An Investigation into the Development of a Professional Online Identity through a Professional Development Course

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This dissertation titled

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Abstract

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An Investigation into the Development of a Professional Online Identity through a Professional Development Course

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The qualitative approach of grounded theory was used to better understand the perceptions of students concerning a professional online identity and the value of an e-portfolio. Extensive research in the area of student created e-portfolios exists in the context of majors that have specific accreditation or licensure requirements. These majors, such as teachers, engineers, lawyers or those in the medical professions, have their own set of criteria that assist their students in forming a concept of what it means to be a professional in those given fields. The major of Retail Merchandising & Fashion Product Development at Ohio University does not have these types of guidelines or requirements and encompasses elements of both fashion and business. Because of these issues students find themselves in conflict with little guidance as they begin their transition from student to young professional.

To further complicate today’s creation of a professional identity is the fact that students already have an online identity that is available for employers to search as they transition to the work force. Because e-portfolios can be shared online they have the potential to help students create and manage their professional online identity as it
develops. This study entailed analyses of students’ blogs completed as part of a professional development course, focus groups and individual interviews.

The combination of students’ past experiences combined with the course content of the professional development class aids them as they explore what it means to be professional within their chosen industry and form their own professional identity. The e-portfolio functioned as a means for students to actively engage in the process of what it means to be a professional in the fashion industry through the visual and content decisions they had to make. It also made them aware of possible consequences, both positive and negative, of sharing information online.

E-portfolios can help faculty assist students in the transition from university to professional work. In addition, the creation of an e-portfolio provides the opportunity to create and manage a positive online identity as applicable to students in Retail Merchandising & Fashion Product Development. This knowledge can help to improve curriculum for students and act as a means of outreach to those in industry.
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We stand on the shoulders of giants; I am appreciative to all that have gone before me to make this goal even possible.
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Chapter One: Introduction

Background of Study

With the increase of social networking sites (SNS) such as Facebook, LinkedIn, Academia.edu, and Twitter, the concept of a professional online identity has become vital as students transition from academia into the world of young professionals (Strehike, 2010). Thoughtful reflections on their academic progress, coursework, and internships have the potential to aid students in understanding what it means to enter the workforce and become young professionals. This study seeks to explore the ways in which, through the process of creating an e-portfolio, students may create an understanding of the development of a professional online identity through a professional development class. Because an e-portfolio is online, it can be accessed from any location with an Internet connection. In this way it is easily sharable and maintained. It can also be connected to other systems to match with standards or additional information for accreditation or assessment purposes (Ketcheson & Everhart, 2002).

The purpose of this grounded theory study was to better understand the perceptions of Retail Merchandising and Fashion Product Development (RFPD) students in regards to the development of a professional online identity through the creation of an e-portfolio. Grounded theory is an inductive approach to qualitative research that involves theory being generated from the data rather than data-generating theory; it is concerned with perceptions, attitudes, processes, and actualities (Corbin & Strauss 1990). The knowledge generated from this inquiry will offer insights into how to help RFPD
students understand what it means to create, have and maintain a professional online identity.

Student engagement and reflection has long been a goal of education at all levels and electronic portfolios have been explored as a format to promote engagement (Backer, 1997; Barrett, 2001; Diez, 1994; Hewett, 2004; Pantz, 1996; Tosh et al., 2005; Wiedmer, 1998; Yancey, 2009). Topics in relation to e-portfolios have included those for assessment purposes of accreditation and accountability where required criteria need to be addressed within academic programs. These areas include K-12 education those in medical fields, engineering, and law to name a few (Eliot & Turns, 2011; Luehmann, 2008; Singh, Vinnicombe, & James, 2006; Sweitzer, 2008). E-portfolios were identified as tools to encourage student self-assessment and reflective practices in line with constructivist learning theory because students actively construct their own meaning through the selection of artifacts to display. Through this process they are creating their own knowledge (Tosh, Light, Fleming & Haywood, 2005). E-portfolios have the potential to be used to begin the development of a professional online identity due to their sharable and accessible nature.

The learning theories of Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, Lev Vygotsky, and John Dewey serve as the foundation for the constructivist learning theory (Keefe & Jenkins, 1996). Self-reflection is an attribute of constructivist theory of learning where learners actively construct meaning by building on background knowledge and experience, and then reflecting on those experiences (Tam, 2000). The e-portfolio assignment was designed to follow constructivist principles by allowing students to explore the topics
within the guidelines provided with the instructor acting as a facilitator and allowing the students to construct their own knowledge throughout the process. As seen in Appendix A, a rubric was given to the students to help them assess the skills that they have to offer. This rubric was adapted from the textbook specific to the RFPD major and used for the Career Search Strategies course as written by Paulins and Hillery (2005). These recommended skills include the ability to set goals, evaluate personal strengths, analyze and forecast trends, work within groups, evidence of communication skills, creative and conceptual problem solving skills, working with diverse populations, life-long learning and demonstrate an aesthetic understanding. It was explained to the students that not all of them would be able to fulfill all of the categories on the rubric at this time but they are goals to work towards and develop as they progress through the program.

As the students reflect on issues involved with their own professional identity, they begin to build on their individual experiences and how their e-portfolio may guide their identity to their next professional experience. Each student’s work experience backgrounds, in addition to their experiences with SNS, and computer proficiencies, influence the construction of knowledge. Students engaged in social constructivism through group-work where knowledge is constructed when they discuss the topics and tasks in class and through online discussion boards. These are examples of items that fit within the provided rubric.

Research has been conducted into the transition of roles from student to professional, but not necessarily by using an e-portfolio; the studies that do are specific to a particular major or profession (Eliot & Turns, 2011; Luehmann, 2008; Singh,
Vinnicombe, & James, 2006; Sweitzer, 2008). Ripe for research is the potential for an e-portfolio to work as a valuable tool in the transition of students from university to career. This study will focus on the specific needs and obstacles of RFPD students as they begin to investigate internship and career opportunities. These students need to be both professional and fashionable, showing a combination of business savvy and an understanding of aesthetic trends as could be demonstrated through the e-portfolio. The ability to communicate their knowledge of fashion is done by self-presentation through dress and the visual choices made while assembling the e-portfolio along with the artifacts chosen to showcase for evaluation.

Through my experiences and observations from previously using the e-portfolio assignment in the professional development course, it has shown strong potential to aid in the successful transition from the educational setting to a professional one. The major itself is somewhat misunderstood by not only those outside the major, but students within the major. Students entering into the major often have a narrow view of their potential employment opportunities, which are more varied than they perceive. Through teaching the course and advising it has been recognized that many students think that they will become a store buyer upon graduation (buyers select merchandise to be stocked in a store, based on the predictions about what they believe will be popular with the consumers of the product). Students from the RFPD program have become retail store buyers but also store managers, tradeshow managers, stylists (for on-air personalities and television commercials), visual merchandisers, product managers and merchandisers, trend forecasters, as well as workers in areas of retail marketing, sales, and design. The
major at Ohio University has a strong base in business and focuses on the business of fashion. This is another point of misunderstanding in that the word ‘fashion’ only refers to apparel, which is incorrect. When ‘fashion definition’ is typed into Google as a search the Google definition provided is “a popular trend, esp. in styles of dress, ornament, or behavior.” Fashion can refer to and include any product where color, materials, art/graphic trends (aesthetic choices in general) and visual trends influence buying behavior. The program requirements at Ohio University do focus on apparel since it is a significant part of the retail economy and has a complex relationship with the consumer in terms of the social and psychological aspects of dress (Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). According to the U.S. Department of Commerce (2012), the twelve-month total for 2012 indicated that 5 percent of all retail sales in the U.S. were apparel. The report lists 14 categories under retail with the total also including the areas of food services, health services, building materials, motor vehicles, grocery, gasoline, general merchandise, and electronics. This demonstrates the significance of the apparel category as it relates to the retail industry.

As described, students graduating from the program have found a wide variety of careers within the field. Many jobs within retail are unique to specific companies but usually have a fashion component to what they design, market, and sell and can be placed at any point in the supply chain. E-portfolios have the potential to be of great value in the development of a professional online identity; in the RFPD program, students can easily present the diverse skills, fashion sense, and professionalism of the creator while encouraging students to reflect on their accomplishments.
**Need for Research**

RFPD students straddle the areas of business and fashion. The need to showcase professionalism while demonstrating an understanding of aesthetics, design, and trends is unique to the major. Through personal interactions with recruiters from industry, feedback has been provided on the need for and occasionally lack of professionalism demonstrated by the students. An aspect that can be confusing for students in regards to professionalism is that the *Fieldwork Experience* is often fulfilled through the position of a sales associate in a retail store where it is required to wear the clothes sold by the retailer. As an example, in the past I have used people from industry for conducting mock-interviews as part of the *Career Search Strategies* class from nationally known retail brands whose target market would be the students enrolled in the class. The person representing the retailer who was there to conduct the interview, was dressed in apparel from the store that consisted of a t-shirt with the store logo, khaki shorts with cargo pockets and flip-flops. This is in contrast to the blazers, blouses, pants or skirts the students were instructed to wear for the mock interviews. Students also reported through the journals required for the *Fieldwork Experience* on the diverse backgrounds of their co-workers. Through this wide range of educational levels and age groups, students report conflicting observations on conduct and behaviors in the workplace as to what they expected or deemed appropriate.

E-portfolios have the potential to demonstrate professionalism, and an understanding of both analytics and aesthetics. Students need to be able to understand the
differences between a personal online identity and a professional one (Suler, 2002). Students begin their college experience with an existing identity and now they are expected to develop a professionally appropriate identity within their career choice. An e-portfolio has the potential to help students demonstrate their diverse skills by not only displaying their academic work through the artifacts chosen, but also through the presentation chosen to showcase their work as evidence of their sense of aesthetics and organization through visual communication.

**Purpose of the Study**

This study is an investigation into the students’ perceptions concerning their e-portfolios in regards to the promotion of their professional identity development as part of a professional development course. In addition, by showing students the value of an e-portfolio, including potential professional advantages, their commitment to the e-portfolio project could be increased (Tosh et al., 2005). As an added advantage, students could benefit from previously identified aspects of an e-portfolio from a learning perspective including reflection and self-evaluation. While there are many purposes in having students create e-portfolios, from reflection to job searching, it is clear that there are certain aspects of a portfolio that are unique to a student’s major, curriculum, and individual goals. To implement a successful integration of e-portfolios into a curriculum, finding the aspects that most engage the students’ desires and addresses the program’s aims becomes a vital component (Wright, 2001). These components are expected to be specific to the type of student and program. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to understand how RFPD students begin to develop and value their professional online
identity through the process of creating an e-portfolio in a professional development course (see Appendix A and B).

**Research Questions**

The following research questions were the focus of this study:

1. In what ways does creating an e-portfolio aid or hinder the process of developing a professional online identity?

2. What do students perceive they need to better complete their e-portfolio to reflect their professional online identity in relation to their career focus?

3. What factors will students perceive support or impede their vision of a professional online identity?

4. How will students understand the value of an e-portfolio beyond a graded project for a course?

5. Do students perceptions of the e-portfolio and professional identity change after completion of the *Fieldwork Experience*?

**Research Approach**

After approval by Ohio University’s Institutional Review Board, the students enrolled in the professional development course, *Career Search Strategies* that is a requirement for the RFPD major, created an e-portfolio following the guidelines described in Appendix A. This rubric was taken from the textbook used for the class and modified for the e-portfolio project (Paulins & Hillery, 2005). There were 23 students enrolled in the course, 12 juniors and 11 seniors. The students were preparing to search for the two internships required as part of their course of study. The *Fieldwork*
Experience is a two credit hour experience and involves working a minimum of 120 hours, keeping a daily work journal, setting three to five goals, and completing a major project. The full internship is equal to full quarter’s enrollment and is comprised of 400 working hours with a daily journal, weekly assignments and a final paper. To aid in the proper sequencing of classes and fulfillment of prerequisites, as well as ensuring that students can pass challenging classes the first 2 years in the major, a pre-major was developed. Students must complete these specified courses before official entry into the major is established. The pre-major courses are as follows: College Algebra, Introduction to Accounting, Introduction to Statistics, Macro Economics, Micro Economics, Introduction to Retailing, and one of the following four studio classes—Color Theory, Design and Illustration, Descriptive Drawing or Three-Dimensional Design (they eventually will take a second studio course before graduating).

In addition to successfully completing these courses, students must maintain an overall grade point average of 2.0. This research study was conducted in the professional development course entitled Career Search Strategies of which I was the instructor and where students must receive a minimum grade of ‘C’ before they are permitted to complete their 2-credit-hour, 150-work hour Fieldwork Experience. This work experience acts as a resume builder for their 16-credit-hour 400 work-hours full internship. The 16-credit-hour internship prerequisites are as follows: senior status and completion of three of these five upper-level RFPD courses: Product Development, Evaluation & Distribution, Retail Promotional Strategies, Retail Merchandising Management, Strategic Merchandise Planning, and/or Global Issues in Textile, Apparel
& Retail. This diversity of courses develops a range of skills including analytical, problem solving, global issues, trend tracking, and aesthetic design to equip them with what will be needed for a successful internship experience. With these requirements, an e-portfolio has the potential for students to not only share their knowledge base with others, but allow them to make connections between the RFPD courses for a more holistic view of the curriculum as it applies it to career possibilities and their future.

**Assumptions**

With reflexivity being an aspect of assumptions in regards to the researcher’s background, it can affect the framing and position of the conclusions (Malterud, 2001). A reflective journal was kept during the duration of the quarter in which the research was conducted in order to keep my perspective in check. With this in mind, various assumptions have been identified based on my role as sole instructor of the RFPD professional development course for 7 consecutive years. These observations include that RFPD students do not appear to fully understand the role an e-portfolio could play in self-reflection or the development of a professional online identity. Students generally report that their main concerns are about grades as opposed to the intrinsic value of the project or course. It has been recognized, that although students initially are interested in the idea of an e-portfolio, they do not completely understand how to use them to obtain an internship or job once they graduate. Because it appears that students will not complete an e-portfolio on their own, it must be part of the course design to help them make these connections. The professional development course provides a suitable place for the e-portfolio as it discusses the job search process, work issues and the relationship
of these to the e-portfolio. Various technical obstacles can prevent students from creating an e-portfolio based on their computer skills and desire to self-educate on the interface being used. Ease of use has been found to be a major concern. Several websites were explored, through trial and error, in the creation of their e-portfolio. Google Sites (http://www.google.com/sites/) was overwhelmingly identified by students as too limiting in choices for format and personalization. Many students abandoned Google for Wix (http://www.wix.com/) or Weebly (http://www.weebly.com/) as it was found through past course evaluations that they were pleased with the layout and visual choices as well as ease of use. The academic year of the student may also play a role in their engagement in creating an e-portfolio in relation to how close they are to graduating in terms of finding an internship or full time job.

The Researcher

The portfolio assignment and its development had been incorporated into the professional development course from the beginning. Originally a hard copy was required and then it transitioned into an electronic copy. Inline with the recommendations of Brantlinger, Jimenez, Klingner, Puagach, & Klingner (2005) and Malterud (2001) a full description of my background is offered to frame any possible preconceptions to avoid bias. With a background in Fine Arts and Design, a portfolio has always been a necessary and valuable tool for me personally and professionally. It was used for both self-evaluations of strengths and weaknesses as well as a tool for job interviews and promotions. I have the advantage of seeing the portfolio’s progression but need to be
aware of personal and past experiences so they do not overshadow new developments with a different group of students and those that are different from my own experiences.

Working as a design professional in industry for 10 years is also a part of my background. This experience gives me a unique perspective of having transitioned from a student role to a professional one and gives me the perspective and hindsight on things that I wish I had known before starting my career. Through my industry experience, I witnessed many interns and recent college graduates as they made this transition into a young professional in the workforce and watched as they encountered obstacles that could have been avoided with a better understanding of a professional identity. This experience could be of benefit in bringing a practical point of view to the development of a professional identity but I will need to be cognizant that subtle changes of what is currently applicable to professionalism changes over time, particularly in an online environment.

Because of these noted possible biases and for credibility issues, a journal was kept for purposes of critical self-reflection as well as having discussions with outside colleagues for perspective (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). As stated by Malterud (2001), “preconceptions are not the same as bias, unless the researcher fails to mention them” (p. 484).

**Rationale and Significance**

Rationales for the study emerged from the observed need to help students manage the development of a professional online identity. This challenge has the possibility to be met through the creation of an e-portfolio that will aid them in making connections to
what they have learned at the university and how it applies to their careers. With today’s individual online presence ever increasing through social media, it has become even more important to help students understand the impact their choices of what they share could have on their future. E-portfolios have the potential to be a valuable tool to aid students in this transition. Ideally this would not only help students organize and reflect on their academic achievements, but help faculty develop a stronger curriculum and make connections with industry insiders to showcase what RFPD students have to offer. For students looking mainly for job placement, the aspect of added value to traditional job search methods in the ease of sharing qualifications could increase engagement in the process of creating the e-portfolio.

**Limitations and Delimitations**

Although this research does contribute to the literature concerning the role of e-portfolios and their connection to developing a professional identity and professional online identity, limitations and delimitations for this research are discussed here.

As part of the delimitations, this study was limited to a specific group of students as defined by the RFPD major due to the nature of their coursework as previously described. To be able to go more in depth in evaluating the data collected, only six students were chosen for the individual interviews. The saturation was reached through the accumulation of the various forms of data evaluated and the number of students enrolled in the class inline with the description of purposeful sampling in the combination of convenience sampling and homogeneous sampling was used as described by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007). Purposeful sampling was used to achieve in depth and
rich information in relation to this specific population and situation. During analysis and the development of codes, new codes became infrequent and identified codes became consistent indicating saturation (Guest et al., 2006). No males were enrolled in the class for the academic quarter for which the research was conducted. The focus groups were voluntary with the 13 students who volunteered divided into two groups of seven and six to make them more manageable and to follow the recommendations on focus group size by Larson, Grudens-Schuck, and Allen (2004). The final six interviewees were chosen through the criteria of having taken the professional development course, participation in one of the two focus groups and having completed their *Fieldwork Experience* over the following winter break.

While there is extensive research concerning the professionalism of college students for specific majors, none could be found for RFPD majors. The follow-up interviews were completed after the grades for the course were submitted; however, the students’ comfort level for speaking freely and in an unbiased manner could have been affected by my role as instructor. Through keeping a journal during the Career Search Strategies class, I attempted to keep in-check a personal point of view concerning the reactions to class discussions and happenings but biases cannot completely be eliminated.

From the 23 students enrolled in the course, six students were selected for the individual interviews based on the requirements of having been enrolled in the Career Search Strategies class for the fall quarter, having participated in one of the two focus groups and had completed their *Fieldwork Experience* the following winter break.
**Definition of Terms**

*Artifacts:* “Individual pieces of work comprised of text and images including video or audio.” (Barrett, 2001, p. 1).

*Blogging:* “A web site that contains an online personal journal with reflections, comments, and often hyperlinks provided by the writer.” (http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/blog, para. 1).


*E-portfolio:* “An abbreviation for electronic portfolios and is defined as a collection of electronic evidence assembled and managed by a user, usually on the Web. Such electronic evidence may include inputted text, electronic files, images, multimedia, blog entries, and/or hyperlinks.” (Barrett, 2001, para. 8).

*Fashion:* “A reflection of our times and a mirror of the prevailing ideas in our society. The concept of fashion applies not only to apparel, but also to literature, automobiles home furnishings, architecture, and food, to name a few categories.” (Keiser & Garner, 2012, p. 580)

*Fashionable:* “A characteristic of, influenced by, or presenting a current popular trend or style. Of a person, dressing or behaving according to the trend.”

(https://www.google.com/search?q=definition+fashionable, 2013, para. 1)

*Professional identity:* “A personal identification with the duties, responsibilities, and knowledge associated with a professional role.” (Eliot & Turns, 2011, p. 631).
**Portfolio:** “A portfolio is a purposeful collection of work that exhibits the creator’s efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas.” (Barrett, 2001, p. 1).

**Specialty store:** “A type of store concentrating on a limited number of complementary merchandise categories and providing a high level of service.” (Levy & Weitz, 2011, p. 612).

**Social Networking Site (SNS):** “A web-based service that allows individuals to construct a public or semi-public profile within a bounded system, articulate a list of other users with whom they share a connection, and view and traverse their list of connections and those made by others within the system.” (Boyd & Ellison, 2007, p. 211).

**Transition:** “Any event, or non-event that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles.” (Schlossberg, Waters, & Goodman, 1995, p. 27).

**Visual merchandising:** “The presentation of a store and its merchandise in ways that will attract the attention of potential customers.” (Levy & Weitz, 2011, p. 615).

**Wix.com:** “A free online platform that allows users to create HTML5 websites, mobile sites and customized Facebook pages, through the use of drag and drop tools used to create personal sites and blogs or establish a web presence.”

(http://www.wix.com/about/us, 2013, para. 1).

**Weebly.com:** “A free online website creator. It uses a simplistic widget-based site builder that operates in the web browser through drag and drop tools used to create personal sites and blogs or establish a web presence.”


In researching the definitions of professional, professionalism and profession
there is room for interpretation in regards to the specific profession being discussed. The Merriam Webster online dictionary (merriam-webster.com, 2013, para.1) defines professional as “a: of, relating to, or characteristic of a profession, b: engaged in one of the learned professions, c: (1): characterized by or conforming to the technical or ethical standards of a profession (2): exhibiting a courteous conscientious, and generally businesslike manner in the workplace.” The definition for businesslike is “1: exhibiting qualities believed to be advantageous in business, 2: serious, purposeful” (merriam-webster.com, 2013, para. 1). The first three definitions of the word profession, have to do with religion and then continues with the fourth “a: a calling requiring specialized knowledge and often long and intensive academic preparation, b: a principal calling, vocation, or employment, c: the whole body of persons engaged in a calling.” Coming full circle to the definition of the word professionalism is “1: the conduct, aims, or qualities that characterize or mark a profession or a professional person, 2: the following of a profession (as athletics) for gain or livelihood” (merriam-webster.com, 2013, para. 1). The online Merriam-Webster dictionary links to their definition on their English learners’ dictionary website which defines professionalism as “a skill, good judgment, and polite behavior that is expected from a person who is trained to do a job well” (learnersdictionary.com, 2013, para.1).

**Organization of Study**

Included in this chapter is the rationale behind the proposed investigation; the explanation for the need for the research as well as its purpose in relation to the RFPD students at Ohio University is described. Existing research, supporting constructivist
learning theories, and reflective practices are discussed as well as transition theory. Research questions have been presented in support of the study’s purpose. The research approach outlines the data-collection methods, which includes blogs, discussion boards, and focus-group interviews. Issues of assumptions and a profile of the researcher that could affect the study have been addressed. The rationale behind the investigation was discussed and finally of terms specific to the topic are given.
Chapter Two: Literature Review

Introduction

This literature review begins by discussing the traditional definitions and uses of a portfolio and how this translates into an electronic format. What is the purpose of a portfolio? Why are they being looked to as an alternative method of assessment? These are two of the questions which will be discussed as portfolios, electronic in particular, are becoming a popular topic as an additional means of not only learner assessment, but also as a means for the assessment of programs to meet institutional criteria and accreditation.

