
o 40-55 years old
o 55+ years old

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at All		Somewhat			Very			Extremely	

On a scale of 1-10 with 1 meaning *not at all* and 10 meaning *extremely*, please rate your responses to the following questions:

- From your perspective, how prepared is the average job seeker for the hiring process?
- From your perspective, how confident is the average job seeker?
- How much value do you find in candidate resumes?
- How much value do you find in candidate electronic portfolios?
- How much more confidence do you see in job seekers prepared for the hiring process?
- How much more confidence do you see in job seekers with an electronic portfolio?
- How likely are you to consider resumes in your application and hiring process?

- How likely are you to consider electronic portfolios in your application and hiring process?
- How likely are you to consider electronic portfolios specifically in your interview process?
- How likely are you to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in a resume?
- How likely are you to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in a cover letter?
- How likely are you to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in an application?
- How likely are you to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in an email?
- How likely are you to view an electronic portfolio when the URL is included in a thank you note?
- How likely are you to consider an electronic portfolio in your selection of candidates?
- How likely are you to consider an electronic portfolio in your final hiring selection?

How often do you seek candidate information online?

- Frequently
- Rarely
- Never

When viewing candidate information online, what do you find? Check all that apply.

- Online Resume
- Social Networking Site
  - Facebook
  - Twitter
  - MySpace
  - Other
- Professional Networking Site
- Electronic Portfolio
- Professional Website
- Personal Blog
- Professional Blog

Short Answer.

What skills or competencies are portrayed in an electronic portfolio?

What are the strengths of using an electronic portfolio in your hiring process?

What are the weaknesses of using an electronic portfolio in your hiring process?

Are you willing to consider including electronic portfolios in your hiring process? Why or why not?

What is needed to consider including electronic portfolio in your hiring process? (Information, training, etc.)

Appendix 2

College Student Survey

Demographic Information

Which status best reflects your current situation? (Check all that apply.)

- Student
- Job Seeker

If student, what is your current field of study?
If job seeker, what is your occupational field?

Gender:

- o Male
- o Female

Age:

- o 18-24 years old
- o 25-39 years old
- o 40-55 years old
- o 55+ years old

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not at All		Somewhat			Very			Extremely	

On a scale of 1-10 with 1 meaning *not at all* and 10 meaning *extremely*, please rate your responses to the following questions:

- How prepared do you feel for the job search?
- How confident do you feel as a job seeker?
- How confident do you feel about your resume?
- How confident do you feel about creating an electronic portfolio?
- How much more confident will you feel as a job seeker with an electronic portfolio?
- How confident do you feel about the preparation for your job search?
- How likely are you to use your resume in the job search and application process?

- How likely are you to use your electronic portfolio in the job search and application process?
- How likely are you to include your electronic portfolio URL in a resume?
- How likely are you to include your electronic portfolio URL in a cover letter?
- How likely are you to include electronic portfolio URL in an application?
- How likely are you to include your electronic portfolio URL in an email to an employer?
- How likely are you to include your electronic portfolio URL in a thank you note?
- How likely are you to share your electronic portfolio during an interview?

Short Answer.

What skills or competencies are developed during the creation of an electronic portfolio?

What are the strengths of using an electronic portfolio in your job search?

What are the weaknesses of using an electronic portfolio in your job search?