There is a consensus of what comprises a successful implementation of a portfolio system as well as what can lead to its downfall, which will also be addressed. These common themes of successful programs as well as benefits gained from the use of portfolios have commonalities that can be learned from by those interested in implementing a system in a particular class, program, or campus-wide format. Various programs and levels of implementation will be reviewed for commonalities.

Next, articles were reviewed concerning professional identity and online identity as well as the transition from student to young professional. As the online world continues to expand and SNS become more a part of our daily lives, it is of importance to account for this as students transition to being young professionals. Limited research that has been completed on students’ development of a professional identity through the creation of e-portfolios but what was found to be relevant has been addressed.
Definitions and Traditional Uses of Portfolios

Portfolios have been around and used by individuals for a long time, one generally associates them with the arts as a means for artists, architects, or designers to showcase their work. A traditional definition of a portfolio as defined by Grant Wiggins in a section of the Technology Encyclopedia by Helen Barrett (2001), reads as follows:

…(portfolios are) a representative collection of one’s work. As the word’s roots suggests (and is still the case in the arts), the sample of work is fashioned for a particular objective and carried from place to place for inspection of exhibition.

(p. 1)

The key words in this definition include: representative, objective, inspection, and exhibition. The importance of these terms and what they mean as they relate to portfolios and electronic portfolios in particular will be discussed in detail later in this chapter.

The definition developed by the Educators in the Pacific Northwest, through the Northwest Evaluation Association and is supported and quoted by Barrett (2001):

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student’s efforts, progress, and achievements in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection; the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection. (p. 1)

In relating the key words from the first definition to the second, more specific definition, it is easy to see the commonalities: the representative compilation of work, and objective to show effort, and progress of achievement, and inspection of the artifacts as it relates to the selection of items to include as well as a means for self-reflection, and
lastly, the exhibition of the portfolio for judging merit for course assessment or for employment. From this exploration of the definition of a portfolio, specifically one for educational purposes, an examination can now begin of the purposes of a portfolio.

**Purposes of a Portfolio**

In her paper, *Encouraging Reflection through Portfolios* presented as part of the conference on linking Liberal Arts and teacher education, Mary Diez (1994) used a metaphor to describe the purposes of a portfolio, that of a sonnet, a mirror, and a map. Each example, the sonnet, a mirror and a map, suggest that the creator must reflect, create meaning and develop their own path. Through this description, commonalities start to develop in approaches that are successful for the implementation of portfolios. In comparing the portfolio to a sonnet, the similarities are in the required structure, which allows room for the creativity of the composer. Creativity is one of the reoccurring themes within successful portfolio implementation. Technology can allow for this creativity, in that there are multiple options for displaying artifacts in a meaningful way; the creators are the choice-makers. It has been observed that is vital to have a well-developed rubric from the beginning so that the creator is given a foundation on which to understand the criteria for which he/she will be assessed (Wiedmer, 1998).

The mirror in the metaphor refers to the reflective quality that portfolios have to offer if they are developed with criteria which points the creator in a direction of self-reflection, as self-reflection is not automatically an outcome. Having the students explain their justification for the inclusion of an artifact can aid them in this process of self-reflection. By making this justification a part of the assembly of the portfolio, students
are more likely to make connections between the actual artifact and its importance to what they learned from its creation (Panitz, 1996). The e-portfolio becomes a tool for students to begin the process of thinking about a professional online identity due to its digital nature of being easily sharable at anytime.

This process of learning from assessing items and contemplating their importance was discovered in a study of students who developed a portfolio as undergraduates and then were followed into the workplace. These students were asked to complete a portfolio of types, which had them list what skills they had developed through their various responsibilities in the workplace and then asked them to list what they had learned from those particular experiences. The former students indicated their surprise by how much they had accomplished and learned since graduating (Brown, 2002a). They were beginning to make connections between their classes and experiences through self-evaluation and reflection.

The map is the last metaphor used in Diez’s (1994) article and describes the next step in self-reflection as it aids in pointing the direction to future self-reflection and aids in future self-development. This mapping process keeps us aware of past mistakes and leads us in the direction of becoming life-long learners. Weidmer (1998) alludes to this aspect by pointing out that portfolios can “serve as evidence of what an individual knows, how the knowledge was acquired, how the knowledge increased over time, how the individual has evolved, (and) where the individual may be heading…” (p. 4).

Another observed aspect concerning the use of portfolios is as an alternative means for assessment in that it can offer more insight as well as a more holistic view of a
student’s abilities (Panitz, 1996). With the increased pressure for standardized testing, teachers are looking for more comprehensive methods of assessment and although this is mostly in reference to grades K-12, higher education is not immune to the pressures for accountability. Business schools across the country are experiencing external pressure for their students to display tangible proof that colleges and universities are preparing them in areas of human relations skills and effective problem-solving skills to be competitive in today’s business environment.

A study was completed at Ashland University’s School of Business and Economics by Poole (2001) where the use of portfolios was reengineered into the curriculum to address these concerns. The entire curriculum was surveyed for aspects on which to draw in order to be able to assess and address the skills desired most by future employers. In doing so, a “stronger emphasis for integrated knowledge across the curriculum was evident” (Poole, 2001, p. 51) with the intention that the portfolio would be the tool for students to make the connections to specific skills. Pre-test and post-test methods were implemented to measure differences between students who used portfolios against those who had not. The study supported the desired outcome of effectively measuring an increase in the students’ abilities for those who used portfolio, in regards to the softer-skills such as human relations and problem solving. These are skills identified by employers, increasing in importance in highly competitive fields and are difficult if not impossible to measure through standard testing and evaluation methods.
Why an E-Portfolio?

Traditional portfolios, electronic portfolios, and e-portfolios have much in common. Before an examination of the differences between traditional portfolios and e-portfolios can begin an explanation of the differences between electronic and e-portfolios must be defined. It is very common for the terms electronic and digital to be used interchangeably and often the term electronic is used when digital is meant. The distinction is as follows: an electronic portfolio contains items that may be a collection of artifacts stored on a CD, DVD, a USB flash drive; in an e-portfolio, all artifacts are stored on the web (Barrett, 2001, p. 2).

All of these formats of portfolios serve as containers for artifacts to be displayed, but the question becomes what differentiates the various formats from being a scrapbook of sorts? This is where the e-portfolio has an advantage by being “easily accessible, having the capability to store multiple media, being easy to upgrade, and allowing cross-referencing of student work” (Hewett, 2004, p. 2). Like social networking, such as Facebook, the e-portfolio allows an individual to maintain artifacts selected by the individual that most represents that individual and his/her self-identity. It is the cross-referencing between artifacts that in part helps students to take ownership and responsibility for their own learning. Another product of e-portfolios is that in this format it becomes easier for students to view their work as a whole, rather than a series of unrelated pieces and therefore, becoming a means to becoming self-reflective (Backer, 1997). The most current terminology used in articles to describe these types of portfolios, are the synonymous terms of electronic portfolio or e-portfolio for short.
The other major aspect that separates e-portfolios from their traditional counterparts is their ability to link to additional standards that go beyond the individual and the classroom goals. This ability to connect electronically through hyperlinks program or institutional standards for accreditation or a university’s work in relation to its mission and goals, allows for a holistic point of view. This viewpoint offers the ability for programs and institutions to do the same type of self-reflection as an individual (Ketcheson & Everhart, 2002). In looking to the future, the University of Minnesota is implementing a system that they expect to link separate academic institutions together, which will work as a type of passport. This passport will link student and program chosen artifacts with institutional information and documentation of university records including full transcripts, which a student will have access to for as long as they wish (Treuer & Jenson, 2003). These are all ways in which e-portfolios are set apart from traditional portfolios and are an added link in the evolutionary process.

**Technology Research and the Passage of Time**

Time is a topic that is important to address, as it often arises in articles and research studies that discuss technology. The discussion of this aspect of technology was intentionally placed towards the beginning of this literature review to establish it as an important issue; it is not one that should overshadow the topic of technology as a whole. Since the purpose of digital, technology-based portfolios has just been discussed, some of the issues in dealing with technology in general will now be addressed.

One of the difficulties in doing research in the area of technology is that time often eliminates (and can create) some of the major concerns in implementing a program
which uses technology. Three of the most common issues are cost, the limitations of the hardware and/or software available, and the lack of simple technology base skills of the students and faculty. An article entitled *Electronic Portfolios*, published in 1996, demonstrates this point. The article begins with a different and simplistic definition of what is referred to as an electronic portfolio as a hypertext that consists of a number of text or artifact spaces created and organized by the author (Purves, 1996). While this in not untrue, it is a limited perspective of what electronic portfolios can offer. The disadvantages of using a portfolio as part of this study were comprised mostly of items that have already been addressed through advancements in technology and the closing of the technological divide; these include cost, the limitations of the software (technical problems), and the learning curve of the students involved. Even with these issues, the professor involved did make a key observation in his assessment of portfolios and their ability to shift the focus from teacher to student and from teacher-instruction to student-learning (Purves, 1996).

An older article from 1995 examines the concerns of cost, but raises an additional important issue. In the article, Ehrmann (1995) addresses the complicated issue of how institutions of higher education allocate and spend their money in relation to other patterns of spending and found that there is “no way to state rationally what it ought to cost to educate a student properly” (p. 1). Noted in the article, is the fast-moving pace of the technology; it wisely advises caution of any technology that is touted, as being a cheaper way of teaching something by using one type over another, be it old or new. It is interesting to note that none of the more recent articles researched made mention of cost.
as a major issue to overcome. As pointed out earlier, there is no easy way to access what is an appropriate cost in comparison to use or implementation, especially in relation to specific institutions. Prices of technology are very hard to predict and are constantly changing (Ehrmann, 1995).

As technology becomes more integrated into the daily lives of students and their availability more accessible their comfort level of using the technology should increase. This is not to say that cost will be completely eliminated from the equation or that technical problems will cease to exist. What should be remembered is that these issues will be in a constant state of change, and in the holistic view in relation to what is of value to the students, these aspects should not overshadow the teachers and institutions.

**Implementation and Assessment of Portfolio Initiatives**

While cost, technical issues, and student ability can all affect the implementation of a portfolio program, there are other issues that need to be taken into consideration for success. One important point to consider before implementation is what technology is expected to accomplish. Ehrmann (1995) pointed out that technology is constantly being compared to what is referred to as traditional methods of teaching; the term traditional methods, is vague and means many things to many different people. The other problem is the assumption that technology is a fix for something that is not working, when it should be seen as more of a tool that can aid in what is already working to make it better, easier, or more efficient. It is impossible to compare technology to a norm when there is not a norm established. This is a beginning point where many e-portfolio programs begin with a wrong assumption and fail. Technology is not a replacement for appropriate methods,
good teaching, or appropriate curricula and should not be seen as such. It is very important not to lose sight of this fact when considering implementing technology into a course, program, or institution. This leads to another important aspect, which is a good plan that takes into account a holistic view that the medium is not the message. To truly see what technology can offer to teaching, learning, and the curriculum, a comprehensive view must be taken; technology cannot be viewed as an indispensable almost invisible tool that is woven into the fabric of education (Ehrmann, 1995).

A key matter that must be decided upon before implementation of an e-portfolio program is its purpose. This must be decided upon in relation to the goals and expected outcomes of those initiating the program. The guidelines and ideas behind making e-portfolios successful remain consistent through all the articles referenced as part of this review. This overall theme for successful outcomes of e-portfolio implementation is the creation of a well-developed rubric for means of accurate and fair assessment. As has been noted, “…too often have (educators) been victims of the ‘rapture of technologies.’ Mesmerized, they focus on individual pieces of software and hardware… and in doing so lose sight of the ‘big-picture’” (Ehrmann, 1995, p. 6). These issues remain true for the implementation of e-portfolios in a single course, program, or that on a campus wide initiative. It is imperative for the students to understand the criteria on which they are being assessed.

**The Need for Technology-Based Skills for e-Portfolio Development**

There are other more general intended positive outcomes as part of the use of electronic portfolios and that is in relation to technology-based skills. Technology itself is
part of the holistic view in that it is important for students to have basic technology skills as part of their education, whatever their majors or degrees.

Much of the research that has been conducted on e-portfolios is in pre-service teacher education. This is largely due to two reasons: the first is the ability for information to be linked to assessment standards for accreditation. The second is that there is a requirement for pre-service teachers to have minimal skills and abilities concerning the use of technology in the classroom environment, which are dictated by standards. These two factors, along with the need for a portfolio as documentation of skills and abilities as they move into the workforce, combine to create an ideal synopsis for research. It can be stated that students enrolled in other programs need technology skills, even though they are not required specifically through standards or accreditation.

These other programs need to assess their students’ abilities and how they measure-up to the program standards, often under pressure by future employers. As students look to be able to move into the workforce, having a portfolio can serve as an aid in this transition. For these reasons, as part of this literature review, an attempt to find additional research and articles outside of pre-service teacher education while not undervaluing the contribution that specific area has made in the research and implementation of e-portfolios. Technology is a constant across boundaries and will only increase in importance for students entering the workforce to be arriving with at least a minimum set of technological skills and abilities.

San Jose State University offers a program with an emphasis in document design and management where technology skills are obviously important to potential employers.
An e-portfolio was the perfect means to integrate the learning of technology skills through various media with the other benefits of self-reflection and development that an e-portfolio has to offer. Backer (1997) indicated an added benefit of “students freely collaborated with each other, both in designing the multimedia as well as critiquing the content” (p. 6).

**E-Portfolios to Support Student Engagement**

One of the main outcomes listed consistently when implementing portfolios into the curriculum is student engagement (Backer, 1997; Barrett, 2001; Diez, 1994; Hewett, 2004; Pantz, 1996; Tosh et al., 2005; Wiedmer, 1998; Yancey, 2009). There are several topics that emerge in almost every article on e-portfolios, they are the same items that are often used when discussing problem-based and constructivist learning: interactive, engaging, motivating, reflective, active role, ownership, and responsibility (Backer, 1997; Barrett, 2001; Diez, 1994; Hewett, 2004; Pantz, 1996; Tosh et al., 2005; Wiedmer, 1998; Yancey, 2009).

The term *constructivism* refers to the idea that learners construct knowledge for themselves, through some of the topics discussed thus far, it can be seen how e-portfolios can support this type of self-motivated learning. Research has been shown to support this connection between e-portfolios and student engagement that is developed through self-reflection which can lead to a sense of accountability and ownership on the creator’s behalf (Barrett, 2001).

In a study conducted by Hewett (2004), the use of e-portfolios was shown to improve students’ course evaluations in pre-service teacher education classes across three
semesters. The surveys completed by the students included written comments on the strengths of the course which included “learning technology skills through the creation of an electronic portfolio” (Hewett, 2004, p. 3). The confidence gained by the students through this experience became obvious to the professor of the course: “…it became evident that the e-portfolio enhanced students’ participation and knowledge gained about the content. The e-portfolio serves as an important tool with which to engage and motivate students to learn” (Hewett, 2004, p. 4).

Another example shown to support the idea of student-based learning demonstrates that “when portfolios are made electronic, faculty and students tend to collaborate in a ‘with and for’ developmental process which enables faculty and students to employ a less-adversarial process” (Gathercoal, Love, Bryde, & McKean, 2002, p. 2) and in return puts the focus on the student’s development; this creates a student-centered approach to teaching. As noted by Gathercoal et al.:

The (digital) portfolio irreversibly changes the roles of faculty and student. No longer is the student simply the recipient of information, having become actively involved in constructing meaning by generating and displaying responses to issues raised in a course of program of study. (p. 4)

While e-portfolios support this type of learning, it is important to note that it does not happen automatically once e-portfolios are introduced into the classroom or curriculum. Much research (Backer, 1997; Barrett & Wilkerson, 2004; Gathercoal et al., 2003; Gibson & Barrett, 2003) has been completed on the importance of having a well-defined purpose and defined outcome. This topic can be logically linked to either the
importance of having a rubric for the creation of the portfolio itself or the importance of having a holistic view if portfolios are being implemented on a campus-wide scale.

Programs implementing a campus-wide initiative also need to look at the issues from a micro and macro point of view (Truer & Jenson, 2003).

**Conflicting Paradigms in e-Portfolio Approaches**

The title for this section comes from an article written by Barrett and Wilkerson (2004), which directly addressed the seemingly incompatible desired outcomes regarding e-portfolios. These two conflicting desired outcomes are in creating both a constructivist portfolio and a positivist portfolio. The tension between these two approaches in portfolio development becomes evident in the fact that they produce portfolio activities that are very different. “The positivist approach puts a premium on the selection of items that reflect outside standards and interests…” (Barrett & Wilkerson, 2004, p. 3) as is generally used when the desired outcome is to meet accreditation and standards requirements. “The constructivist approach puts a premium on the selection of items that reflect learning from the student’s perspective” (Barrett & Wilkerson, 2004, p. 3). The desired outcome for this approach is to create an atmosphere to encourage student engagement and self-reflection. The positivist approach provides less flexibility for the development of a professional online identity as often the artifacts selected for the e-portfolio reflect outside standards. The constructivist approach allows for student reflection and engagement that supports a student controlled artifact selection process that would more closely reflect his or her own idea of a professional online identity.
The problem lies in the fact that when the main focus of the portfolio becomes accreditation or specifically to a student graduating it becomes similar to the high-stakes standardized testing and a seemingly all-or-nothing type of approach. Once this happens, the student is less likely to become engaged in the development of his/her portfolio and view it as “something that they have to produce to get out of the program” (Barrett & Wilkerson, 2004, p. 11). The research discussed in the article concerns the motivations of the learner and indicates that students are less likely to continue the process of portfolio development once they leave the program. How can these two credible uses for portfolios be made to work together when the intended purposes and outcomes are so opposed?

The answer lies in compromise by creating sections of a portfolio, parts that are controlled by the student, thus developing learner ownership of the content, and other parts that are controlled by the organization, for content and purpose (Barrett & Wilkerson, 2004). As stated in this same article, portfolios need to have “carefully-articulated philosophies – with thoughtful consideration given to the process of sorting and selection” in order to be successful. Barrett and Wilkerson (2004) stated:

The best way to kill (the portfolio development) would be to make it mandatory…key benefits are lost if the reflective culture of professional development is replaced by a ‘culture of compliance’ – where (students) go through the motions of assembling materials according to a predated checklist.

(p. 13)

From this exploration of the two perspectives of e-portfolios, it becomes obvious that it is vital for successful implementation to have a well-developed and researched
plan in place before including the portfolios themselves into the curriculum, lest the desired benefits and outcomes be lost to both the students and the institution. Student engagement is one of the greatest benefits of e-portfolios and it is an outcome that must be planned for in order for engagement to happen (Barrett & Wilkerson, 2004).

Assessment of E-Portfolio Work

Now that the importance of identifying the intended purpose, outcomes, and benefits desired through the implementation of a e-portfolio plan have been established, it is just as critical to address how students’ work will be assessed in such a way as to keep student-centered learning and engagement at the core of the intended purpose. It is vital to provide students an active role in the decision of what should be chosen to be included in their e-portfolios as it is this ownership and control that acts as a motivating factor for engagement in the portfolio process (Barrett & Wilkerson, 2004).

Another example of the successful implementation of e-portfolios into a curriculum is one that was completed at Valley City State University where the program was implemented as a campus-wide portfolio initiative for all of its 1,100 students (Corwin, 2003). In this article by Corwin (2003) on e-portfolios, an outline for institution-wide standards was listed as the broader, holistic set of goals and was established at the beginning of the process. Division outlines were the next step in the development, and fit within the goals already established at the institutional level. The division outlines included specific classes within each curriculum that would support the goals of that particular division. As problems and issues arose, they were dealt with and
revisions were made, a few of these issues worth noting for the purposes of this review and are as follows. The emphasis was taken off electronic and placed on portfolio.

In the adoption process, it is meaningful for the many people involved with the process to be included from the beginning, whether they are faculty or administration; but in doing this you have people whose views of technology differ greatly. Often the word technology can negatively impact a person’s perception and interpretation of what, in this case the portfolio, is all about. By removing this association, the purpose of the portfolio does not get lost in its digital format. A second problem was that the team struggled with how much of the portfolio should be prescriptive. As discussed earlier in the Barrett and Wilkerson (2004) article, keeping the students engaged by giving them ownership is vital to the success of an e-portfolio program. The team decided to keep the portfolio student-centered in which “students make decisions on what and how to present information” (Corwin, 2003, p. 5).

Another important concern was the primary choice of audience, which was originally decided upon as being the potential employer; this was decided to be too limiting and the choice was made to have the primary audience be the divisional faculty and the purpose to be academic assessment. The portfolio’s use to aid the student in employment is still a possibility; it has just changed from being the primary purpose. Lastly, the idea of mapping (as with Diez’s 1994 metaphor) was implemented, which allowed for “effectively connect(ing) the outcomes of the major to the abilities and skills and provided students with a visual representation of how the projects fit into the curriculum” (Corwin, 2003, p. 5). The study tracked data through the 5-year adoption
process, and did not exclusively focus on the use of e-portfolios specifically, but on the growth in the use of technology in learning in general, with the e-portfolio itself factoring in the documented improvement. The study can safely be interpreted to indicate that portfolios definitely played a part in the overall results, which included changing the way students and faculty viewed the learning process. The purpose of using this study, as an example is that it shows what extensive planning before implementation of a comprehensive plan can do to create a successful outcome. This includes well-developed goals at all levels, a strong sense of the primary purposes of the e-portfolio, as well as making sure that those involved understand these items, and that they know that they have the support to fully integrate the e-portfolio into the curriculum.

E-portfolios are not always successfully adopted. One example in particular was an attempt to integrate e-portfolios into a series of professional development courses in the Netherlands. At the beginning of the article, Verhagen and Hoiting (2001) said, “The literature shows growing consensus that educational reform efforts are doomed to fail unless the teachers’ cognitions, including their beliefs, intentions, and attitudes are taken into account” (p. 2). The integration of portfolios into the classroom was only a small part of the holistic revision of their curriculum.

The program involved the training of specialized pre-service teachers as young professionals in a work-type environment starting at the beginning of their academic careers. The idea was that by presenting the class in this manner, and by having fellow upperclassmen act as mentors along with the integration of a portfolio, it would help them to achieve the goal of professionalism from the outset. Several issues hampered the
concept from the beginning; some of the issues were as follows: teachers’ and their mentors' willingness to actively participate, and understanding of the exact purpose of the portfolio from the perspectives of both the students and professors (Verhagen & Hoiting, 2001). The overall account of the three-year trial gave some insight into how not to implement a portfolio, or any kind of curriculum change, for that matter.

The portfolio integration seemed to be the least of their mistakes, but a more clearly defined purpose and intended outcome for the use of the portfolio would have helped. The lack of maturity in the first-year students was sighted as one of the problems, but as discussed earlier in successful examples of e-portfolio implementation, it seems that the error was made in the actual approach to the portfolios as well as the assignments, which were a part of the e-portfolio program. One of the main reasons for failure, as outlined in the article, is simply stated by Verhagen and Hoiting (2001). “Portfolios fail when the students don’t see the value” (Verhagen & Hoiting, 2001, p. 426). A familiar thought. A foundation was not fully formed. Clearer guidelines and a well developed intended outcome that included specifics would have helped students understand the purpose and allowed them to take responsibility for their own work. The development of the goals and outcomes go hand in hand with the faculty being on board with the changes; if and when the faculty and administrators are involved in the decisions of the creation of an e-portfolio system it addresses both of these potential problems at once.

A successful example that studied the effects of “placing a faculty committee at the heart of its effort to create a (digital) institutional portfolio for accreditation,
accountability, and assessment” (Ketcheson & Everhart, 2002, p. 2) supports the idea that it is the people involved that make an e-portfolio program successful. This particular article focused more on the collaboration of faculty administration and institutional research and why this particular committee worked so well together. The committee was assembled to create an electronic institutional portfolio for accreditation, accountability, and assessment. While assessment of student learning was originally a key component, it became less so by the end of the recommendation. A valuable outcome of this trial concerned the creation of a digital institutional portfolio and the development of a holistic view that showed the value of such a tool in aiding the university in focusing its goal. The university can use the e-portfolio in the same way a student or a teacher would use it in a providing a structure for self-reflection, which can help map the way for future direction. Through this developmental process of the e-portfolios, the items required, the necessary methods (strong guidelines and rubrics), and valuable results (reflection and self-assessment) were the same as those on an individual or student level. It also became clear to the committee how information collected from student e-portfolios, which were tied into a larger data base for program reflection and accreditation, helped the university show in great detail the criteria which were or were not being met by the students, the program, or the institution itself (Ketcheson & Everhart, 2002).

Variations of E-Portfolios

The last points discussed concerning the issues involved with implementing a e-portfoli o system are also involved in the planning, goal setting, and intended purposes of the use of portfolios takes the discussion to the last topic of the literature review which is
what type of e-portfolio to use? The purposes and goals obviously need to be considered when planning what is appropriate for the intended outcomes. The first question involves whether the intention is the creation of an e-portfolio for a single class, program, or campus-wide initiative. For a smaller-scale purpose, the choices, according to Gibson and Barrett (2003), can be looked at in terms of generic tools (GT) and customized systems (CS) for the development of e-portfolios. GT refers to off-the-shelf hardware and software, which can be used to create truly customized portfolios such as web pages, CD-ROMs, etc. CS refers to software specially designed for the development of e-portfolios including links to assessment criteria as well as server space, programming, and databases.

There are trade-offs between the two methods, but a combination of the two is also possible, drawing on the strengths of each. For either method used, flexibility is very important, especially in the areas of; organization, content and ideas, and the “ability to connect content to various schemas” (Gibson & Barrett, 2003, p. 2). Another aspect to keep in mind is the intended outcome and purpose of using an e-portfolio and the way in which it can alter the “process for producing, improving, and sharing (information)” (Gibson & Barrett, 2003, p. 2). Two of the main points made in this article were that CS systems encourage a top-down approach, due to the fact that they are usually tied into a set of standards, often for accreditation. GT systems on the other hand, start with a blank slate and are constructed without a pre-formed foundation. Again, there are pros and cons for each of these points. The author provided working rubrics to help in the decision making process of which system is best for the needs and purposes of the users. The
rubrics devised by Gibson and Barrett (2003) were divided into the following categories: planning and goal setting, framework for creativity, communications, collaboration tools, reflective processes, connection capabilities, organizational flexibility, display flexibility and transportability, data and information as well as start-up costs and maintenance (p. 573). The end recommendation is a combination of the two systems for maximum benefits for the student, faculty, and institution. The end result indicated, “appropriate use of (both systems) builds technological, critical, and creative-thinking skills” (Gibson & Barrett, 2003, p. 14). It is important to remember, as established earlier, that for student engagement to be a result of e-portfolios, flexibility and creativity are essential qualities.

The University of Minnesota (UM) truly implemented a comprehensive system that demonstrates all the topics discussed thus far. As described by Treuer and Jenson (2003), access and control over one’s own information and records was the main focus. UM implemented a campus-wide initiative to make e-portfolios a fully integrated element in the curriculum and across campus. Their goals included putting the focus on learning outcomes and student engagement regarding students’ educational development; but the university had a broader vision for portfolios as well. The goal of UM was to create an environment of lifelong learning by creating an e-portfolio system that could be shared with “anyone, anywhere, at anytime” (Treuer & Jenson, 2003, p. 34), a feature they refer to as “virtual identity” (p. 34).

UM created a system where students’ permanent university records could be combined with the students’ personal work and materials, becoming a comprehensive portfolio system. The other key factor and goal of this system was that it would help
create a standardization of compatible systems that could be transferred to other academic institutions and serve as a passport of types. The article also stressed the high level of materials customization as well as the ability to limit or give access to areas of the portfolio depending on use, i.e., employment or the admission to other academic institutions. The potential for this type of e-portfolio, which the institution is constantly updating and the students have access to, is almost limitless. This is a system to which the student will have access for a lifetime and can be updated as they receive additional degrees or, if they so desire, from job to job. This study illustrates the potential for e-portfolios to create lifelong learners. It is notable to mention that UM provided access to their system set-up to all those interested; with the desire of encouraging others to create compatible portfolio systems in order to make this revolutionary vision a reality (Treuer & Jenson, 003).

The reasons and advantages for implementing such a comprehensive form of e-portfolios for the campus connects to the issues discussed as a part of this literature review: the planning involved, the support of the administration and faculty (technical support as well as support of the initiative), the flexibility of the parts that the student can control, the separation of the elements controlled by the university, and of course the potential for the on-going self-evaluation and reflection process.

To segue from e-portfolios to identity is an article by Bauer (2009) that offers a student’s perspective on the potential of e-portfolios and identity construction. The article begins by acknowledging the previous research on e-portfolios as a core assessment tool, a means to improve curriculum, and to foster reflection. Bauer asks the important
questions of: Do students use e-portfolios as a professional marketing tool and how can an e-portfolio aid in the construction of one’s digital identity, which seems to be a necessity in the digital age?

Bauer (2009) begins by reflecting on his own experiences in the construction of an e-portfolio as part of the course work for his master’s degree. He first describes and defines the types and uses of e-portfolios as it relates to past research. Where the conversation begins to depart from this discussion is with his observation that reflection is a bridge to the workplace. It is not purely about self-reflection but also meaningful feedback. This feedback can come from peers and teachers but also future employers.

When employers were asked about e-portfolios in 2008 the majority reported that they did not use them but over half stated that they planned to use them in the future. Bauer (2009) recommends “higher education should encourage students to produce e-portfolios, including their resumes, samples of all kinds of work, projects, and presentations to showcase their learning and competency for potential employers” (p. 177).

The last point made by Bauer (2009) on the construction of a digital identity is as a means of personal branding, the e-portfolio starts as a tool for student engagement and merges the learning tool with that of developing a professional digital identity. He draws a model with three spheres that when combined create a digital identity; first as an e-portfolios to collect, select, reflect and present, second as a personal learning environment to manage, and lastly as a social network to connect and share. When these
aspects are combined they will support the needs of universities, teachers, learners and employers.

**Identity, Transition Theory & Transferrable Skills**

Identity, professional identity, and online identity (or as Bauer (2009) called it, digital identity) comprise the next section of the literature review. The parts of our identities, as will be described, are not separate from each other but exist simultaneously. As related in the article by Hogg, Terry and White (1995), identity theory and social identity theory have similar perspectives and overlap in several ways. The authors first define the theories and then compare and contrast them and in conclusion offer suggestions on where each is most useful in its application.

Identity theory involves social behavior in the context of the relationship between self and society. It acknowledges that there are multiple components of self in the form of role identities and the different roles that one plays in their life (Hogg et al., 1995). Role identities are described as “self-conceptions, self-referent cognitions, or self-definitions that people apply to themselves as a consequence of the structural role positions they occupy, and through a process of labeling or self-definition as a member of a particular social category” (p. 256). Examples of role positions are student, professional, wife, mother and or sister. Identity theory recognizes that the role identities are not all equal in relevance and are linked to behavioral outcomes. There is a hierarchy of these roles and those ranked as more salient are tied more closely to behavior and commitment. Society frames the context for self-meaning and influences the behavior of the self within the societal roles.
Social identity theory is like identity theory in that it focuses on the social categories or groups that the individual most identifies and feels they most belong. It is a self-definition that is part of the concept of self. As a member of the group, how one should think, feel and behave is defined. The theory is used to explain members of the group’s behavior in the context of self-enhancement that includes subjective belief structures (Hogg et al., 1995).

Both theories address structure and function of self in relation to the socially constructed self and that it is a dynamic self that works between the individual self and the societal self. Behavior is also a commonality in regards to how it is organized in relation to the roles with which we identify. Another similarity is the way identities are internalized and work to define an identity of self. Hogg et al. (1995) explains that social identity theory is more about group behavior and intergroup relationships while identity theory addresses counter-roles and those relationships. Social identity theory does not discuss roles per say, it describes groups and it can be argued that one can play a role within a group it does not specify the difference.

Identity theory derives from the individual roles and role identities and the idea of self-definition, the roles and groups are not differentiated. Social identity theory comes from a wider range of social attributes and differentiates between roles within a group and identity based on membership to a group. Finally the authors believe that the two theories differ in how dynamic and responsive they are in how they consider the self-concept to be with social identity theory more adaptable (Hogg, et al., 1995).
From this construct of identity and the idea of roles as a part of self, comes professional identity as one of those roles. As noted in social identity theory there are multiple roles of self and are defined by perceptions of what those roles are and should be by group identification and self identification. These roles are dynamic and as students transition to a professional role and identify with a group it continues to evolve.

Professional identity construction as it relates to group identification and role development when the role is stigmatized, is the topic of the article by Slay & Smith (2010). Professional identity is a concept of self and is comprised of one’s “attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences” (p. 86). This research study adds the effect of stigma as part of the formation of a professional identity to the process in order to examine its relationship. Stigma is defined as characteristics such as race, religion or gender that are deemed by society to be inferior or tainted. How does the role of a professional self develop when one identifies self as being part of a group that is stigmatized?

The article notes that professional identity construction is complex and combines self and societal perspectives of a profession that individuals adapt during periods of career transition, and life and work experiences all play a part in this self-understanding. While previous research on race and career is noted they do not discuss the process of constructing a professional identity. This study “considers how relationships between members of a culturally stigmatized groups may influence professional identity construction” (Slay & Smith, 2010, p. 88).
Narrative analysis was used to review the histories of Black journalists during a time when they were rare and the “professional identity of ‘Black journalist’ did not exist in the minds of many people…(and) Black identity was highly stigmatized in America” (Slay & Smith, 2010, p. 89). Multiple authors used existing published materials as data that was analyzed and coded by themes: Factors influencing construction, model components consisting of antecedents, and redefinition of tasks.

The results found that family and cultural values played an important part in professional identity construction. Experiences of being the outsider of the professional community was another recurring theme along with experiences of transforming and being transformed. Personal transformation in regards to his or her standing in the journalistic community in relation to “prestige, status, and respect as professionals in their field” played a key role (Slay & Smith, 2010, p. 95). Other themes identified were: Questioning occupational rhetorics, reflecting on the disadvantages and advantages of cultural stigma, and questioning the identities of Black journalists.

Slay & Smith (2010) offers a model for professional identity construction that is comprised of early influences (family, cultural values) and professional experiences (outsider experiences/stigma, transformation experiences). These two themes help to form professional possible selves that include the repertoire of selves available for use in redefining and creating a professional identity. The professional possible selves work as an ongoing negotiation with the redefinitions of tasks. The areas included in this negotiation and which work together to develop a professional-self includes, redefining profession, redefining stigma and redefining self. In conclusion Slay & Smith (2010)
state that redefinition rather than adaptation is an important part of professional identity construction in stigmatized groups. This process includes, and aligned with Ibarra’s (1999) findings of role model identification, provisional selves experimentation and evaluation of experiments using internal standards and external feedback.

Nyström (2009) investigates the development of a professional identity through the relationship amid the personal and professional parts of life. Proposed is the idea that these are not separate parts of identity but overlapping dynamic relationships that are negotiated between professional, personal and private areas of life. Specifically the article looks at the experiences within educational institutions, the workplace and other aspects of life for novice professional psychologists and political scientists as they transition from higher education.

Outlined is the concept that association with a specific group based on values, norms and ideas frame parts of identity development (Nyström, 2009). This could include that of a chosen profession or extended societal expectations such as gender as well as presentation of him or herself in relation to that profession. Noted is the role that choice of an educational program plays in creating a professional identity in the process of their ‘sense of being.’ In transitioning from education to working life the connection between the two has been found to be far from evident to students (Nyström, 2009).

Data was collected through interviews at three points, first after students’ last semester of study, second upon 15-18 months of work and third after 30-34 months of work. Interviews were evaluated and coded into themes and patterns. It was stated that psychologists have a professional role that is clearer than that of the political scientists
with their liberal arts degree. In line with this point, the findings showed that it was harder for them to identify with a certain work practice unlike the psychologists. Analysis found three different forms of professional identity in that of non-differentiated identity, compartmentalized identity, and integrated identity. These represent the negotiated relationships between personal, professional, and private aspects of one’s life (Nyström, 2009).

In defining these identities it was identified that professional identity formation is the process of “actively sorting out or downplaying, some communities at the expense of others in order to focus attention” to the professional or private parts of self (Nyström, 2009, p. 15). This is particularly true for those who had worked 15-18 months after graduation. Shifts and changes are a part of continued development of a professional identity as seen in the group that had worked 30-34 months. This group had found a balance between their different roles and could reconcile their different identities the more work experience they gained. These graduates framed their professional development “as a prioritizing and sorting out of different spheres” of their lives to find the core of who they have become as they moved from student to early career professionals (Nyström, 2009).

Research into ways in which a professional identity is developed is often confined to a specific profession. McElhinney (2008) looks at the professional identity development of clinical psychology trainees through a qualitative study. She begins by stating that “professional identity development involves the acquisition of new role behaviors and new views of self...(and in) attaining equilibrium between the formal
status of the role and the individual’s perceived competence in that role” a professional identity develops (p. 1-2).

Upon providing a theoretical background for the study, the importance of interactions with others such role models is discussed. Role models provide a forum where the professional self is constantly being reevaluated and reformed through these interactions. It is a process that is constructed socially as opposed to individually (McElhinney, 2008) thus work experiences are vital to this process. As part of this process is that of internalization of the role as professional and the realization that knowledge is evolving.

In the field of clinical psychology, it was observed that the trainees became increasingly reliant on self-validation of their skills and competencies in the field. They become active participants with the potential for conflicts to arise. This can arise when trainees do not feel they have adequate knowledge to perform or conform to role expectations (McElhinney, 2008). Each trainee has their own ability to deal with these uncertainties based on their other identity roles and aptitude for negotiating these conflicts.

In summary, it becomes clear that professional identity development is a process that is complex and opportunities to try out the new role as professional and interact in order to receive feedback to re-assess their performance is important (McElhinney, 2008).

This next article used focus groups of inter-disciplinary teams to investigate the professional development of persons in integrated care. As this research used people in
the profession working with others in the profession those who participated in the research were further along in the professional identity development process. However, there were a few findings that were found to be applicable to a wider group of people, including students.

Individual characteristics were found to have a great impact on the development of a professional identity such as having extraordinary talent or firm beliefs (Holmesland, Seikkula, Seikkula, Nilsen, Hopfenbeck, & Arnkil, 2010). It is a convergence of all the roles that we have. Other points when negotiating a professional identity is the interactions with others and participating in the ongoing dialogue of roles and responsibilities to create meaning.

Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) discuss self-narratives as a means for role transition and negotiating of work identities. Past research into work identities included how humor, dress, personal style and office décor communicate a professional self to others but not as much has been investigated into the role of story telling and how it can create meaning. Framing this idea is that “…the elements of narrative that allow people to achieve desired identity aims and the dynamics of the process by which new narratives are explored and rejected or retained for future use” are still underdeveloped (p. 135). In the article, the authors layout the case for more research into narratives as a tool for aiding in the process of transition. In telling a story about the self, a sense of self emerges.

Identities are multiple, variable, and socially constructed with the various meanings created by self and others based on the social roles and identities a person holds
as well as those prescribed to the individual by others (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Outlined in the article is selective literature on narrative research in career transitions and outcomes concerning authenticity and validation. “Self-narratives are powerful instruments for constructing a “transition bridge” (Ashforth, 2001, as cited in Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) across gaps that arise between old and new roles and across identities claimed and granted in transition-related social interactions” (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010, p. 138). Two qualities that arise as a transition occurs and as the adjustment is happening are authenticity and validation. Authenticity is discussed as being true to oneself across different situations. Validation includes acceptance by others while transitioning into the role. As part of the argument for narrative and identity development is that when an evolving narrative occurs people draw from it to bridge the gaps in social interactions. It becomes a part of their story and in the process creates authenticity and validation through the interactions and becomes a basis for future development (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010).

Transition theory, transformative learning and facilitating insight are the core of the article by Robertson (1997). He describes Bridges’ transition model as the model used to facilitate moments of insight and help learners to conceptualize their experiences in regards to learning a specific topic. Transformative learning as part of the process includes how a person has grown and developed beyond where they started and results in a fundamental shift from their original point-of-view. Teachers ideally strive to facilitate learning as opposed to just disseminating knowledge. As Bridges’ model describes the beginning, middle, and end to the transition it is noted that this transition does not come
easily and that it is often met with resistance. As noted by Robertson (1997) “Paradigms that are most critical to the way in which people see their world and themselves in that world evoke the fiercest resistance” (p. 111) In the middle stage or neutral zone the learner is more free to explore different ways of looking at the world and may reveal a new paradigm. Upon accepting the first and second parts of the transition the last step of new beginnings can be entered. In this last stage learners often experience a ripple effect in that their views begin to shift in other capacities as a result. Donald Schön (1990) is also cited by Robertson (1997), as being instrumental in reflective learning as the process of guiding the student through these transformations with the instructor as facilitator. It is the instructor who is the guide through this transition and plays a critical role in helping with the paradigmatic shift of the student as it happens. Robertson (1997) offers strategies for teachers to assess what works for their particular students. He provides a rubric with eight reflective questions in regards to assessment and development and another in relation to desired outcomes for hindrances and helps for teacher and environment.

In conclusion it is reiterated that transitions are a fact of life and not always an easy part of life. But with these transitions can come empowering paradigmatic shifts that lead to this transformative learning (Robertson, 1997). This article offers a model of helping to conceptualize the process in order to make this type of desired learning into a more consistent event.

While the article The Dalhousie Career Portfolio Programme: A Multi-Faceted Approach to Transition to Work uses the word portfolio in its description, the project discussed is centered on what is called a skills transcript. Wright (2001) describes the
value in the project is in helping students understand what skills are developed through the courses they have taken and aiding them in identifying transferable skills developed as a result. Employers will be looking for once the students graduate. The focus is not on students who are earning professional degrees, but students in the arts and social sciences without access to employment skills. The article describes the experiences of the process of helping students make these connections between the courses taken and skills developed. Wright (2001) offers the experiences of what worked in the study and what needs continued refinement and evaluation. Active learning techniques that put the responsibility of learning on the learners were employed and incorporated a rubric to help participants of where to begin. Personal reflections were a key part of the process to aid in making these desired connections.

Mentors were involved in guiding students to connect theory to practice. Of the skills identified by Wright (2001) on the transcripts, the most common were as follows: (a) written expression, (b) problem-solving, (c) group work, (d) time management, (e) oral communication, (f) public speaking or presentation skills, and (g) research skills. Qualitative data was collected and reviewed to analyze how the project’s goals aligned with students’ experiences and included both positive and negative feedback. While many students did see value in the endeavor of creating a skills transcript, the main parts needing further attention concerned the actual process becoming clearer, the conviction of the professors, and clearer criteria overall. Lessons learned were identified and shared for those looking to implement a similar type of program at their own institutions. At the end on the article under notes, it is important to point out that the transferable skills on
the rubric were added using information gained from actual employers and what they are looking for in new employees.

**Social Networking Sites and Online Identity**

*Identity Management in Cyberspace* is the title of the article by Suler (2002) that discusses the ways in which we manage these online identities. The ways in which one’s identities often merge together on the Internet cause him to ask the questions: Who am I in cyberspace? And am I the same as I am in person or someone different? The aspect that one has the opportunity to present themselves in a variety of ways online through the many choices given to do so is the core of this article. As Hogg et al. (1995) explained there are many roles we play that together create an identity of self. Suler (2002) applies this to cyberspace and describes the different online groups to which we choose to belong such as professional, leisure, hobbies, or personal where we can join and participate as much or as little as we wish. One can choose aspects of self that we wish to display. These qualities of self can be positive or negative, emphasized or downplayed and the sense of anonymity can foster these traits.

The type of groups that exist in cyberspace can dictate proper decorum as to how one is expected to portray oneself. There are groups that expect a level of fantasy in your persona in gaming environments. At the other end of the spectrum are professional groups that expect honesty in how you are portraying yourself and then there are groups that are somewhere in between. In these groups you do not know for sure the level of honesty. “This power to alter oneself often interlocks with dissociation and valence” (Suler, 2002, p. 458). Is this a false persona or just another aspect of self? Suler (2002, p.
makes the point that we all wear masks that differ from how we internally think and feel but that does not make our selves less authentic.

How much of the choices we make when creating online selves and joining various groups in subconscious? Various levels of consciousness exist of how we present ourselves online. Our identities are expressed in the choices we make, from what we wear to our careers. These are the media through which we communicate who we are and Suler (2002) then extends the logic that if this is true, the medium is the self. Each choice made in cyberspace is a part of our identity and a specific attribute of self.

As recognized in the article by Suler (2002), cyberspace offers a variety of ways and an outlet to present one’s self-online. Markgren (2011) outlines ten ways to create and manage a professional online identity. The article is written for librarians but the advice can serve any professional with an interest to self-promote. The idea of self-promotion can be awkward but Markgren (2011) makes the point that it is an important aspect to managing a career and the online forum for sharing accomplishments can aid in creating a professional online identity. Ten steps are outline with number one being to accept that you have an online identity, meaning it already exists and people can search information about you. Two is that because of number one, you can influence how people perceive you. From here the steps cover ways of framing your online identity in a positive light and understanding that you cannot completely keep the social/personal aspects of your identity separated from your professional identity. Thinking about personal branding in the choices made in your online identity will help keep your identity ‘clean.’ Step seven is simply to create an online portfolio. Markgren (2011) discusses
what an online portfolio can provide inline with existing research and outlines tips for how to build an online portfolio. In closing she reminds us to be mindful of our online existence (be polite and respectful) and to share, use, and keep it current.

In the article by Grant (2008), a point of view from that of a recruitment specialist is provided in relation to building a personal brand. With the rise of the Internet the way in which recruiters operate is evolving. A recruitment specialist was interviewed to offer perspective on how graduates can capitalize on this trend and how to create a professional online image. Described are the ways in which the role of the recruiter has changed into not just talent scouts but relationship managers as well. Technologies from online and cellular to Twitter and Facebook are discussed as the new tools for recruitment and application.

A key aspect of personal brand development as shared in the interview is how the potential candidate aligns themself in relation to the field in which they are entering. The interviewer is looking for a ‘fit’ with the corporate brand and corporate culture (Grant, 2008). People skills and credibility in addition to academic credentials are critical. Maintaining visibility through the Internet is the way in which a personal brand is created and developed in the current job market.

Strehike (2010) reviewed 14 web-based articles on the influence of SNS on careers and job searches. Networking has been identified as an effective way for career development; but what is new is the use of the Internet and the tools that it provides for connecting people. These new web-based outlets for communication have both positive and negative consequences of which job seekers need to be aware in regards to public
and private information. Strehike is clear to reference that “despite the growing collection of literature on SNSs, researchers have paid little attention to the influence of this technology on career development” (p. 40). The following six concepts are identified concerning SNS: online identity, user profile, reputation, visibility, employer use, and online relationships. In relation to these categories the need for understanding the distinctions between public and private contents, online and offline worlds as well as close and casual relationships are of great concern. These issues can affect self-presentation and the messages an online profile(s) is sending to the people who are viewing them. The article continues to offer suggestions and advice on how to manage one’s online presence to their advantage. Strehike concludes by making it clear that online presentation is important to managing a professional presence on SNS as well as understanding the boundaries of public and private information.

After reviewing the references for the article by Strehike (2010) it was found that many of the articles were no longer relevant as they addressed SNS that no longer exist in their original form such as MySpace and Friendster. Other articles were no longer accessible from the listed websites such as CareerBuilder. Three of the articles, which are from The New York Times and The Wall Street Journal and The Vancouver Sun, were located and found relevant and are included in the literature review below. Included are two articles from 2010 and 2012 to show the progression in the knowledge and use of SNS in reviewing job candidates and the job search process. The articles have been reviewed in chronological order.
The article titled *Persona Undermines a Resume* by Finder in 2006, two years after Facebook was launched in 2004, foreshadowed the potential pitfalls of a SNS identity. College recruiters and human resources give examples of student profiles that cost promising candidates potential jobs. The checking-out of candidates’ online presences is described as a growing phenomenon that can make “students look immature and unprofessional at best” (Finder, 2006). Companies have been communicating with career counselors to express concern and that they should let students know that they should be aware that they are being searched online. Students interviewed for the article made statements that they had never thought that employers would bother to go beyond looking at their resume and grades. Employers interviewed had mixed feelings about being able to see into students’ college living rooms. The article notes that not all companies are doing online searches and career counselors are skeptical about the number of companies that actually do them. This stated, all agree that it is important to be aware of this trend and the merging of the youth world overlapping with the adult world.

Athavaley (2007) reports that in addition to employers searching SNS for information on job candidates they are also looking on professional networking sites such as LinkedIn and Jobster.com for mutual connections. Through these mutual connections they are able to seek information on candidates beyond the references provided. A senior recruiting manager said that networking sites “have completely changed everything” (Athavaley, 2007, para. 5). The article warns about connecting with people they only have a limited relationship with, as there is no guarantee that a reference provided would be favorable. The pros and cons of these practices are acknowledged in how they can be
beneficial but also backfire. The same senior recruiting manager also stated “a person’s online presence is just an integral part of their life at this point” (Athavaley, 2007, para. 12). Recommendations for job hunters are provided on how SNS can also help, but to be careful about choosing the people with which you connect and how their behavior could reflect upon you.

The article *Your Online Persona Reflects Your True Image* conveys a message of ‘dress for the job you want, not the one you have’ in terms of an online identity. This advice comes from a digital marketing agency president, Mitch Joel, that states “…we are moving towards a day when your lives are really melding in what we do in the real world and what we do online…they are becoming true representations of what we are and what we do (“Your Online Persona Reflects Your True Image,” 2002, para. 4).” Survey results on Canadians and self-promotion on the Internet found that 4 in 10 do not know how to do so. This includes the impact that their online activities could have in real life both positively and negatively. Other statistics are provided concerning use of the internet and demographics including that eighty-one percent of Canadian women indicate they are conscious of the impact their online activities could have on their image, compared to 70 percent of men.

An article from *The New York Times* in 2010 begins with the negatives of SNS and follows with how you can social network your way to securing a job. Manjooroo (2010) reports that the entire job-search process has undergone a complete overhaul with the advent of all the means for social networking. It describes Facebook, Twitter and LinkedIn as a few of the tools for self-promotion and managing your online reputation.
While this is seen as non-negotiable by recruiters it is often an obstacle for those doing the job search. Teaching job seekers how to use these online resources effectively is becoming a main part of career counseling offices as universities and colleges across the country. Issues of being consistent with their image across these media can be tricky and teaching ways of how to manage an online identity is key. Twitter is used as an example of a means for getting your name out there and making connections that can lead to employment whether you are actively looking or not.

The 2012 article from *The Wall Street Journal* offers more of the same warnings about SNS as a job hunter but notes that a recent survey by CareerBuilder found that two in five companies now use SNS to screen potential candidates. Kwoh (2012) reports that what is considered a deal breaker is changing with the evolution and access that employers now have to candidates before hiring. Companies are now able to use social media to pick up on subtle clues that indicate whether a candidate would be a good fit for the corporate culture. Clues that are looked for include: work styles, work ethic and honesty. The article ends by noting that Millennials, in particular, are most vulnerable as Brendan Wallace, CEO of a SNS noted by saying “The social-media identity they carved out was never created with the end goal of a job in mind” (2012, para. 16). While the information acquired through online searches cannot legally be considered in the hiring process, it is hard not to consider it, if even subconsciously.

Eliot and Turns (2011) completed a study with engineering students and the creation of a professional identity through portfolio construction. A volunteer workshop was initiated to explore this process. It was noted in the article that little or no
information about the criteria for choosing portfolio content or possible future uses for the portfolio itself was offered to the participants. No information was provided as to the method for assembling the additions to the portfolio construction such as an online format or otherwise. The question for their research was stated as “How do engineering undergraduates approach the task of constructing professional identities in the context of the professional portfolio activity?” Eliot and Turns (2011) discuss the transition that students have to make in how they frame themselves as a professional while they are still enrolled as students. The findings were categorized as internal and external processes both of which relied on the students’ personal narrative of self and their previous experiences. Activities that encourage internal and external sense making were also discussed. Internal activities included the reframing of personal history, constructing the future and finding new meaning in their experiences. External activities included comparison to role models, internships and meeting other’s expectations. Reflection and comparison are at the center of the process of transition from student to the creation of a professional identity of self. In conclusion the researchers found the feedback of the workshop to be positive and as such ended with asking two additional questions: How as educators do we currently support these sense-making activities for our students? And how can we better support professional identity development as an ongoing process in our students

**Student Perspectives on Professional Identity and E-Portfolios**

The objective of the study conducted was to understand how medical students perceive professionalism in a context that they find relevant to themselves. Focus groups
were the primary means for gathering data from 72 medical students in the UK (Finn, Garner, Sawdon, 2010).

After analysis the researchers identified seven themes about professionalism: the context of professionalism, role modeling, scrutiny of behavior, professional identity, ‘switching on’ professionalism, leniency of standards of the profession for students, and sacrifice of self as an individual. The contexts for these themes fall under that of the clinical experience, the university experience and the virtual experience (Finn et al., 2010). Another issue having an impact on identity of self was that of clothing; it was understood as one of the ways that professionalism could be switched on or off. The article did not say if the clothing was a uniform just that it was an element of costume dressing in the way they perceive a doctor should dress.

Students’ online identities through Facebook also emerged as an issue with struggles of doctors as individuals and doctors as professionals. They came to understand that they needed to be accountable for their actions both online and off. In the context of role modeling of peers and of mentors the line where behavior was inappropriate for a professional became blurred. What was okay to share and what was professionally questionable was unclear.

The issue of SNS and professionalism was compounded by the high standards as defined by the medical profession made students aware of the sacrifices of entering their chosen profession.

Web-based professional development portfolios were used as the means for first year medical students to begin to develop a professional identity. These portfolios were
for internal use only and not intended to be an agent for self-promotion. Narrative reflection, self-assessment, goal setting in combination with structured mentorship were the pre-determined criteria developed for this program (Kalet, Sanger, Chase, Keller, Schwartz, Fishman, Garfall, & Kitay, 2007).

As part of the goals of the portfolio a list of 6 points were outlined with an evaluation of; below expectations, meets, expectations, and exceeds expectations used to assess the assignments. A context specific decisions in which professionalism was challenged was the framework for the reflections. Mentoring sessions to follow-up on the written reflections were also a part of the process for evaluating professionalism.

The findings were based on an end of year survey on student perceptions’ in using the portfolio in addition to the assessment of their participation in the process of maintaining it. Student satisfaction with the professional development portfolio was mixed with feedback ranging from the process being useful and reasonable to that of feeling rote and insincere. Suggestions for future improvements include, individualization of the assignments and tailoring of the requirements (Kalet et al., 2007). The authors noted that while student satisfaction is important, it is not the only measure of the portfolio’s success.

The article titled *Engagement with Electronic Portfolios: Challenges from the Student Perspective* focuses on e-portfolios from the student perspective and offers similar observations as that of Wright (2001), including student buy-in, motivation, how to assess the final product, and issues with the technology/interface being used. Constructivist theory was at the foundation of the implementation of the project with the
underlining desire for it to help students make connections in their learning. Year three of this multi-year project was the core of this article and included reporting on the pilot projects used to aid in the refinement of the final projects. Methodology included both quantitative data through online questionnaires along with qualitative using interviews and focus groups with students from a variety of majors being used.

As listed above, four themes were identified and specific responses by students are offered to further demonstrate the variations on these themes. It is of note that the article discusses the e-portfolio aiding in job searches and being the carrot to motivate students as well identifying value for their personal development. Also identified was the added engagement of students in the reflective process through the ability to make connections between what they have done and how they are transferable skills. Lastly, Tosh et al. (2005) observe what they considers a problem in promoting the e-portfolios as an employment tool in that students were pre-occupied with the look and feel and less so about the content. It is important to the proposed study to emphasize that for RFPD students, the look and feel is as important as the content, so understanding a way to have both aspects seen as equally important is key.

**Professional Identity and Professional Online Identity**

Identity Theory and Social Identity Theory is the title of the article by Stets & Burke (2000) that aims to compare and contrast the two theories to demonstrate how they can work together to create a more complete view of self. The authors describe the links between the two theories as defined by three areas. First is that the two theories are arranged differently with social identity theory using categories or groups and identity
theory using roles. Second is the area is the activation and saliency of identity and the third area is the process that arises once the identity is activated.

As with many of the e-portfolio articles, this professional identity case study is specific to a particular point of view and in this study it is teachers. This article titled *Using Blogging in Support of Teacher Professional Identity Development* uses blogging as the tool for reflection for development of a professional identity. The observations for teachers can be adapted to other areas such as RFPD with modifications as to what is important for the industry and students. Luehmann (2008) examines the aspects that make a blog unique in respect to the interactive qualities through the way followers interact. Bloggers can take on various roles such as storyteller, learner, advocate, and mentor. These roles might be found to be different for students, as they are not yet embedded in their profession. Another value identified in blogging is in relation to reflective practice and the potential to becoming a life-long learner by continuing the process.

Obstacles are noted in that the blogger needs to be motivated to keep up with the process as the investment of time and thought involved is great. Drawbacks include putting oneself in a vulnerable place for criticism and comment, which can act as a deterrent (Luehmann, 2008). By starting as a student with only the instructor and possibly some peers being the audience, the blogger could become more familiar and thoughtful to how the system works. Knowing what is appropriate to blog about and what topics are deemed unprofessional or controversial is also of great importance and part of discovering ones’ professional identity.
Female Role Models and Self-Presentation

The RFPD program at Ohio University is predominantly female with approximately 98 percent women to 2 percent men. Fashion is a major that is comprised primarily women for example the Fashion Institute of Technology is 88 percent women and 12 percent men according to FindTheBest.com (2013). With this being the case, it is important to consider how women see themselves in a professional capacity and begin to form their professional identity.

In searching for articles relating to students enrolled in fashion programs and professionalism, one was found from 1989 titled Profiling the Career Development of Women Fashion Merchandising Graduates: A Beginning. Avery (1989) begins with providing an assessment of the number of degrees awarded in the area of clothing and textiles and that the increasing number of students in programs warrants exploration into possible career directions and the career development of women. A short history of women in the workforce and the changes that have occurred since the 1960’s are discussed in relation to the patterns of career orientation and salience. Avery (1984) cites Miller’s (1984) definition of salience “as the importance people assign to careers and the extent to which individuals perceive they have the freedom to make career choices. (p. 34).” The article investigates the career patterns of 115 women graduates of a four year baccalaureate program and rates them using a scale of 1-7 with 1 equaling having never worked and 7 as having a high level of commitment to their career. These rating descriptions address the upward mobility of careers as they related to traditional occupations versus nontraditional occupations for women. The study used demographic
characteristics as a basis including: Age, marital status, children, years since graduation, employment status, years in retailing, number of positions held, and those seeking additional education. The study also noted if the women had been or were currently employed in retailing and if not, what type of jobs did they hold. In conclusion the author notes how much is still unknown about the career development of women. Avery (1989) acknowledged that not addressed in the study was the interface of ‘career/homemaking’ on career choices and the effect of the husband’s occupation, salary, values, and sharing of household duties. These variables as well as the stress and guilt created for families of working mothers could also have implications on career development of women. She asks many pertinent questions of how time and our changing society will affect women in the workplace in the future. In Avery’s (1989) recommendations, she offers that educators and researchers must pay special attention to issues of self-esteem and teach transferrable skills, critical thinking and decision making to their students that will be of benefit for the evolving job opportunities of graduates in fields of fashion.

As the previous article noted in 1989, the programs in the area of fashion evolved from what was once Home Economics into retail careers in fashion of which college women were drawn. This article by Michelman (2002) discusses the elimination of an apparel-marketing program and investigates what happens to a students’ identity from a feminist perspective. Explored are the issues of gender bias that exist within programs of textiles and clothing, gender bias in the academic community at large and how it impacts a female dominated field. The researcher uses a mixed methodology of questionnaires, focus groups, individual interviews and analysis. She acknowledges that her sadness and
frustrations are intertwined in the paper. Michelman (2002) gives a history of the Department of Human Sciences, in which her program was housed. The program emerged from what was the school of Home Economics, founded in 1925 that provided an education to women entering college “…centering on the social and economic well being of individuals and families.” (p. 54). At the time the department was eliminated it housed 300 undergraduate students of which 98 percent were female. In framing the issues of identity from a feminist perspective she notes the numbers relating to gender bias within the field and through the International Textiles and Apparel Association (ITAA) which publishes the peer reviewed academic journal *Clothing and Textiles Research Journal*. Included are the dominance of male-authored texts in the field and reports of gender bias by department administrators in areas of textiles and apparel. The theoretical perspectives, methods, examination of the data, and discussion were provided.

The discussion indicates the complexities of student identity. While they retained positive attitudes concerning their choice of major and career opportunities they also believed that they faced stereotypes and social stigma based on their major with the following quote chosen to express the sentiment of many.

Unfortunately, in this society, even in the year 2000, anything dominated by women is often viewed as insignificant or at least less important than fields dominated by men (apparel marketing major, age 23) (pg. 59).

Following this train of thought, it was found that student perceptions of their major was lowered after the elimination of the program and they wanted to know why they did not get the respect from the school that they thought they deserved. Students
gave examples of the stereotypes of the major as all being “flakes” and that it is an insignificant area for study. The questions that resulted as a result of this analysis are:

Why is this the perception of students in the major and why do they feel discredited?

How much of this identity is perpetuated by the field and the faculty? Is it a major that is associated with a “feminine (i.e. fashion), passive, dependent and less-important consumer orientation in a larger environment of “producers”…?” (p. 59). The author’s answer to all of these questions is yes. In conclusion she states that the field should explore the lessons learned from the department elimination and its impact on student identity to build a stronger professional community in this female dominated field.

In discussing the transition of women into professional roles and the use of suitable role models, the contrasts between men and women are explored. The concept of identity threat is used to explain gender differences in responses to the image and identity gap created by a professional transition. The way a person self-presents has been connected to success and is related to having suitable role models to emulate. Women were found to be less likely to report access to these suitable role models compared to men when developing an image of self for presentation. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2007) discuss previous research that supports that “part of assuming a work role is looking the part” (p. 3) Each time a person transitions into a new role they look to copy and convey what they deem appropriate for the situation. In certain areas of the business world where women are in the minority the lack of role models is cited as a barrier, but it is not for men. This study looks at employees in the specific context of transitioning to a client advisory role and the positioning of self in relationship to the client. The article argues
that the expectation of appropriate demeanor and its relationship to professional success creates and additional identity threat. This comes in the “form of devaluation or disconfirmation of gender identities” (Ibarra & Petriglieri p. 4). In not having appropriate role models that are compatible with their own, or other’s concepts of appropriate female identities, a conflict occurs. This paper focuses on women working in predominantly male fields and the process of creating a work identity and how the people who surround you at work affect how a professional self is created.

Qualitative and inductive methods were used to study junior-level management consultants and investment bankers during career transitions. Details of these career paths were provided to give context as to the nature of the roles and responsibilities of these jobs as well as demographic information on the participants. The internal hierarchy frames workplace identity as well as what is considered the norm for the specific corporate culture the company. Men and women were found to have different image and identity strategies for the workplace with men finding a true-to-self professional identity more quickly. The paper continues to explain the different strategies and combinations of strategies that both men and women use and that fit with what is accepted, or not accepted, within the context of the workplace. Suggestions for how companies can aid in role transition for women in male-dominated occupations were provided. This hurdle for women was found to be consistent with previous studies concerning identity threat and displaying role appropriate images.
Young women as management professionals and their role models are the focus of this qualitative analysis. This investigation differs in that it departs from the bulk of the research where the focus is on mentors that consist of a more active role.

In building a professional identity, (Singh et al., 2006) cited previous research that found “as young people build their professional identities, they may draw on partial role models, and on positive or negative traits and behaviors as part of the learning process” (p. 69). Because of this observation, research into who these young people are choosing as their role models is of interest. The researchers reported on previous findings concerning the lack of women role models in the workplace and the search for ones that demonstrate good work-life balance. Women in male-dominated fields were found to report that the women working at those firms were modeling themselves after the men and were not good role models. In more balanced workplaces women did consider women to be good role models as “professional, stylish, accessible and encouraging” (p. 70). Women will often find role models outside of the business world from people they admire.

This exploratory study interviewed 10 young women with the average age of 32, attending a career seminar in the UK, on who they personally considered to be role models in relation to their professional identity. As part of the investigation, the women “…were also asked to draw a network map of [an] individual set of role models, with domains circled, to facilitate discussion of each role model and of the role model set” (Singh et al., 2006, p. 71). From these activities, themes and categories emerged. Role models were evaluated by ‘closeness,’ as in if they were personally known by the subject,
or were celebrities or fictional characters; role models were also evaluated by gender. An identified subtheme was the femininity/sexuality of the given role model with an understanding of the benefits and drawbacks associated with stereotypes.

In conclusion, the authors acknowledge the limitations of such a small sample but point out that the current lack of business role models is of serious concern for women and could result in possible limitations in career advancement. Further research is suggested with a larger sample size across genders and with a more business-focused approach.

When discussing first impressions, the way in which someone is groomed and dressed is important to consider (Burns & Lennon 1993). Self-perception and the perceived perceptions of others in a professional capacity as well as dress, play a role in these perceptions. Adomaitis and Johnson (1993) conducted research into casual versus more formal uniforms of flight attendants and how it affected their behavior as well as how it affected the relationships with the people with which they interacted. The researchers outlined the reasons for trends in the mid 1990’s for more casual dress in the workplace from minimizing class distinction to it being an employee benefit that did not cost anything. This research was prompted by an airline that made the switch from formal uniforms to a casual uniform and back again in less than one year. The multiple roles of flight attendants from police type authority to hospitality agents are diverse and they have extensive contact with the customers. The history and roles of uniforms and their role in establishing authority is provided to give context. Adomaitis and Johnson (1993) outline the existing research on uniforms and its functions for different types of organizations.
and how it functions to establish the identity of group members, to suppress individuality, to certify legitimacy and to conceal or display status.

An ethnographic approach was used in this research. Semi-structured interviews of flight attendants were conducted to record their perceptions of self and others and to recall their experiences when wearing the formal versus casual uniforms. Demographic questions were gathered in addition to the questions on relationships and self. The number of participating flight attendants was 37 with 32 female and 5 male with ages from 26 to 64 with a mean age of 37 all considered themselves experienced at their job. Adomaitis and Johnson (1993) found that the flight attendants overwhelming reported the uniform affecting their own behavior. In regards to the formal uniform attendants described feelings such as: importance, pride, confidence, and being in control. As a result of these feelings they felt they behaved more formally. Conversely, the casual uniform resulted in feeling of being more casual. This casualness resulted in not acting as professional, embarrassment, lack of confidence and respect. They also felt that the casual uniform did not communicate their role or identity. Not all the responses for the casual uniform were negative as it did provide the attendants with a since of fun, physical comfort and increased stamina.

In reporting the findings Adomaitis and Johnson (1993) stated that the, “…type of dress does impact the behavior and emotions of the individual as well as his or her perceptions concerning ability to perform their job. (p. 99)” The researchers connected this finding back to the existing theories about the functions of uniforms previously stated. Suggestions for further research in relation to issues of authority and uniform
changes have been made, not only for those who wear uniforms but also for workplaces that have employed casual dress versus more formal dress.

A short article published in a trade journal *Teller Vision* supports the topic of the role dress plays in the workplace. Using web based career resources such as Yahoo!, HotJobs.com and the retailer Banana Republic the article found that when it comes to reviews, promotions or securing a job a candidate’s wardrobe is increasingly important. Statistics using the general workforce (68 percent) and human resource professionals (82 percent) agreed that the way in which an employee dresses directly affects their prospect for promotion (*Teller Vision*, 2008). According to the managing editor at HotJobs.com, a person’s attire speaks of their overall commitment and is a reflection of how they care about their job. It can also be as important as being on time and prepared when they are up for career advancement.

**Conclusion**

With the continued increased use of SNS by students including blogs, websites, and personal profiles, it has become increasingly important for them to understand the implications of what they share online. Students do not always consider the concept of a professional identity in the context of an online format. Today the Internet is being used extensively for internship and job searches, this is an area were research is just beginning. e-Portfolios have the potential to bridge these uses of the Internet by students and through their reflective nature also has the potential to aid in the development of an online professional identity. SNS and online identity adds the component of photographs of self. Whether it is a chosen photograph for a profile picture or ones that are shared by others,
the components of a visual online identity are added to the mix. Because of this inclusion of photos, aspects of dress and first impressions are have been reviewed along with ways in which women determine what is professionally appropriate to wear.

The literature review suggests that for successful implementation of an e-portfolio program, planning is most vital. The planning must include the people initiating the plan and those that will implement and assess the e-portfolios. Support to follow through in the process must also be provided. The value of the e-portfolio to the students must not be overlooked, or else the students will not want to use the portfolios and any goals to be met will be skewed or incomplete. This, and the outcome for self-assessment and reflection, would be lost. These are the overriding factors. In closing it is asked: What defines the successful implementation of an e-portfolio program? The answer refers back to the presentation by Diez (1994). A successful e-portfolio implementation is one that begins with a strong foundation that still allows the freedom to make it personal like the sonnet, one that gives cause for self-reflection like a mirror, and one that points to the areas that should be addressed next like a map. This is true for an individual, a program, or at a college or university level, as each should be constantly assessing and reassessing in order to grow and improve. It is through this e-portfolio-initiated growth that life-long learners can develop.
Chapter Three: Methodology

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to understand how undergraduate RFPD students from a mid-sized Midwestern university develop and value their professional online identity through the process of creating an e-portfolio in a professional development course.

Ibarra (as cited in, Slay & Smith, 2011) defines professional identity as “one’s professional self-concept based on attributes, beliefs, values, motives, and experiences” (p. 86). It has also been identified that career success is often found in conjunction with successful professional identity construction and that it is a complex combination of life and work experiences, self-definition, and periods of career transitions (Slay & Smith, 2011). Ruyter and Conroy (2002) “interpret identity as the dynamic configuration of the defining characteristics of a person” (p. 510), combine this process of constructing one’s professional identity with an online identity, which is “defined as the configuration of the defining characteristics of a person in online space” (Kim, Zheng, & Gupta p.1762) , and has the potential to affect the process in either a positive or negative way.

Personal experiences and background frame my perspective on this research study. It is important is qualitative research to present the background of the researcher as “A researcher’s background and position will affect what they choose to investigate, the angle of investigation, the methods judged most adequate for this purpose, the findings considered most appropriate, and the framing and communication of conclusions” (Malterud, 2001, p. 483-484). With my years of industry experience as a designer I am
familiar with the hiring practices of employers and the skills needed to succeed first hand. While my academic background is in fine arts and design I worked side-by-side with coworkers sharing the same title whose major was fashion merchandising. In collaborating with buyers from major design labels and working collaboratively with vendors I have an understanding of the roles that fashion students can hold in industry. A part of my career involved working with a manufacturing vendor from China to design an exclusive product that received a U.S. patent. Another part included traveling to French speaking Canada to work with print mixers to approve color for production. An attitude that demonstrates willingness to travel and work with diverse cultures is a skill that is valued by industry.

The ability to present oneself in a professional manner is critical. In teaching professional development I am constantly thinking about my transition from school to work and my misperceptions of what it would be like, from the behaviors of others to the expectations of outcomes. The added complexity of employers forming an opinion through the Internet before they meet you is a new part of the employment landscape that is evolving for a generation that is growing up at the same time as the Internet.

As part of the investigation of the processes of creating an e-portfolio and professional online identity, grounded theory was used following the guidelines outlined by Corbin and Strauss (1990). Grounded theory is an inductive approach to qualitative research that involves theory being generated from the data. Grounded theory studies can be concerned with perceptions, attitudes, processes, and actualities (Corbin & Strauss 1990). A key to its understanding grounded theory is the approach does not entail testing
a hypothesis, but instead attempts to develop a theory from the data. Debate still exists concerning the exact methodology to follow for grounded theory (Patton, 2002), but using purposeful sampling and simultaneous data collection and sampling is a constant (Goulding, 1999). For this study, purposeful sampling was used consisting of the RFPD majors enrolled in the professional development course. The combination of convenience sampling and homogeneous sampling was implemented as described by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007).

Data is generally collected through recorded interviews, and observations. Specific procedures for data collection are completed such as, note-taking, coding, memo-writing, and general writing. This process translates into codes that are found in the data, concepts that are developed and linked through related codes and categories, which are created through organization of those codes (Allan, 2003, Corbin & Strauss, 1990, Glaser & Strauss, 1967, Goulding, 1999, Patton, 2002). These codes are constantly compared with the data and the data is reviewed multiple times to create well-formed concepts and categories finding further commonalities. Through this process, connections are made and theory emerges (Allan, 2003, Corbin, & Strauss, 1990, Glaser, & Strauss, 1967, Goulding,1999, Patton, 2002). In alignment with these guidelines, a variety of data collection techniques were used including student blogs, two online discussion boards, two focus group interviews, and six individual follow-up interviews. Triangulation of data was possible using these multiple methods and helped to ensure credibility and dependability (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005). Through the data, categories were identified and coded on a continual basis throughout the study by constantly comparing the
emerging theory. A table was developed adapting Allan’s (2009) guidelines as a model where quotes were identified, assigned key points, and then placed into categories. Text was copied and pasted into a table from the interview transcriptions for each focus group and then each individual interview (Appendix D). The same process was followed for the student blogs and the discussion board. My process included a coding system, which allowed each selected quote to be easily traced back to its original source and context. Similar to Allan (2009), after reviewing the blogs and transcription of the interviews the process of constant comparison continued. Key points were identified in the transcripts and compared with concepts and categories, which were established and adjustments were made to the categories to reflect the entirety of the findings. These findings were then used in resulting analysis.

Because the literature review is treated as data, it often is not apparent which literature is relevant at the beginning of the study and therefore was completed after data collection. While the framework of the literature review may not be explicit, the researcher begins, at a minimum, with objectives based on prior experiences. These prior experiences were noted in chapter one (Nastasi & Schensul, 2005).

For this study on determining how students understand the relevance and roles that an e-portfolio may play in developing their professional online identity, a qualitative methodology was appropriate. To discern the actualities of how students create meaning through the multiple facets of an e-portfolio, no assumptions were made and the answers were emergent from the data collected. The current research discusses engagement and reflection as benefits of an e-portfolio and indicates that when approached and introduced
appropriately, they are perceived as having value (Wright, 2001). Having an understanding of how students are or are not able to actualize meaning and identify the value through creating their e-portfolios in the context of an online setting adds to the existing knowledge in relation to creating a professional online identity. Becoming aware of unknown frustrations and difficulties in the development and uses of an e-portfolio will aid in developing additional valid and productive uses of the tool. Within the RFPD program, the creation of portfolios has been assigned in various classes before, but follow-through on if and how students are using them is vague. To understand their effectiveness, how students organize and put them together, how students view and show understanding of the value of creating e-portfolios, open-ended questions were used as they are less leading and provide more diversity in responses. A grounded theory methodology would find out what is really happening and how students are making sense of their professional online identity though an e-portfolio showcasing their body of academic work and industry experiences.

While much research has been conducted on e-portfolios (Backer, 1997; Barrett & Wilkerson, 2004; Barrett, 2001; Brown, 2002b; Cohn & Hibbett, 2004; Corwin, 2003; Diez, 1994; Gathercoal et al., 2002; Gibson & Barrett, 2003; Hewett, 2004; Nyström, 2009; Panitz, 1996; Purves, 1996; Tosh et al., 2005; Treuer & Jenson, 2003; Verhagen & Hoiting, 2001; Wiedmer, 1998; Wright, 2001; Yancey, 2009), the vast majority are specific to a given major and intended professions which require outside accreditation such as teachers or licensure like those going into the medical professions, law or engineering. Other researchers, such as Corwin (2003) and Cohn and Hibbet (2004),
investigate university-wide implemented e-portfolios for the entire institution and student population. Fewer of these studies tie-in the concepts of a professional identity. The RFPD program does not have its own accrediting body nor does Ohio University offer an institution-wide e-portfolio system. The students in the major straddle the business and fashion worlds where they need to be both professional and fashion/aesthetic savvy. Because of this dual role, their concerns are unique to their chosen career path and therefore warrant their own inquiry.

The uses and intentions for implementing e-portfolios range from purposes of, as stated above, validating accreditation requirements to also aiding in student engagement and reflection. Through the wide range of articles available offering various areas of focus, it is apparent that a reoccurring issue found among the research is that a one-size-fits-all formula is riddled with problems (Cohn & Hibbet, 2004). As Cohn and Hibbet (2004) stated, the issue is mainly due to the needs and desired outcomes for different majors and professions having varying goals and needs as well as that of the students. The uses of e-portfolios that stem from accreditation have a set list of standards and criteria given by the accrediting body to design the e-portfolio system around. Programs that aim to encourage student reflection and engagement vary per the major program, curriculum, and students’ goals. It is this fact that that makes a focused exploration of what works within a particular program a valid endeavor as what is effective for one set of students may not work for another group and further validates choosing grounded theory as the methodology. For the RFPD major, being free of program accreditation issues, a desired outcome for professionalism is a primary goal.
The goals of the program’s desired outcomes being investigated are known. What will provide an understanding of how to reach this outcome and what is seen as valuable from the student perspective in creating an e-portfoliio as they begin to develop a professional identity is unknown.

As previously mentioned, the following questions were the focus of the study:

1. In what ways does creating an e-portfolio aid or hinder the process of developing a professional online identity?
2. What do students perceive they need to better complete their e-portfolio to reflect their professional online identity in relation to their career focus?
3. What factors do students perceive support or impede their vision of a professional online identity?
4. How do students understand the value of an e-portfolio beyond a graded project for a course?

**Grounded Theory Approach**

The grounded theory approach was used for this study, as the understanding and the theory emerged through the process of creating a professional e-portfolio and the course content of professionalism. Grounded theory is an inductive research method with the theory evolving from the data. The information being sought is unique to the student base being investigated and to the specific program curriculum. Grounded theory strives to link practice and theory, with the ability to do so within a given context and requires investigation, which seeks to explain and describe the given situation (Corbin & Strauss 1990). In discussing why to use grounded theory as a methodology, Stern (1980) stated
that “... the strongest case for the use of grounded theory is in investigations of relatively uncharted water, or to gain a fresh perspective in a familiar situation” (p. 30). Because of how the students begin to develop a professional online identity and what engages this particular group of students as to the understanding the value of an e-portfolio in relation to their chosen career is unknown, the theory will emerge from the data.

**Description of the Situation**

The research sample used theoretical sampling with the population consisting of 23 students who were enrolled in the course, 12 juniors, and 11 seniors. RFPD students enrolled in a majors-only 300-level course entitled Career Search Strategies. This course is intended as an introduction to professional development as well as to present the guidelines for the two required internships. The participants in the study were students who just met the requirements to progress from Pre-RFPD status to full majors and were enrolled in the required professional development course in which the pre-requisite is being in the major. The students’ standings included juniors and seniors depending on when they met the requirements for enrollment in the course. For this Fall Quarter, the enrollment included 23 students.

This professional development course was selected as it has traditionally included the creation of a portfolio as an assignment with the choice of creating either a hardcopy or electronic format. The previous time the course was offered the requirement of an e-portfolio was implemented as one of the assignments for the class. The objective for the course as stated on the syllabus as found in Appendix B is as follows:
The course objective is to further the professional development of students in the retail major program, particularly with respect to career development in retail merchandising in preparation for future work experiences and employment through resume and cover letter writing, development of interviewing skills, job search strategies, professional writing, discussion of current key topics within the industry, and a variety of other professional experiences.

This course was offered twice a year for 7 years with myself as sole instructor and the move from a traditional hard-copy portfolio to an online e-portfolio has been experimented for the past 2 years with several trial-and-error incarnations. This study was designed based on the observations recognized over the past four quarters concerning the process to identify more definitively what the students are thinking and experiencing while constructing their e-portfolios and looking at how they will be presenting themselves professionally through their choices. In the past, this researcher observed that the students did not have a full comprehension of what a professional presentation of self and portfolio should include or look like. This assessment is in respect to the artifacts to be chosen and displayed as well as the visual choices made to showcase them through an e-portfolio. Students in RFPD are involved in a curriculum where analytic/business skills and aesthetic/fashion skills are necessary and can effectively be displayed through an e-portfolio. However in past observations of the e-portfolio assignments by the researcher, it was noted that students fail to look professional and tend toward the more personal in nature along the lines of a Facebook or MySpace representation of an online self. This includes pictures of themselves on vacations and drinking at parties. Past examples have
visually communicated through choices of color, graphics, fonts, and photographs a casual format and feel of a scrapbook and included information such as hobbies and personal background information leading to a less than professional presentation.

Other witnessed obstacles to the creation of an e-portfolio include ease of learning the interface, and customizability to better reflect a personalized (and professional) presentation. Two choices for online websites to use in creating an e-portfolio were identified through previous experiences and included Wix.com and Weebly.com, which are both free and offer a multitude of templates and customizable options as well as readily-available tutorial resources. As the project was introduced and worked on throughout the duration of the class, issues of the visual choices were discussed and students had the opportunity to view the e-portfolios created by the students who were in the class the previous year.

**Research Design**

Before the introduction of the e-portfolio assignment, each participant was asked to complete a personal data sheet in order to gather basic demographic information. At this point, students were assigned a pseudonym for the purposes of anonymity. Participants were placed in groups of six and seven members for in-class work on the e-portfolios and for discussion groups on Blackboard as recommended by Larson, Grudens-Schuck, and Allen (2004). Larson et al. reviewed recent literature on focus groups and made recommendations based on best practices.

Multiple methods were used to gather data, adding to the credibility of the research process (Natasi & Schensul, 2005; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). Students kept
weekly blogs to capture reflections on the process with topics being introduced based on the progression of the project and class discussions. Two volunteer focus group interviews were conducted at the end of the quarter with the questions being shaped by events and blog entries explored during the duration of the quarter. From the students involved in the focus groups, those who completed the *Fieldwork Experience* over the following winter break were asked to participate in individual interviews.

While an official pilot study was not completed, there were much anecdotal/casual observations that have been explored and noted in previous teachings of the course in regards to the implementation and development of the e-portfolio since it is a part of the existing course objectives. It is through the transition from the hard copy portfolio to the e-portfolio that the need for further research beyond the basic quarterly class revisions is needed, as well as the increase of an online identity through social websites. Other observations that have been identified include: cost, as it needs to be free and the trade-off between customizability and complexity (ease of use). In the past, a paid service that was greatly discounted at an educational rate was used; when not one of the 30 students who created an e-portfolio used the service, it was discontinued. Students appear to be more engaged if they can personalize their e-portfolio to make it their own, but get frustrated and lose interest if it is too difficult. There is anecdotal evidence to further investigate a student’s commitment to the assignment in relation to the distance in time for the perceived end-use of the e-portfolio for internships and employment.

Obstacles have included a difference in the older students in the class being more focused on getting an internship or job than those which find the internship further away
on their academic timeline. The aspect of the e-portfolio being easily sharable with others through the Internet is one that students have noted as being an advantage. Another noted observance is that more instruction and direction will need to be given on the assignment in regards to explaining the descriptions needed for each artifact added to the portfolio. This requirement keeps the e-portfolio from being merely collections of artifacts and forces the student to reflect on each project for growth and self-development as well as rationalize for a viewer why they added each piece. Pacing of the project was refined, breaking it down into parts with separate deadlines, as it can be overwhelming to have to consider all the visual, organizational, and design issues with how the information is assembled at the same time as finding, selecting, and formatting all of the artifacts to be showcased. As noted by Barrett and Wilkerson (2004) it is important to avoid students feeling like they are merely assembling artifacts from a predated checklist. But as this was a graded project some guidance was provided as outlined in Appendix B. This assignment description allowed for much flexibility according to the students’ career directions and preferences within the major while suggesting possible directions for emphasis.

**Data Collection, Analysis, and Credibility**

Thirteen students volunteered to participate in the focus groups and were placed in a group of 6 or 7. According to Larson et al. (2004), focus groups offer, “…reliable valid information collected in a manner that takes stakeholders’ values and needs into consideration…” (p. 1) and “is a series of discussions intended to collect participants’ perceptions…” (p. 1). Each student kept an individual blog during the course where
questions that evolved from their postings were presented each week for reflection using Blackboard. These were analyzed and coded as the quarter progressed. A journal was kept of notes on observations of the class and my role as instructor/researcher. As topics were presented and discussed pertaining to professionalism and the creation of the e-portfolios, questions were noted and generated for course additions. Peer and self-critiques were completed as a final part of the e-portfolio assignment with criteria allowing for student self-analysis. Focus group interviews were performed as a follow-up to the entire process in following the guidelines described by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) and Larson et al. (2004). The authors make recommendations in how to manage challenges common to the use of focus groups to collect more balanced data and information as well as ensuring for saturation (Natasi & Schensul, 2005). By collecting data through multiple methods, this allows for triangulation to test for consistency.

**Trustworthiness**

In matters of qualitative research, the issue of trustworthiness is crucial. Triangulation of the different modes of data collection to test for consistency will aid in the trustworthiness of the study. Both the processes of triangulation and constant comparison can add an aspect of checks and balances. As stated earlier, many methods of data collection were used to enable the process. This was throughout the data-collection period as described. Seeking disconfirming evidence in the data and literature review can create a more balanced picture as well. Nastasi and Schensul (2005) elaborate on 10 techniques for judging trustworthiness as outlined by Lincoln and Guba (1985) which are: prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, member checking, peer
debriefing, negative case analysis, reflexive journal, thick description, audit trail, and referential adequacy. It was necessary to make the role as researcher clear as instructor of the course. At the time of the final interviews, students were asked to corroborate my interpretations to make sure that my findings were consistent with their stated experiences and opinions. An outside observer was asked to review the findings to identify possible researcher bias.

**Transferability**

As with all grounded theory investigations, generalizability of the study will not be relevant to the population as a whole; however, the themes, categories and issues which emerge could be of importance to those in which the situation and need for professionalism is similar enough. Although the specific careers that students are pursuing vary greatly, a mode for exploring a professional identity, whatever might be appropriate for the field, is a commonality. The issue of transferability can be addressed through ensuring rich descriptions of data collection and analysis methods, which will allow for potential applications in other similar contexts (Nastasi, 2005). In this way the study would be appropriate to additional situations and can offer helpful knowledge to others helping students to create e-portfolios and develop professional identities.

**Limitations and Ethical Considerations**

The main recognized limitation at the proposal stage of this study is researcher bias. Having been the sole instructor of the professional development course twice a year for 7 years, which has always had some form of a portfolio as part of the class requirements. Various stages of student engagement in the process of portfolio creation
have been experienced and provided information to aid in the refinement of the assignment each time the class was taught. Observed is the apparent disconnect between the students and their perceptions of its usefulness. Through this experience, some opinions as to why this may be have been formed but there is no evidence to support the assumptions and therefore no need for research. The component of the e-portfolio as a professional tool in online professional identity development has more recently been produced through observations of the choices students make in the process of creating the e-portfolio from visual choices to content. With this, the 10 years of industry experience in a professional context and the students’ lack thereof, offer completely different perspectives of what professional means and looks like. This needs to be taken in to account with vigilance to remember the age and experience gap in evaluating the data. As Stern (1980) stated “…grounded theory provides a method for investigating previously un-researched areas and a new point of view in familiar situations” (p. 118), which is the ultimate goal in this circumstance.

Ethical considerations were minimal due to the subject matter being explored not being of a sensitive nature. All course assessments as part of the class requirements were kept separate from participation and content of students’ responses to questions both written and verbal. A journal was kept to record thoughts and reflections to keep this possibility in check. Participation in the focus group was voluntary and was offered as an option to taking the final exam. Of the six students that met the qualifications for the individual interviews all agreed to do so and they were conducted after grades for the
course were submitted. Blogs were opinion based and credit was given as long as it was provided to increase the potential for an honest and sincere response.

Chapter Summary

In summary, this chapter outlines both the description of the proposed study and its research methodology. Grounded theory was used to understand how students might begin to create a professional online identity through the creation of an e-portfolio. The participant sample consisted up of RFPD students enrolled in a professional development course. The enrollment for the class was 23 students with 0 sophomores, 12 juniors and 11 seniors. Several data collection methods were used and included: blogs, a discussion board, focus group interviews, individual interviews as well as personal notes on class discussions. Triangulation was used throughout the process of data collection to account for both credibility and dependability.

The review of literature was completed after the data was collected as the theory emerged from the data. The final synthesis was completed through comparison of both the data and existing literature. Interpretations, conclusions, and recommendations were made based on this comparison for educators and for further research. The aim of the study was to increase the understanding of how the creation of an e-portfolio can aid undergraduate RFPD students in the development of an appropriate professional online identity. An examination of student understanding of how the choices made and they way in which they are communicated in an online environment as part of their professional online identity will be made.
Chapter Four: Findings

The purpose of this research study was to explore through a sample of RFPD students their perceptions and understandings of professionalism through the creation of an e-portfolio as a component of a professional online identity.

The questions guiding this research were (a) In what ways does creating an e-portfolio aid or hinder the process of developing a professional identity? (b) What do students perceive they need to better complete their e-portfolio to reflect their professional online identity in relation to their career focus? (c) What factors do students perceive support or impede their vision of a professional online identity? (d) How do students understand the value of an e-portfolio beyond a graded project for a course? (e) Do students’ perceptions of the e-portfolio and professional identity change post Fieldwork Experience?

The findings discussed in this chapter were based on the analysis of several sources of data which included the analysis of two focus group interviews comprised of seven and six students respectively from a professional development course of which the prerequisite is to be a RFPD major. From those two focus groups six students were selected to participate in individual interviews, which were conducted after completion of their required Fieldwork Experience. In addition to the data gathered through the interviews, reviews of student blogs completed during the professional development class and the reflective journals completed during the Fieldwork Experience of the students who were interviewed individually were used as supplemental material for analysis where applicable. Data was coded using Alan’s (2009) method as a guideline where
quotes were identified, assigned key points, and then placed into categories (Appendix D).

Students enrolled in the professional development course for Fall Quarter of the academic 2011-2012 year were used for this study. A total of 23 students were enrolled in the course of which 11 were seniors, 12 juniors of which all were female. The 13 students who participated in the focus groups did so voluntarily as an option to taking a final quiz, which was approved by IRB (Appendix C), leaving 10 students who chose the final quiz option. The first group was comprised of four juniors and three seniors with the second group having four juniors and two seniors, questions can be found in Appendix E, Participants for the second interviews were chosen based on if they participated in one of the two focus groups and completed their Fieldwork Experience over the following winter break. Six students met these requirements (all names are pseudonyms); Hailey, Emma, Kaylee, Julie, and Nicole were all juniors, with Melanie being a senior. The following report on findings focuses on these six students but includes supportive data from the focus groups and blogs from students enrolled in the course where appropriate.

Brief biographies for each of the six students who participated in the follow-up interviews as part of this research have been provided to provide context.

Hailey is a junior who in addition to her RFPD major is also working on a business degree in Management Information Systems (MIS). She completed her Fieldwork Experience at a national down-market department store near her home in a midsized Midwestern city. She has secured her large internship at a national specialty
apparel store in a small college town. Hailey is interested in going into e-tailing or visual merchandising after graduation.

Emma is a junior and completed her *Fieldwork Experience* at a national specialty apparel store in a mid-sized Midwestern city. She has not yet secured a position for her large internship and is unsure what area of retail she wants to go into upon graduation but does know that she does not want to go into store management.

Kaylee is a junior who transferred from another university where she was a fashion design major. She divided her *Fieldwork Experience* between a national specialty apparel store and a higher-end privately owned apparel boutique. She secured her full internship at another higher-end privately owned apparel boutique in a large Midwestern city. At this time she thinks she might want to go into visual merchandising.

Julie is a junior and completed her *Fieldwork Experience* at a national specialty apparel store in a large Midwestern city. She has arranged a full internship at a high-end privately owned specialty boutique in a suburb that borders the same city, where she will be doing a variety of tasks that are required to run a small retail business.

Melanie is a senior who also divided her *Fieldwork Experience* between two workplaces. The first was at an online gift company where she had previously worked seasonally during academic breaks and the second at a national specialty apparel and home furnishings store in a midsized Midwestern city. The second position she took unpaid to gain experience in the area of visual merchandising which is the area where she intends to pursue a career. She secured her full internship at the corporate office of an accessories company in a large city on the East Coast.
Nicole is a junior and concluded her *Fieldwork Experience* at a national specialty apparel store in an affluent suburb of a midsized Midwestern city. She also secured her large internship in the same geographic area at an advertising agency that works with retailers. Nicole is interested in securing a position in buying or visual merchandising upon graduation.

After review of the data collected the findings for each of the questions follows.

**Question One**

In what ways does creating an e-portfolio aid or hinder the process of developing a professional online identity? Students began to think about their professional identity when making visual choices for their e-portfolio including adding a photo of themselves and considering how it connects to their online identity.

The e-portfolio was introduced as an extension of students’ resumes that can offer proof of the skills and experiences described on a resume. In choosing artifacts to include, the students used the rubric to aid them in matching up the classes taken and experiences they have had with the suggested objectives. A list of examples of what students included is as follows (a) the ability to set goals, a written outline of where they see themselves in five years; (b) the ability to evaluate strengths, the results of the Myers-Briggs Type Indicator; (c) the ability to analyze and forecast trends, the trend sheet assignment completed in the *Retail Promotional Strategies* class; (d) evidence of effective communication skills, written papers and PowerPoint presentations; (e) evidence of creative and conceptual problem solving, an app design project, completed in a marketing class and the store design project completed in the *Retail Promotional*
Strategies class; (f) aesthetic understanding, projects from the courses Design and Illustration Techniques and Color Theory; (g) ability to work with diverse populations, study abroad trips; (h) life-long learning, certifications and associate degrees; (i) leadership abilities, officer of a club or sorority; (j) industry experience, the Fieldwork Experience or other jobs. Traditionally resumes do not include a photo except in the performance professions such as acting but as students were identifying artifacts to include as a part of the e-portfolio all students enrolled in the class chose to include a photo of self. This became a common discussion point for what is considered a professional photograph that is appropriate for a job search. As fashion majors, there was a struggle to be fashionable but at the same time professional, where that line was between the two variables was somewhat subjective. This topic was discussed in class and arose in both the focus groups as well as the individual interviews.

During the class one of the weekly blog entries was based on the content of the extended film trailer for the movie Miss Representation. The clip aimed to show how women are portrayed negatively in the media. As fashion and media are interdependent the topic and film clip was a good fit for the class. There was not a class discussion specifically about the clip as it was shown at the end of class. Therefore, students were left to come to their own analysis concerning their interpretation. All six students, for which this study focused, agreed with the message delivered and made a connection with the class content to the workplace. Despite the strong feelings associated with this video clip, it was not raised in the focus groups or individual interviews as a basis for considering the message the chosen photo of themselves for their e-portfolios.
communicates. As found in the blog entries, students did begin to consider appearance and what it communicates to those you meet and articulated it as follows. When asked students did not consider themselves to be feminists.

[Hailey] After watching the video in class, it finally hit me that women are always being judged on their appearance in almost every situation. This occurs on television, in magazines, and everyday life. We are constantly being judged on our appearance instead of our personalities...When job interviews take place, the first thing someone notices about you is your appearance. This is something that can make or break the opportunity for you. No matter if you have the best qualifications for the position; looks play a key factor in the decision.

[Emma] Before watching this, I never truly realized how women can be viewed not only in the work environment but society in general. It got me thinking as to who my female role models are and what they had to do in order to fight against the stereotypes of women...The video says that no matter what a women achieves in her life, it always come down to the way that person looks. This was extremely disappointing to me, because not only are women not recognized for their accomplishments, but also tend to be respected less if not good looking.

[Kaylee] After watching the movie about Women in the Media, I found that I was not exactly surprised, however, I was most definitely fazed... I found this video to be extremely insightful and gave me something to think about while both in school and during my job search in the coming years.

[Julie] This topic has always been interesting to me. I have written many papers
and projects on how women are impacted by the media. I do not think it is right how our whole lives we are led to believe that we need to look a certain way, and that men will only like us if we are beautiful.

Julie’s realization aligns with third-wave feminists in that “young women today face a world colonized by the mass media and information technology, and they see themselves as more savvy than feminists from their mother’s generation” (Snyder, 2008, p. 178).

Nicole, while not disagreeing with the message in the video clip had a more pragmatic interpretation of the message. Her blog read:

> Women are treated unfairly in the workplace, but not all of the time. I believe some women subject themselves to being treated unfairly because of the way they will portray their personalities… Watching that video, though I have heard these things before, reopened my eyes to what the media does to woman. I feel that this is nobody’s fault, it was the way our country was brought up, but we can fix it if we try.

Melanie’s entry was similar to Nicole’s in that it was not as critically stated but echoes a similar thought.

> I felt that this video was very touching and definitely brought up some very interesting and important points… Being a woman in the world of fashion isn't as bad as being a woman in the world of business, public relations, etc. We do have the advantage especially in women's fashion because we are women, and we know what people want.
During the focus groups students discussed photos of themselves on the Internet through various SNS but it was the second focus group that explicitly made the connection to their e-portfolios. Kaylee brought it up by pointing out that one of the e-portfolios she reviewed of her peers was what she considered inappropriate by saying “We even talked about it in class! I was like, come on!” She continued by adding:

I mean, like boobs showing. I was just like, are you serious? I mean, just… it’s fine for like Facebook and all that. That’s fine for your friends to see. But, if you are trying to get people to buy the fact that you are the best person for the job… I mean, if that was the picture that I saw, I would be like, hell no!

Haylee’s discussion of inappropriate material suggests an understanding how materials in the e-portfolio could impact a job search. The expectation of the RFPD program is that the e-portfolio will be used in job application to set the applicant apart as this is a highly competitive field.

A discussion ensued about what is appropriate and what is not especially for students entering into the world of fashion for a career.

[Melanie] And especially like…we are in a major where you know, like you said, you could be really fashionable. Sometimes fashion like steps in. For instance, this fall and like this summer like see-through tops have been really in, even if it has like a tank top underneath. Like is that okay? You know, it’s like even if you are wearing a full coverage underneath; it’s still kind of a see-through material. Like is that provocative or is that just like in fashion right now? Because that was like huge.
Julie’s statement was representative of the struggle for determining appropriate professional attire in a world of which they have never been fully immersed when she stated:

Yeah, it’s hard to look professional and still have your own personal style attached to that. I think. Because I think in the professional world it’s all like one size. Like, this is how people like dress and bossy and like stuff. That’s just not me. So, it’s hard to like figure out what works in that aspect I guess.

During the individual interviews students had a better time articulating what was and was not appropriate when discussing the photographs chosen by their peers but still struggled with where the line for being inappropriate was crossed. As a student explained;

[Kaylee] I don't think that I saw anything that stood out to me like, “oh my gosh, I can't believe she put this on there.” I think that some people kinda just threw stuff together and didn't really think about someone else is gonna be looking at this from a professional standpoint. I don't know. I know you talked a lot about what your pictures, especially the personal pictures, say about you. You don't wanna look too boring and professional, but you also don't wanna look too fun and crazy. It's kind of a fine line of—so I think that some people just didn't take it as seriously and kind of just threw a bunch of stuff together.

Emily also struggled with the balance between a professional identity being boring and the identity of herself as being fun.
“Yeah, I have a picture of myself. I had a business outfit on, but I was smiling. I wasn’t being serious or anything; just little things that I tried to like tweak it a little bit too. Not too much, just to make it a little bit more fun.”

This aspect of offering a photograph of oneself when applying for an internship or job for a career is new but posting pictures on the Internet is not. A personal identity of self has already been placed on the web for viewers both known and unknown but not in a professional realm. Melanie referred to the photo she chose as being nothing like the one she used on Facebook and in comparison much more conservative. When asked what she thinks her photo and visuals she chose as part of her e-portfolio communicate she said:

I would hope that it communicates that I have a very outgoing and excited personality about finding a career. The photos that I put on there, I tried to stay as professional as I could, but I also wanted to show that I'm just very happy and—it's so hard to communicate yourself like that when you're not—even on the phone, it's hard. My pictures are in black and white, but then my background is like this bright pink, but it's still professional. I think it just kind of makes me look organized.

Many factors contributed to students understanding of what the word professional means, as well as what it means to be a professional themselves. The addition of the online part of identity also varied. Factors such as previous experience in the workforce and mentors/role models contributed to this understanding.
When asked about how she chose a photo for her e-portfolio Hailey struggled to find one, which she thought was appropriate.

Well, that was really hard as well, 'cause I don't really have a professional one. I just tried to find one—it wasn't a senior picture, but it was one that did become one of my senior pictures. I just chose that. I'm not sure if I used a good one yet. I probably should change it as well, but it was hard to decide that too, 'cause I wasn't sure what would look appropriate and what wouldn't, 'cause there's so many different things. I guess it depends on the person looking at it too and how they view everything.

In thinking about the process of selection she begins to reflect on its purpose as it relates to who is looking at it and why in relation to the purpose of the e-portfolio. When asked what image she thinks her e-portfolio communicated to the viewer she responded by considering the point of view of a potential employer.

I think it communicates a lot, 'cause I mean I think a lot of employers, when they see you, usually they'll just get a general idea of how you are, what their perception is of you. I think you need to use one that's obviously appropriate, but I also think it depends how the person is as well, how they view different things. I mean I know one person can look at a photo and think oh, that's nice. Then another one's like no, I don't wanna have that on there. I think that is very difficult to choose because you don't know who would view it or who's going to view it. I think as long as you're sticking with something more professional then it'd be fine either way.
She begins to understand that the e-portfolio can act as a first impression with a viewer and how not only the content of the artifacts chosen, but also the visual choices made in the construction of the e-portfolio can influence the characterization of who you are. It also creates a realization that it cannot be completely controlled because of the unknown background of the viewer.

The aspect of an online identity had not consciously been considered by all of the students, especially as they prepare to enter the workforce.

**Question Two**

What do students perceive they need to better complete their e-portfolio to reflect their professional online identity in relation to their career focus? Visual choices and artifact selection were catered to career goals for students who explored various career opportunities within the major before creating their e-portfolio.

Again, with the continuum that exists in career possibilities for RFPD students, there is a struggle with the visual choices necessary when creating the e-portfolio. Hailey, who is also majoring in Business, described the process this way:

> I thought the process was really good. The only thing I know I had a little bit of trouble with was maybe knowing what exactly the color scheme and how it should visually look, only because, especially with business and then retail, it's like business is more like they want it plain and no color. Then also I added color to mine so I figure I am having retail in there as well. I think the visual part was a little difficult to make a decision on. Then just implementing the—I haven't done it yet, but the projects, I feel like that might be difficult 'cause I don't want it to
look too unorganized where I'm just throwing all my projects in there. I don't know. I'll have to look at it more, but just to see if there's a way to maybe separate 'em by the drawings or projects like group projects I've had, and that way they can scroll through easier to see them instead of not knowing really what it's for.

The layout of the e-portfolio and organization of it with the wide variety of artifacts, from Excel spread sheets to drawings, was an issue as well. In remembering the critique of her peers’ work she was able to think about not only what it communicated but could see how it could be geared towards a specific career focus through the visual choices made while constructing the e-portfolio.

I think, from the ones I viewed, I know as far as the picture of ourselves, I feel like they were very similar to what people chose. The only difference I'd see is I know the one I viewed, I forget who it was, but she was more into the designing type of thing, so hers was more artistic and had her different—she had photography in there as well. It was different photos she has taken. Hers was more artistic and I know that hers and I, we were really different there. I think it depends exactly what you're going into. I liked hers a lot thought, 'cause I thought it really accentuated everything that she was trying to show as far as her different projects she's done and how she had them come up was really nice too. I think everyone's was a little bit different depending what direction they were going…

After completing her Fieldwork Experience, Emily stated that she knew she did not want to be a manager in training but thinks she might want to go into event planning
or visual merchandising. She struggled with how to communicate this through the choices of not only what artifacts to add but also the organization and visual choices of pictures, fonts, and colors.

I try to make it professional, but at the same time, creative, kind of. I didn’t want to be too serious, too verbatim, too—you know. Cuz I feel like with certain—I don’t know. I feel like certain portfolios a lot of times look the same. They’re very—they don’t really show a company who you are. Whereas in mine, I tried to make it at least show a little bit of who I am, with being a little bit more fun, more creative, more not-boring, in a way. You know what I mean?

The issue of differentiation and expressing one’s personality was a common theme and just how to do that was a process. Kaylee’s situation is unique in that she started off at another university as a fashion design major before she realized that it wasn’t a good fit for her career goals. The creative side is obviously important to her to express to potential employers as well.

I mean I'm constantly trying to find ways to make it stand out more because I want it to be as creative as possible. I think it shows that I'm, I mean, for me, like I said before, I'm a visual person. If I have a resume in front of me saying all these organizations that I'm in, that's kind of boring to me. For someone to be able to pull up on my portfolio and see the work that I've done in those organizations, or projects I've completed, or things that I've done while at work, just completely by myself, I would be more impressed by that. I kind of try to see it from the other side of the table so that I know what I'm getting myself into.
We discuss briefly what types of social media she uses and when asked about if she thinks her online identity communicates her career goals Kaylee pauses and states that she does not really use Facebook anymore and continues with the following statement.

Well, I don't know. I just think that I'm now getting to place where I'm more expressive about what I wanna do in my future. Things like Pinterest and things like that, it's kind of a little breakaway of getting into my creative inspirations and things like that. I don't know. I mean I think that, especially with Pinterest, yeah, I think it does. I wouldn't say that Facebook and Twitter are gonna hurt me in any way, I don't think. I think that I keep it pretty PG.

It was as if she had not considered that social media could actually promote a positive professional image and that a Pinterest account could actually demonstrate her creative side to potential employers.

Nicole feels that she is promoting her creative side through her e-portfolio and when asked she answered, “I think more of my creative side, because it has a lot, I can—and actually my computer skills, almost, because I’ve added different kinds of ways to show the pictures and different technologies I’ve put in there, and I thought it made it seem kind of creative and et cetera.” She mentioned earlier that she was interested in pursuing a career in buying but she did not include any of the projects from that course. When questioned about it she said she had not really thought about adding anything from that class and as she thought about it and how she could include those projects more she added she agreed that it would be a good idea.
When Melanie, who is interested in visual merchandising, was asked the same question she also answered her creative side.

I think to an extent, it would. Yeah, I've got some artistic stuff on there from design and illustration. I've got some of my art projects. I do need to put my entire color theory portfolio up there, which will take a while. Yeah, I think in the long run it does. I think that some of my text that I have on there, like the first page when you go there, I've just written what I'm looking for in an internship or a career. I think that when an employer would look at it, they would definitely see—it would be clear what I want to do, I think.

Later in the interview when discussing the process of putting together the e-portfolio she shared said she worked on it with a fellow classmate:

...[she] and I got together every night one week and we just worked on our e-portfolios together and watched TV. We really tried to make it look structured and easy to navigate because there's nothing worse than a website that you can't navigate. I think that since I do want to go into visual merchandising, it's a good thing that it's really organized because the just shows how organized I would be.

Julie was asked what type of image she thinks her e-portfolio communicates and described the visual choices she made as opposed to the projects included. She said:

I just think it shows that I’m creative and neat. Cuz, I just try to set myself apart a little bit. It’s hard to do, but just showing what I’m capable of and—I don’t know. I kind of just picked a colorful theme to try to show that I’m kind of exciting [laughter].
She went on to explain that a lot of her work was at home and not on her computer at school. When specifically asked about her online identity in relation to her career goals she did not mention her e-portfolio but laughed and said:

No. I need to shape mine up, I think, a little bit. I’ve gone through and deleted pictures that I didn’t think were appropriate for anyone to see. I haven’t—and I’ve made my thing really private, but I know that even companies can get into that and still look at your stuff. That’s why I have deleted pictures of things that I didn’t think were right for someone else to see that’s going to potentially hire me. I think eventually, I will just delete all of them and just keep ones that are okay. Or even just make it so only I can see my pictures or something. I don’t use Twitter and I don’t have any other online thing except Facebook, so…

When asked about other social media and LinkedIn in particular she did add “I just need to, kind of, get myself in gear and straighten all my stuff out. That’ll probably be with the Facebook, and the online portfolio and getting a LinkedIn account.”

**Question Three**

What factors do students perceive support or impede their vision of a professional online identity? Students have a strong concept of what is not professional but have a harder time specifically defining professionalism or what a professional self looks like. After the class and creation of the e-portfolio they are just beginning to think about their online image in relation to their transition into the workforce and in regards to becoming a professional.
There are two elements that were found to be separate in the responses, first is the issue of professional identity and then that of professional online identity. In identifying a benchmark for student perceptions, the information gathered from the Career Search Strategies course blogs were reviewed. The first of the three-blog topics relating directly to professionalism, asked students to convey a time when they witnessed someone being unprofessional. Students described specific examples of situations from past work experiences where co-workers were lying or cheating the system. All were able to explain with ease what being unprofessional looks like but more elusive for the students was what exactly, being professional looks like. Two of the blog topics concerned reading articles on professionalism. The first article, concerned perceptions of their generation, generation Y entitled; Study: Youth have a relaxed work ethic from the Washington Post (2010).

When assigning the blog for the Generation Y article, it was prefaced in class with the comment that whether or not this typifies Generation Y it is important to know how some may perceive your generation as you enter the workforce so that you may better understand and preempt any negative assumptions. Reactions from the students varied but all conceded that elements of the article are accurate and that it is important to know how you are perceived. All six students related the article back to themselves and their own work ethic.

[Hailey]…I realized that the information I was reading was somewhat true, but also I disagreed with it… I believe that a lot of the Generation-Y group are not as motivated to seek a career because throughout their life they were handed
everything… However, I also disagree with the lack of work ethic because I believe that I personally am working hard in order to become successful. I believe that in order to define this article as being correct or not, you have to look at your personal life and how you are living it. Things are made a lot easier for our generation now because of the advances in technology and education. There are many factors that contribute to this dilemma.

[Emily]… I was completely in shock. I had no idea that my generation today had such a lack of importance when it comes to ethics while in the work environment. Not only was I shocked, but also disappointed as well because my personal views on ethics are very important when it comes to where I am employed… This shows me how different times have changed and how my generation no longer cares about working hard and earning what they deserve. The article also discusses how people in this particular age group refuse to accept the fact that it takes long, concerted effort to build a career. Everything the article discusses concerns me greatly for many reasons. If this generation views work ethic the way they do now, this shows me that they will only set that example for their future children as well. By doing this, generations will continue to become more lazy and less determined to perform their best while in the work force.

[Kaylee]… (I found this article) to be extremely interesting, yet not surprising… I have found that I am learning a lot more about older generations and their views of myself and my generation. As much as it degrades my generation in some ways, I feel that many of the people interviewed in this article had a definite
point. I believe that a lot of people in my generation or "Generation Y" feel a sense of entitlement or like the article stated "they'd rather be poorer and have free time than have a lot of money."… and (it) is not necessarily a direct reflection of every person in my generation, however, this message that baby boomers, generation X-ers and other older generations are sending to us is loud and clear…The most important idea that I took away from this article is that nothing in my life will be handed to me. I expect that I will be pushed hard when I go to work and most likely even before I land a job…

[Nicole] I have many feelings toward this article. In some ways I could see the way the older adults view our generation as slackers, but I also believe that they aren’t in our shoes and lived in completely different times, so they just do not understand the way we live. Our generation has so much more technology, and have different perceptions on how life works, I feel as if it would be difficult to be so quick to judge our generation…I believe we still have strong morals, we just may not express it in the same ways as older generations. Some people may lack in work ethic, but I believe that it is awfully harsh to label one whole generation… All in all I think its is hard to label one generation, only because times change and so does the world, not every generation will stay the same due to constantly changing technological advancements.

[Melanie]…(this article) really disappointed me. It was fairly accurate, however… When I see an article like this it really makes me think about where my motivation comes from. I believe that as long as I am enjoying the work that
I'm involved in that I'll do the best job I can... I think that if all 50 million of us (the millennial generation) read an article like this before beginning a career, things would start looking up. People would strive to disprove this view of our work ethic and try to overcome it. It is a good thing that our generation "may be a self-confident generation" but that doesn't always mean a good one.

[Julie] I actually have to say that I must agree with a lot of what this article has to say. I think that many people in my generation have this mentality that their personal life always comes first instead of work life... I liked this article because I thought it was really relevant, and even though I feel like I was already kind of aware of this problem/argument it helped to go in depth and explain it more as well as showing people’s opinions from different generations.

For the third professionalism blog entry students were assigned to read three different articles entitled as follows: *Conducting Professionalism at Workplace* from the Internet site Buzzle.com (Khilawala, R. 2012), *Creating a Positive Professional Image* from the Harvard Business School (Stark, M. 2005) and *Tips for Professionalism in the Workplace* (Magee, M. n.d.) from the eHow.com website. Each student stated that they learned tips from the articles restating the advice they found most relevant to themselves and expressed a new way of looking at professionalism. Both Emily and Melanie quoted the same line in the article by Stark (2005) when she interviewed Harvard Business School professor Laura Roberts where she said “People are constantly observing your behavior and forming theories about your competence, character, and commitment, which are rapidly disseminated throughout your workplace" (para. 2). The idea that you
should consider someone else’s point of view in regards to how you are perceived resonated the strongest.

[Hailey] After looking at this article, I realized the importance of professionalism in the workplace…there are different levels of professionalism. Some may be in the workplace, while others are everyday. This is how someone views you and the type of person that you reflect. Although we do not like to be judged on this, it is a very important factor when applying for jobs and receiving an interview.

[Emily]…Before this assignment, I never thought into depth about what my own identity was in the work area. After reading these articles and the numerous tips they offer, not only was I able to figure out what my professional identity was but also learn numerous tips about improving your image as well… It became apparent to me that you, the professional, are the only one that have the power sway others opinions about your image… In order to be successful anywhere in the work place, it is extremely important to maintain a positive professional image…

[Kaylee] This week's blog on professionalism was extremely interesting and necessary. I found that I was not completely aware of some of the things that go on in the real world once people find a job. Professionalism is all about how your peers and fellow employers/employees perceive your personality and behaviors that reflect a positive and respectful image…However, it was not all about rules and strictness; the article also talked about how keeping the environment professional gives employees the motivation to keep working hard and to develop
good relationships with other employees at work…Professionalism is much more than simply dressing the part. It is the persona that you give to people… This topic will definitely help me in the long run.

[Nicole] Maintaining a positive sense of professionalism is important when working at any job…Reading the articles I have come across some good tips that I believe could improve your performance as a professional…Being professional is sometimes difficult because we act so differently out of the job site… Maintaining a professional work environment is a top priority when receiving a job.

[Melanie] Professionalism in the work place is one of my least favorite topics only because I have witnessed so many people not behaving professionally…. In "Creating a Positive Professional Image" Laura Roberts says, "People are constantly observing your behavior and forming theories about your competence, character, and commitment, which are rapidly disseminated throughout your workplace." I think this is extremely true and regardless if you've been hired or not yet, it is important to always maintain a professional attitude and personality in front of both employees and employers.

[Julie] I think that these articles had a lot of good information in them, and I took some tips from each one of them. I think it is really crucial to think of yourself from someone else’s point of view and to make sure that you are considering what they could possibly be thinking of you when you’re not around. Overall I liked the messages from the articles and I took a lot away from them, in ways that might help me maintain my own professional image.
When students discussed being professional in the individual interviews, it was often equated with the atmosphere of the workplace. An environment, which was described as boring, and uptight was associated with being professional where as an environment that was fun and enjoyable, is not professional. As Kaylee realized after reading the professional articles and wrote in her blog “it (professionalism) was not all about rules and strictness” however Melanie did not quite make the same connections and relayed an experience where she said of one job “…but it didn't matter enough to me. It was a part time job and it wasn't a big deal. In the "real world" however, things are different.”

When talking about her Fieldwork Experience Nicole described in the following way:

…My internship, I feel like, wasn’t—my 399A—wasn’t too serious, only ‘cause it’s (a national apparel specialty retail store) and they're really relaxed there, anyway. I mean, it was serious, obviously, but it wasn’t anything that I was like, “Oh, I’m so nervous to go to work today.” They're all really fun and it was just kind of relaxed.

She continued to explain that she was taking her course credit work experience seriously but added “I guess if I was in a more professional thing I would probably—like, professional internship before that, I think I might have thought more about it, or if I had bigger roles. Yes, I did some management, but it wasn’t that much.”

And even more telling of her thoughts about what it meant to be professional came through an experience with a different employer where she said:
I mean, it’s more professional, but they're really laid back, also, ‘cause it’s a small company. So it’s kind of like—I mean, you can go in there, but they were really relaxed. It wasn’t like a serious office or anything. I go to fun events, like go to bars and go to things like that during the weekend, so it’s not as professional as I would think. When I think “professional,” I think of 9 to 5, whatever, you have to go there, wear a suit, that’s all you think about all day and, I don't know, sit at a desk. I mean, I’ll be sitting at a desk, but I don’t have to dress up or anything. This student perception ties together with the first research question in regards to self-presentation through dress and what it communicates and the struggle with choosing a photograph for the e-portfolio.

Visual communication, beyond the photograph of self, in the form of the choice of colors, fonts and graphics were a concern as to the image that those choices conveyed. Kaylee shared that when she was putting together her e-portfolio she struggled to strike an appropriate balance between the self she knows and the one she hopes to create.

I know that you talked a lot about what your pictures, especially the personal pictures, say about you. You don't wanna look too boring and professional, but you also don't wanna look too fun and crazy. It's kind of a fine line of—so I think that some people just didn't take it as seriously and kind of just threw a bunch of stuff together.

In describing her reasoning in choosing the graphic choices in constructing her e-portfolio Hailey explained it this way:
(the background) was pink 'cause [Laughter] that is my favorite color. I don't know if I'll change that or not, but it's more of a simple looking one. There is a, more of a design border around it, but it is kind of plain. Then I tried to add color to it, but I was kinda not sure where to cross the line at or not for what they wanted. It just has my name and then a brief explanation of who I am…

Emily discusses her need to use social media to her advantage, which is seen in her comments about LinkedIn given after she spoke of her online presence in regards to her Facebook page and Twitter feed:

LinkedIn I feel like is a lot less harder to make a bad image out of yourself because it’s a professional network. You can only put certain things on there. I definitely try with Facebook, and everything, to make sure that future employers—would they think this is an acceptable picture—or type of thing. I think it’s—I don’t know. I think people need to be aware of things like that.

Melanie has several online social media accounts but in discussion of them she does not articulate a strong connection between them and what they represent as she embarks on the development of a professional self and job search. When listing her accounts she stated “Gosh, you're reminded me of all these things that I have!” The next question I asked her was about her e-portfolio and the image that it communicates and as shown in the quote used earlier, she describes the visual choices of the colors and fonts and what they communicate. The next question was about the photo she chose to communicate a professional image and through this question she begins to connect this with the other parts of her online presence.
My front photo—they're really close up to my face. I don't even know that you can see my outfit. If you can, it's definitely something conservative. It's nothing like Facebook status. It might be from my Facebook, but yeah. There might be one of me wearing like a one-shoulder dress, which I think is okay because I don't have any cleavage or anything [laughter].

When asked about the peer assessments of the e-portfolios the first thing that she comments on are not the photos but the color and font choices and if they looked professional:

I definitely came across a few that were pretty unprofessional looking, like black background, neon writing. I was just like, oh, this doesn't really look like someone that wants to get a job. There were also really, really good ones, like really impressive ones that people definitely had worked on.

When talking about her own visual choices she was aware of what they can communicate:

I was definitely careful of what font that I used. I wanted it to look professional, but it's really pretty. I'm sure you know what it looks like. It's got really loopy, kind of handwriting-looking, but definitely still professional. I definitely worked really hard to organize it…

When asked about what type of image Julie thought her e-portfolio communicated she, like Melanie, began to describe the visual choices of color and fonts and as she was quoted earlier, has started to manage the privacy settings for her Facebook account.
Unlike her peers she does not have any other social media accounts to worry about including a LinkedIn account. When asked if she is going to get one she responded:

I think I’m going to. Cuz you were talking about it in class, and it’s just much more professional. I think I will—this summer I think I’m gonna do a lot of re-evaluating of a lot of the things I’ve done…. I just need to, kind of, get myself in gear and straighten all my stuff out. That’ll probably be with the Facebook, and the online portfolio and getting a LinkedIn account.

**Question Four**

How do students understand the value of an e-portfolio beyond a graded project for a course? Students expressed an understanding of the value of the e-portfolio beyond a project submitted for a grade in the course *Career Search Strategies* through having revisited their e-portfolio after the course ended and their intention of sharing it with potential employers.

Nicole was one of four students who submitted her *Fieldwork Experience* project as a hardcopy as opposed to through her e-portfolio. When asked why, she responded:

I just felt like it would be easier for them to see it when I'm there in front of them instead of maybe just if they're not by a computer, they wouldn't be able to pull it up or, if I did give them the link, I don't know if they would actually look into it more. I just think it would be easier to showcase them at the time.

Despite this initial statement she did share the link with the person who interviewed her for the full internship and said that she also comment positively on the fact she had an e-portfolio although she did not elaborate on if she actually visited the link. To expand on
the e-portfolio I asked if she planned to revisit or use the e-portfolio in the future. She responded:

I have revisited. I'm actually trying to add more of my projects I have done. I'm kind of in the middle of that. I've been taking a lot of business this past quarter, and the quarter before, and fall semester is mostly retail courses. I think probably after fall semester is when I'm really gonna input everything and use it, maybe for the career fair that's coming up in the spring after that. Yeah, I've looked at it. I haven't really done much with it since. When I did have my interview at (the retailer), I did give her the URL to look at. I don't know if she did or not.

When asked directly if she thought the whole process of putting together the e-portfolio was of value to her she stated:

Yeah, I really think so because, honestly, if it wasn't for having that e-portfolio, I probably wouldn't have a portfolio to really showcase. I don't know, I just feel like, too, with the portfolio, I didn't really understand how to put one together physically that would look presentable. I felt online it just makes it look more organized like it's easier to navigate, just for them to pull up. Now everyone's on the Internet, so for them just to be able to go through that and even see my resume on there instead of just handing them copies where they could maybe misplace it or something, they could always pull it up on there. That's what I really liked about that, but I don't think I would have made one 'cause I wouldn't have thought of it. I'm glad that in our class that we did do that because now I have it, so whenever I have an interview, I can have and add more things whenever, which I
like about that too. You can always customize it too to look however you want it to.

Emily also brought up the ease of sharing that an e-portfolio offers:

I did it online just cuz I thought you could do a lot more with it, which is with like the special effects and everything. You can make it look more neat, cuz I know me, personally, I’m not good with arts and crafts and putting things together. I know it’s easily accessible to employers and things like that. I mean, they can just go on their own time, look at it. Everyone has a computer, so it’s easier to do it that way. I don’t know. Just me, personally, I thought it was easier to do it that way.

In regard to whether she has revisited her e-portfolio and her intention to do so she was honest in saying “I have not, which is not good. I know I need to still. I mean, I’ve viewed it, but I haven’t updated it or anything. That’s something I know I need to.” And then added when asked specifically if she plans on revisiting it, “Oh, definitely, yeah. I mean, I definitely think it’s important to have when you’re going out there after you graduate. Cuz it’s basically what you’ve been doing…I’m sure I’ll be using it a lot within the next year.”

Kaylee already revisited her e-portfolio and said “I continuously update it because of all my projects and things that I want shown, and what kinds of internships I'm looking for and things like that.” When asked if she viewed the e-portfolio of having value she had also received feedback from a potential employer:
Yeah, absolutely. I actually used it for my interview with the internship that I'm doing in the summer. My sister's friend works there, so I sent it to her and she was really impressed by having all your work in one place. She liked that. Then when I got there, she was like, "Do you have any of your work?" I was like, "Oh, I have my online portfolio. I can pull it up." They were all so impressed by that. It's been nice.

Kaylee also added “…but I see this (e-portfolio) as a tool to get ahead of other people that are in the same major as I am. I kind of took the serious route…”

Nicole’s response to whether she thought the e-portfolio was of value she stated:

I mean, definitely I think it’s pushing you along…I feel like in class when we worked on it, it was more of like getting it complete and not editing it for like correctness or relation to actual things that you would be doing outside, like how we related to jobs or internships. I think it was more like a process of compiling your work and putting what you wanted on there. I think that, as I've edited mine and looked over mine, I continuously try to tweak it in a way that whatever internship or job that I'm looking for, it kind of makes sense to them and it kind of—I don't know how to say that.

Despite Nicole’s reflection of the value of her e-portfolio she did not submit her *Fieldwork Experience* project as part of her e-portfolio but instead submitted a hardcopy stating that “I didn't really think about a portfolio, it was just kind of, I could type something up in a paper form easier, I’m more familiar with it, so I thought portfolio
might be a more difficult task.” She also commented that she didn’t use a blog for her journal entries either because she could not figure out how to create an account.

**Question Five**

Do students perceptions of the e-portfolio and professional identity change post *Fieldwork Experience*? Perceptions of students’ professional identities and the e-portfolio continue to evolve at different rates post *Fieldwork Experience* and in addition the course content covered in the professional development class in regards to their understanding of what professionalism means to them.

When asked directly if they think differently about their professional self, post *Fieldwork Experience* the responses, students thought of the contacts they made:

[Hailey] Yeah, I think so, maybe because of the fact that I have more of a network now ’cause I've had that experience… I just feel like that I've gained so many more people that I can network with after I graduate, to even be there for me like a recommendation or things like that, just to have about my experience with them and what I've done when I was doing an internship with them. I think having the 399 and 499 are perfect because you can have the small sales type of internship experience and then you go to another one, it's on a whole different level. That's why when she was explaining to me what I would be doing, even talking to people from corporate, which would help me later on because I would have their connections of just being able to talk to them and make a relationship with them…think just making more connections through networking and having those
experiences really have helped gain more on my resume, 'cause I really didn't have much at first until then.

[Emily] Yeah, slowly… I am, because this is the time that I need to start networking. I mean, it’s always important to network, but especially now to start getting those contacts that you can contact later when I need an internship and what no… Definitely, as I get older along with everyone else. I had friends that just graduated. I started dating my boyfriend when he was just getting to be a senior here. Now he is a full year out in the real world. Just seeing what he’s gone through, it’s kind of slowly, not prepared me, but to see what I’d have to face in the future. Then just friends that have moved and have these jobs, I know that it’s coming and it kind of has mentally started to prepare what I’m eventually gonna have to…

[Kaylee] I mean I just think that it's become all the more real. I took the trip to New York City this year and it's just kind of like a wakeup call. You think that nothing is happening outside of Athens and people are—I mean people are doing things, and getting ahead. I tell my roommates all the time I don't know if I would be prepared for life after college if I didn't take these kinds of classes because I think 399, and 299, and some of 400 a little bit has just prepared me more professionally than I would have ever expected. They always ask me, they're like, "I wish that we could take classes like that because they're about real life stuff." It's connecting your experiences and your work ethic with what you're
gonna do in the future. I mean 399 for sure; I don't think I've ever taken a more beneficial class, I don't know, to relate it to my future.

Nicole did not look at her Fieldwork Experience as a big picture part of her education as Hailey, Emily and Kaylee, but saw it only as a sales associate position leading to a job as a store manager. When asked if she thought differently about her professional self post-Fieldwork Experience she stated:

I—honestly, no. [Laughs]...I think, only because it wasn’t as serious, but I’m always kind of like, when I get a job, I want—I think I’m gonna be professional no matter what. I’ve always been kind of professional. I don’t let myself do—I actually don’t even get personal with people at work, only because I get scared what they're gonna say to the bosses and the managers, and I just kinda keep my distance, which also could be bad, because then you don’t get so close to your coworkers, I guess.

Melanie appreciated her Fieldwork Experience but thought that it would have been more valuable if it had been longer. She did mention that getting to know people, networking, is an important part of the experience. When asked if she thought it helped develop her professional self she responded as follows:

Oh, yeah. I definitely do... I learned how to interact with everyone. It was just hard because it was really short. I wish that it would have been maybe like a full quarter because doing it in that short… Doing it in that short period of time, I couldn't get to know anyone. It was Christmas, so it was just a madhouse. I definitely learned a lot.
Julie was in-between Nicole and Melanie as to understanding of how the Fieldwork Experience into her education and professional development. She expressed that it was more about discovering what she does not want to do as a career as opposed to understanding the skills she developed while completing it. Julie acknowledged that being given responsibility made her feel professional during her Fieldwork Experience:

I think it helped a lot just because—well, the 399A helped me a lot in finding what I want to do. I’m really happy that I did that because I just don’t want to be a sales associate [laughter]. I just don’t, at all. I’ve done it for too long…Finding that I really did like the visual merchandising really helped. I feel like it’s made me—like that job kind of put more responsibility on me. I felt like I was being professional. Like making my own shop. I felt like I was doing something even though I was just following the planogram.

In addition to the Fieldwork Experience the course content of the Career Search Strategies class was a factor in students’ transition from student to what it means to be professional. These next selected comments were taken from the last blog entry of the quarter of which the topic was left open to students as to what they wanted to write about. Four of the six students of which this research focused upon chose to reflect on the class itself. Hailey discussed one of the course assignments that she found particularly inspirational. Emily did not submit a final blog entry.

In addition to listing all of the assignments which she found valuable and why Kaylee also included this insightful information:

This class has taught me more about my intended career path and my plans for the
future than I ever thought originally possible… I know now that I will be more prepared when I graduate from college…. I’ve also learned about online portfolios. I know that this project is what will set me apart from other college grads in my same position that potentially apply for the same jobs as I do. I also know that doing little things like acting in a professional manner all of the time, never burning any bridges and keeping a respectful attitude of all people at all times will help me get ahead in the future… I think that this class may be the most influential and important course that I have taken thus far in my college career and I know that I will take each and everything I learned this quarter and use it in my pursuit in finding the career fit for me.

In addition to expressing her stress about finding a job upon graduation Nicole also listed assignments that she found reassuring, useful, and insightful that will help her, as well as relevant topics she had not considered before. Following is an excerpt from her last blog entry:

This class so far has been very helpful towards building a path towards my career… From this class I will take a more creative route in building my career. It’s all about going out there and doing what is right for you. I have learned that without taking risky opportunities while you’re young, you may end up places where you don't want to be… and I really believe that this class has made me think about life in a different way, SERIOUSLY. I hope to take my experiences and lessons that I have learned from this class and use them when I leave college. Melanie listed the assignments she thought most valuable and inspirational and
I have chosen to write a reflection for my 8th blog entry about our class. This class has been surprisingly one of my favorite classes of college. I've enjoyed it mostly because I have felt it's been very influential and helpful to get me ready for the "real world."… Thank you for a wonderful quarter, Michelle. It's been a pleasure.

Julie, like the other students, listed the assignments she most valued and added some thoughts about the process of transition from student to professional:

The topic for this week’s blog was left to be pretty open. I am choosing to write about what I have gotten from taking this course… I also think that just by working on the e-portfolio assignment the past couple weeks I can tell that having this is really going to benefit me, and without the push of creating one in this class I probably wouldn’t have made one on my own… I am happy that this course is a requirement in the curriculum because it really puts you in perspective of what you want to do upon graduation. Things are not going to be easy and jobs are not going to jump out at you when you graduate because of the economy and how hard it is to find a job. I don’t think I really realized that until I noticed how hard it is to even just get an internship somewhere. It is terribly frustrating, and competitive, and this class shows you the skills to go above and beyond the competition. I would recommend this class to any one, not just retail majors!
Chapter Summary

This chapter presented the findings for each of the five questions uncovered by this study. The findings were arranged in accordance with the research questions. Data was gathered through two focus groups and six individual interviews. Supplemental data from student course blogs and Fieldwork Experience journals were used as appropriate.

The study found two components of professional identity in regards to the e-portfolio, the photograph of self and the visual choices that comprise the e-portfolio. Students made selections for these two components in an attempt to reflect their personality and struggled in the process to also present their concept of a professional image. The photo component emerged as a code and was identified as falling under the theme of thinking about the future, in that students are considering the point of view of the person viewing it and what it communicates to a potential employer (see Appendix G, Table 2).

The degree to which students kept in mind their career goals while making the visual choices for the e-portfolios depended on the extent to which they had adequately explored the many career options offered by the degree as well as their past work experiences. Those that were confident of what area of retail for which they wanted to work made visual choices that they considered appropriate for the perceived career path. Again, these students were thinking about their future encouraged by the process of putting together their e-portfolio as framed by the course content of the professional development class.
All the students who participated in this study were still developing the concept of professionalism in relation to their own identity. The online identity and how it relates to the progression of their professional identity was not something that was consciously considered until discussed in class. Students were able to better define concept of professionalism when discussing other’s actions, as opposed to their own actions. The Fieldwork Experience and the coursework completed in the Career Search Strategies class aided students in thinking about their professional identity and what it means as reflected in the course blogs, Fieldwork Experience journals and individual interviews. The online aspect of professional identity was considered important but students have not yet actively begun to develop it in regards to their future employment. Reflection was a theme that emerged and was coded as course content, which encouraged RFPD students to reflect upon what it means to be professional (see Appendix F, Table 1).

The e-portfolio was seen as having value beyond a graded project for class especially for those closer to completing the full internship and graduation. All expressed that they intend to update and share the e-portfolio to potential future employers and two of the six indicated that they have already shared the link. The major themes that emerged from the integration of the e-portfolio into the curriculum was found to support the transition process through reflection, thinking about the future, comparing self to others through mentors and role models and considering the point of view of others to their own identity.

Professional identity is a gradual transition of self and it is not necessarily affected by any one single event but a combination of experiences with the coursework
and Fieldwork Experience contributing to this process as is apparent though the analysis of the gathered data. What the e-portfolio does do is to get the students thinking about the point of view of the person looking at their information and in a time of social networking and the Internet to understand how easy it is for people to find information about you. The perception of the e-portfolio does not change in a measurable way post Fieldwork Experience but is still valued as it was upon its completion.
Chapter Five: Discussion

After providing an overview of the research questions, methodology, breadth, and main findings of the research study, this chapter will discuss each of the research questions, address implications for teaching, uses of the e-portfolio, the professional development of students in an online environment as well as identify areas for future research. The purpose of this grounded theory study was to better understand the perceptions of RFPD students in regards to the development of a professional online identity through the creation of an e-portfolio.

The framework for this study was a professional development course required for all RFPD students in which the course description is as follows; The course objective is to further the professional development of students in the RFPD major program. Focus with respect to career development in preparation for future work experiences and employment through resume and cover letter writing, development of interviewing skills, job search strategies, professional writing, discussion of current key topics within the industry and a variety of other professional experiences. The course continually strives to develop current and relevant ways to aid the students in their transition from student to young professional, thus the questions guiding the research were (a) In what ways does creating an e-portfolio aid or hinder the process of developing a professional identity? (b) What do students perceive they need to better complete their e-portfolio to reflect their professional online identity in relation to their career focus? (c) What factors do students perceive support or impede their vision of a professional online identity? (d) How do students understand the value of an e-portfolio beyond a graded project for a course? (e)
Do students’ perceptions of the e-portfolio and professional identity change post Fieldwork Experience?

The course used for this research consisted of 23 female students who had just moved from the pre-major to the major after completing a series of curriculum requirements and maintaining a minimum grade point average. Enrolled in the major’s only Career Search Strategies course for the fall quarter of the academic year 2011-2012 were 11 seniors and 12 juniors. The final analysis focused on six students who met the qualifications of having been enrolled in the course for that particular quarter, participated in one of the two voluntary focus groups, and completed the three credit hour Fieldwork Experience over the eight-week winter break, following the end of the course. The Fieldwork Experience involves securing a job in a retail related capacity, working a minimum of 125 hours and completing a reflective journal, a set five self selected goals, and completion of a major project that lasts the duration of the time employed. The goals and projects were to be submitted in a portfolio format with the choice of doing so through a hardcopy or online format.

Individual interviews of the six students who were selected based on the above criteria as well as the focus group interviews were the primary source of data. Upon the coding of the interviews the course blogs and Fieldwork Experience journals were then reviewed and coded in the same manner (Appendix D). The individual follow-up interviews were conducted spring quarter of the same year.

The interpretation of the findings is divided into two parts. Part one addresses the first three research questions concerning issues of how students think about professional
identity and how they connect it to their current identity including their online identity. These questions also explored if the e-portfolio aided or hindered in this development of a professional online identity. Part two addresses questions four and five and how students understand the value of the e-portfolio in the process of developing a professional identity as well as what role, if any, the Fieldwork Experience played in this ongoing transition from student to young professional. These last two questions also relate to the current curriculum and the e-portfolio as a graded project in the Career Search Strategies class as well as for the required Fieldwork Experience.

**Part One: Research Questions One, Two, and Three**

The first three questions have overlapping findings. One of these findings is that before exploring students’ professional online identity students must first begin to understand what being professional means. Students must come to terms with the inevitable transition from college student to young professional as it relates to career goals. It was found that having a role model or mentor in this process of transition. Real examples of what it is like and what the reality of the job search and working full time looks like helps in this transition to a professional identity (Eliot & Turns, 2011; Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007; Michelman, 2002; McElhinney, 2008). As indicated in the definition of terms provided in chapter one, the definition for professional, links to that of profession and is determined largely by a given profession to determine what constitutes professional for that particular field. Even the definition provided in the English Learner’s Dictionary (learnersdictionary.com, 2013, para. 3) leaves it up to individual interpretation as to what is meant by “the skill, good judgment, and polite behavior…” as
those are subjective qualities. This vagueness of what is professional for the major along with the absence of an accrediting body for is apparent in the students’ inability to provide their own definition for what it means to be professional.

The *Career Search Strategies* class acted as a catalyst to encourage thinking about what it means to be professional. The e-portfolio assignment was used to encourage students to consider the point of view of the person looking at the e-portfolio and what it communicates both visually and content wise as they transition to a professional identity.

Question one specifically asks in what ways does creating an e-portfolio aid or hinder the process of developing a professional online identity. The creation of the e-portfolio does not hinder the development of a professional identity but the connections made to a professional online identity were limited. This may be in part due to the wide use of social media in which “anything goes.” For students who were either further along in the program or had connections with friends, family or mentors already in industry as well as previous work experiences, the reality of becoming a professional was varied. Throughout the quarter students struggled with what it means to be professional and how they themselves fit into a professional world. The process of giving meaning to experience known as sense-making (Dervin, 2003) and plays a role for students as they work to create their own professional identity. While the e-portfolio itself does not hinder this process, trying to find a comfortable balance between personal & professional identity was an issue. Wanting to ‘stay true to self” while transitioning from being a student and whom they see themselves currently as into industry was seen as being contradictory identities. Creating the e-portfolio puts front and center this dynamic of
selves and forced to make both visual and content choices that display for others to view an image of professional self. This phenomenon aligns with identity theory as described by Hogg, et al. (1995), Nystöm’s (2009) description of how transitioning students negotiated their professional and private identities, and Robertson’s (1997) discussion of Bridge’s transition model. The RFPD students struggled to find a balance of who they are now and what a professional self means. The part of Bridges’ transition model in which students are experiencing is the beginning of the end. It is the end of their life as a student and transitioning to their role as a young professional. This is met with some resistance as they struggle to define this new role and how it fits with their perceived identity.

The e-portfolio was introduced as an extension of students’ resumes that can offer proof of the skills and experiences described on a resume. Traditionally resumes do not include a photo except in the performance professions such as acting but as students were identifying artifacts to include as a part of the e- portfolios all students enrolled in the class chose to include a photo of them. This became a common discussion point for deciphering what is professional. As fashion majors, there was a desire to be fashionable but at the same time professional, where that line was between the two variables was somewhat subjective. This topic was discussed in class and arose in both the focus groups as well as the individual interviews. Clothing has always played a part in one’s identity (Burns & Lennon, 1993) in that it is a form of expression and communication. In the workplace it communicates commitment and dedication to career (Teller Vision, 2008).

Melanie had made the comment about wanting to be pretty and professional while Julie stated that she did not feel like herself when dressed what she considered to
be professional. Julie’s comment also demonstrates the resistance that happens during the first stages of transition (Bridges & Mitchell, 2012).

The six students for which the research focused upon all expressed interest in a career relating to the visual aspects of possible career directions for which they might pursue upon graduation and were aware that the e-portfolio can communicate their visual skills. The visual communication of the e-portfolio was not only thought about in regard to the artifacts selected to display, but also the fonts, colors and template choices for assembling the framework. They had to apply their visual knowledge gained in their coursework to create the backdrop for the artifacts selected to profile as well as think about how to make it look professional while still being true to their current identity. In alignment with the research of Barrett & Wilkerson (2004) a balance of flexibility in format and requirements with that of the students having control of the project is important to successful implementation.

While not as directly related to their development of a professional identity, it was found that parts of the interface for a few, were thought to be a hindrance in that they could not figure out how to display artifacts the way they wanted or customize and change the look of the selected template for their e-portfolio. How comfortable students were with new technologies and their perceptions of the project also aligns with the findings of Barrett & Wilkerson (2004) and commitment to the process. This interpretation relates to question two and what students perceive that they need to better complete their e-portfolio to reflect their professional identity in relation to their career focus. As already stated, students must define what professional means and what it means
for their industry. They must begin to put themselves in the viewpoint of the employer looking at the e-portfolio and what the choices they make in assembling the e-portfolio communicate. This includes the selection of artifacts, the template, colors, organization, and presentation. The self-initiative to figure out a satisfactory packaging of these elements was important to the satisfaction of the outcome. As Corwin (2003) found, letting students make decisions on what and how to present information creates a sense of ownership and dedication to the e-portfolio project. Students were shown several online resources demonstrating how to use the e-portfolio interface but when asked if they used them they admitted that they did not take full advantage of these resources. An effective way for students to learn how to use the interface were the in class sessions where students were able to share how to present, alter and format their e-portfolios and artifacts with their peer to peer.

Question three explored factors that students perceived supported or impeded their vision of a professional online identity also started with the exploration of what professional means. While students were marginally aware of the implications of their current online identity, like their perceptions of what professional means, they were unsure of where exactly the line for being inappropriate was and were not aware of how to use social media to their advantage. This was apparent in their struggle to choose what photograph of themselves to include as part of their e-portfolio. Again, issues of wanting to be seen as fashionable, and true to self as well as being professional arose. What students felt they had control over was a theme that emerged in relation to their online identity. Discussions on this topic in class and in interviews revealed that the
understanding of control of privacy in social media were varied and that those closer to graduation were only just beginning to think about implications of their online presence.

The e-portfolio as a way to create and control a professional image was not an initial connection made by the students but in regards to research question four and if they saw it as more than a graded project for the course, they did see it a tool to get an internship or job.

When introducing the concept of an online professional identity in the course, students indicated that they had heard stories of potential employers searching the social media sights of job applicants. Photographs were the main concern of the students and what is ok and what is not. When discussed further about half of the 23 students in the class were shaking their heads yes indicating that they had adjusted privacy settings but four or five student raised their hands indicating that they had not. In the focus groups students shared information about privacy and their various social media accounts to which it became apparent that they were just beginning to be concerned. Having the topic of a professional online identity in class to emphasize the importance of being aware of its positive and negative implications was new to the students. Some had set up LinkedIn accounts but none had used it for networking or completed profiles.

Through the analysis of the data gathered and as was previously stated, it was found that before the questions of professional online identity can be thoroughly understood by students the concept of professional identity must be explored. While students agreed on what behaviors were not considered professional the concept of one’s past experiences and career direction framed what is professional. It is the visual, creative
aspect of the major that students struggle with in that that casual and professional are not necessarily compatible. If the clothes sold at the retailer are required to be worn by the sales associates and the clothes are considered casual this can be misconstrued as the workplace being unprofessional. This finding aligns with those of Adomaitis and Johnson (1993) and the perceptions of the formal versus casual flight attendant uniforms by self and others. Students connect visual with creative and creative with casual.

Deciphering the concept of professionalism through the Career Search Strategies course (reflection, discussions) and Fieldwork Experience (experiential learning, mentors) becomes part of the process of transition from student to professional.

Students attempted to figure out how to stay true to their current identity while portraying a professional one through the choices required in assembling the e-portfolio. This finding was apparent as students discussed with their peers and their own choices for their photographs of themselves used for the e-portfolios. The color, fonts and design (visual communication) of the e-portfolio also was a concern as they discussed the choices as wanting to show their personality while balancing against what they understand to be professional. A reoccurring concept of how a woman should present themselves was found to stem from the discussion of photographs. This concept and the course blogs on the movie trailer for Miss Representation and that on role models highlighted the challenges for creating a professional identity for stigmatized groups (Singh et al., 2006; Slay & Smith, 2010). People play many roles in their lives that are framed by societal definitions (Stets & Burke, 2000; Hogg et al., 1995). The roles for which women in our society play, include student, mother, wife, and more recently in
history, professional. Having relevant role models was a theme that emerged through the Fieldwork Experience and as reflected upon in the journaling for all six of the students of which the study focused. Michelman, (2002) states that this is particularly important for a female dominated field and major that fights stereotypes. As Emma noted in her blog after watching the movie trailer for Miss Representation that women need to be aware of stereotypes in order to not to fall into them.

Ibarra’s (1999) research into professional identity focuses on professionals and their transitions into more senior roles. His idea of “learning an effective professional style” through observation and imitation is one students engaged in for those with mentors or role models. Being true-to-self was in contrast to imitation in that individuals will not imitate if they believe it to be unauthentic. RFPD students did not feel comfortable in unfamiliar roles that they saw as professional. Ibarra and Petriglieri (2007) continued this idea in that part of assuming a work role is looking the part and if there are no role models for which you can identify (that look like you) the transition into that role is much more difficult. Connecting to this concept of role development is that of Hogg et al. (1995) and social identity theory in which role positions are discussed. As explained, there are multiple components of self in that we all have different roles we play whether it is, student, professional, wife or mother. Society frames the context for these roles, which are defined by the social group with which one feels they most belong. The behaviors are defined by the perimeters of that group. The roles women play arose from the discussion in class of professional women and role models as well mentioned in the blogs and interviews (Ibarra & Petriglieri, 2007, McElhinney, 2008, Singh et al. 2006). In
class, several students expressed opinions that they believed men and women were treated equally in their chosen field of fashion. The conversation in class aligns with third wave feminism in that “…(they) feel entitled to interact with men as equals…(they) actively play with femininity” (Snyder, 2008, p. 179). Students did not believe that being a woman put them at a disadvantage but believed that it would instead be a benefit to getting ahead. But as explained by Ibarra & Petriglieri (2008) in the process of creating a work identity the people who surround you at work affect how a professional self is created.

For certain career choices where the accrediting bodies define expectations and graduates must past board certified licensure to practice such as teachers, health care professionals, lawyers and engineers to name a few, the issue of professionalism is more defined. Even within these areas much research has been done on how to help students see themselves in these professional roles as they transition from the role of student (Eliot & Turns, 2011; Finn et al., 2010; Luehmann, 2008). For students whose career choices are not defined by the profession it becomes more elusive in defining what being professional means. For RFPD students the influence of the fashion industry as part of their career further complicates the issue of what is appropriate. Students struggle with defining the line between fashionable apparel, which is an area they know, and what is professional apparel, of which they have little experience at this point in their lives.

When discussing the transition of their identity as a student to that of professional two frameworks were explored, Schlossberg's Transition Model and Bridges' Transition
Model. Both of these theories are commonly used within the context of career development. Aspects of both of the theories can be applied to the RFPD students.

Schlossberg’s Transition Model is described by Burns (2010) as having both adult career and personal transitions broken down into anticipated, unanticipated and non-event transitions. In context of the RFPD students their graduation is an anticipated event. Schlossberg notes that the transition needs to be taken in context of the situation, self, support and strategies for each individual.

Burns (2010) describes Bridges’ three stages of transition in his model in that the transition begins with an end, involves a middle period with new beginnings emerging to complete the transition. For the RFPD students the ending is that of their years of being a student is coming to an end the middle period or neutral zone being the job search upon graduation and the new beginnings starting with the accepting of a job. This is when the previous connections, roles and identities of that as a student are eventually replaced.

While parts of both theories are applicable to the situation of the RFPD students Bridges’ model with students in the first two stages fit with where the students are currently in their lives with the third stage still in the future. Students found themselves between two identities as they reluctantly let go of their student identity and explored what it means to be a professional. The Fieldwork Experience was identified as a transformative experience to varying degrees for each of the final six students through the follow-up interviews. It was demonstrated that playing a work role in what they felt was a relatively risk free work experience where they could try out a professional self was a step in the development of a professional identity inline with Bridges’ model.
For RFPD students the process of thinking about and making the visual choices while creating the e-portfolio included considering how their choices represent parts of their current identity as well as their career directions especially for those interested in visual merchandising. Students struggled with deciding on what to add and if quality of their work was strong enough to share demonstrating the reflective quality of an e-portfolio (Backer, 1997; Barrett, 2001; Diez, 1994; Wright, 2001). This struggle ties in with students beginning to think about the point of view of the people viewing the e-portfolio and how potential employers may perceive their choices.

Part Two: Research Questions Four and Five

Questions four and five address issues post creation of the e-portfolio and the Career Search Strategies class. Understanding the value of the e-portfolio beyond a project for a grade fosters lifelong learning and reflection. Students conveyed that they would continue updating their e-portfolios in the future as Verhagen & Hoiting (2001) ascertained that “portfolios fail when the students don’t see the value” (p. 426). While students stated that this was their intention of the fourteen students that completed their Fieldwork Experience during the winter break following the class only five submitted their Fieldwork Experience project using the e-portfolio completed in class. One student submitted their projects online but separate from the e-portfolio. Natalie during her follow-up interview mentioned that she did not show the e-portfolio during her interview for her full internship, as she did not see how the artifacts she chose were relevant. This stated, Kaylee offered that she sees the e-portfolio as a way to set her apart from other
applicants in a job search and Julie did show it during an interview with positive feedback.

Perceptions of students’ professional identities and the e-portfolio continue to evolve at different rates post Fieldwork Experience and in addition the course content covered in the professional development class in regards to their understanding of what professionalism means to them. Subtle changes occurred post work experience, which became more apparent to the students once the questions were asked. When questioned about professionalism post Fieldwork Experience they would pause and really think before answering and had problems articulating their thoughts. They would talk about the coursework and discussions had as part of the Career Search Strategies class more than their experience. This being the case, from reading the journal reflections that were part of the credit requirements, they were beginning to make connections from the coursework to the workplace. As the Fieldwork Experiences for the students interviewed all worked on the floor in a retail store and none wanted a career that mirrored what they did, they spoke of what they were going to do, or were looking for in their full internship or career. For future research follow up interviews with the students who have completed their full quarter internship and are getting ready to graduate could offer further insight into the steps students go through in the transition from university to workplace.

The creation of a professional identity is a process but the work experience piece is an important part of the evolution. This is evident in the findings of Eliot and Turns (2011) and the framing of their research in relation to internal and external experiences, both of which relied on the student’s personal narrative of self and their previous
experiences. As course content is combined with work experiences students begin making connections between what they know and what they do. Not every internal and external activity that Eliot and Turns (2011) identified for their engineering students lined up directly with that of the RFPD students. Those that did included the internal activities of reframing of personal history, constructing the future and finding new meaning in their experiences. External activities included comparison to role models, internships and meeting other’s expectations. A comparison between the alignment of the internal and external activities found by Eliot and Turns (2011) with those that emerged from the RFPD data can be seen in Appendix F, Table 1 and Table 2. These activities align with Bridge’s transition model as described by Robertson (1997). The resistance for change that Robertson (1997) spoke about was found to recur in the RFPD students depending on their past work experiences and with mentors or role models. The activities found in the data support the model in that instruction or guidance in combination with reflection and experience are significant components of a transition. The e-portfolio, course content and work experience were defined as tools to aid students in the process of transition.

A core concept that emerged from the data was the concept of sense making in relation to what defines being professional. Reflection is at the center of being able to make sense of an experience (Eliot & Turns, 2011; Mezirow, n.d.) and e-portfolios are a valuable tool to aid students in reflecting on the work they have completed as a student as well as journaling and blogging (Barrett, 2001). The Career Search Strategies class integrated reflective assignments to foster the transition from student to young professional and as apparent through the blogs relating to professional development was
realized by the students. When reflecting on the articles assigned to read and reflect upon all six of the students related the articles back to themselves.

McElhinney (2008) found that as students participate in work experiences they begin to see themselves in the professional role and as they demonstrate competence their comfort with the new role develops. This was found to be the same for the RFPD students through the written reflections in their Fieldwork Journals completed as part of their small work experience. All of the six students to varying degrees wrote about their feelings after being complimented by their supervisors. Kaylee, who wants to go into visual merchandising, was asked to remerchandise the entire boutique by the store manager after she was impressed by Kaylee’s store window design. She reflected on how her desire to follow her career direction was reaffirmed by this positive reinforcement.

Students began to explore their professional identity during the quarter enrolled in the Career Search Strategies course. Through their blog entries it became clear that it was helpful for them to reflect on what it means to be professional as it was apparent that they began to make connections between their personal experiences, issues in the workplace and their own career path. The e-portfolios, along with the blogs, became another piece to the sense making in regards to a professional identity. The path for students was not a linear progression but a process that differed for each student. Through the e-portfolio creation process reflection and transition were key elements that aided this process of developing a professional identity that emerged through the coding of the data. The e-portfolio was a multi-purpose tool that worked as a catalyst in the transition and process of moving form student towards their goals and future career path. These findings
align with that of Robertson (1997) and Schön (1990) in reflective learning being the process of guiding the student through these transformations with the instructor as facilitator.

The online component was present in that the context of the decisions for the e-portfolio are displayed online with the intention of sharing with the intention of outreach to potential employers as the first impression. New to the online job search is the addition of the photograph of one’s self, which is readily available through not only an e-portfolio but other social media as well. Students were forced to think about their current online identities through social media such as Facebook and Twitter and how others might interpret their online identities. In addition to the photograph of self, students struggled with maintaining the current concept of their identity while creating a professional one though all the visual choices required in the assembly of the artifacts chosen to display. Again this fits with identity theory as described by Stets & Burke (2000)

The advantages of a more professional social media presence was new to the students as they had heard of LinkedIn but had not created an account or had created an account but were not sure what to do with it. Those students that had mentors, whether it be a supervisor or older sibling, were able to develop a sense of the role social media can play in the transition from student to professional

It was found that framing the findings similar to that of Eliot and Turns (2011) in regards to internal and external categories are appropriate for the RFPD students although the specific activities that the RFPD students engaged in differed somewhat from that of the engineering students. In their article they cite research by Thornton and Nardi (1975)
having to do with the stages of development in reference to how professional identities are created stating:

Professional identity can now be seen as a particular type of narrative that develops over time through interaction with external forces (peers, faculty, employers, and other industry representatives) and internal forces which include the development of autobiographical reasoning in late adolescence and young adulthood, and the development of evermore realistic understandings of professional practice. One activity, however, stands at the core of these various models and theories: the individual’s ability to reconcile external messages about the professional role, external messages about the individual’s skills and knowledge, and the individual’s own needs, wants, and ambitions. In other words, it is the individual’s ability to make sense of internal and external forces that can determine their relative identification with professional engineering. (p. 634)

Eliot and Turns (2011) identified six internal frame sense-making activities: Reframing personal history, defining self as engineer, constructing the future, realizing/articulating values, defining engineering practice and developing self narrative abilities. With the two activities listed that define the practice of engineering as a profession the profession and the licensure board aid students’ understanding of what it means to be an engineer. RFPD students do not have this set of guidelines and the career opportunities are wide and varied which complicate the definition. The fashion aspect of the career and the visual choices of self-presentation, artifacts and e-portfolio further complicate the definition. The remaining four activities align with what was found
through the blogs, interviews, and journals: the sense-making, reflection and transition process of moving from students to young professional.

The external frame sense making activities (Eliot & Turns 2011) which were identified as framing self as applicant, creating a persuasive case and comparing self to others were parallel with what the RFPD students experienced. Thinking about their skills and value as an employee, demonstrating that they have the skills through the creation of the e-portfolio and identifying mentors and comparing self with others through discussions and peer reviews of resumes, cover letters and e-portfolios. As Emma stated when reflecting on the process of assembling the e-portfolio she was aware that the end result was going to be shared and resulted in her desire to make sure the artifacts and the final e-portfolio was representative of her best work.

In addition to the alignments with the work of Eliot and Turns (2011), two additional themes emerged from the data (see Appendix G, Table 3) those of understanding value and authenticity of roles. Ibarra and Barbulescu (2010) discuss feelings of authenticity in the role one plays being a part of the transition process. In regards to the RFPD students, learning about issues of professionalism (course content), reviewing and sharing the skills required to become a professional (e-portfolio) and then using the knowledge learned in a work setting (internship) combine to create the beginning of feeling authentic in a work role. While completing the internship having a mentor who validates their work furthers this transition process (Ibarra & Barbulescu, 2010) Understanding value is the ability to connect the dots between the course content, seeing the e-portfolio as a bridge to a professional identity and a professional career. The
students who were able to make these connections felt more prepared and confident to make the move to a professional role upon graduation.

**Recommendations**

This research emphasized the importance of helping students explore what it means to not only be professional but professional in the context of their chosen career options in RFPD. It is also necessary to have students to begin considering how their current online identity can affect their upcoming professional identity. Course assignments are important encouragements to aid students in thinking about their individual experiences as well as the viewpoints of others and what they mean in the context of their transition to young professional. Blogs were shown to be a good way for students to frame a topic in regards to their own background. Classes could also incorporate group discussions where students could compare and contrast experiences and viewpoints.

Further discussion of what it means to be professional in different environments could be expanded upon. While research into companies’ corporate cultures is already included in the course content, more could be done to help students explore that although there are different levels of formality at workplaces there are constants with being professional. This recommendation is given as students were found to confuse a relaxed environment with one that is not professional.

The *Fieldwork Experience* and the reflective journal were also found to be important pieces of the curriculum with students referencing the value of what they learned in class as it applied to their experience. More could be done to help students
synthesize the reflections in their journals with its value as they move on to their full internships. As Bauer (2009) recommended from his student perspective, that in conjunction with reflection more meaningful feedback provided by peers, instructors, and professionals on the e-portfolio would be a valuable addition.

Further Research

What it means to be professional is valuable for students to understand before they make the full transition from student to young professional. As SNS and the media that people use online continues to evolve the research as to how it is used for making connections with others should also evolve. It is important for educators to aid students in this transition so when employers hire these students upon graduation they are ready to fulfill their roles. “Professional identity is an important factor in engagement, retention, and adaptation to the workplace” (Eliot & Turns, 2011, p. 631). Because of this fact, follow up research in regards to the employer’s viewpoint would be a valuable addition as well as with that of the students. Questions include:

1. What are the impressions of the students e-portfolios by those in industry?
2. Did students continue to update their e-portfolios as they said they would?
3. Did students use them in their job search upon graduation?
4. Did students receive feedback back from their employer on their e-portfolios?
5. How does a job define the sense of self and their role identity?
6. How do people in industry define professionalism in the contest of their profession?
Summary

The e-portfolio is a multi-purpose tool that has many dimensions. In this research study it aided the beginning stages of the transition of identity from student to young professional through reflection and sense-making and the choices it forces students to consider and make. The process of creating an e-portfolio encourages students to evaluate the role that the Internet now plays in this transition process and how their social media presence, in the form of Facebook, Twitter, and blogs to name a few, can affect their image. In exploring the roles of online identities and what they can create, both the positive and negative aspects of the Internet were contemplated through the process of assembling the e-portfolio. Aspects of how they present themselves in a professional manner from how they are dressed in the photo selected, to what artifacts were chosen to include, to the visual choices and organization of the e-portfolio. This creation of the e-portfolio gave a sense of control to the students in this aspect of their online identity. Students were made more aware of ways in which their online identity could benefit through other social media sites such as LinkedIn and how they could work together with the e-portfolio.

Online identity is something that cannot be avoided, especially for those growing up in an age where it is integrated into our social networks of family and friends. SNS, blogs, Pinterest, LinkedIn, You Tube among others are the way we share information and interests. Today’s college student arrives with an online documented history created at a time when thoughts of how it could affect their job search and professionalism was far from consideration. While many programs have taught issues of professionalism and
professional identity, addressing the online environment is a must in today’s world. The e-portfolio has the added benefit of bridging the professional identity with a professional online identity as indicated in this research. This is transferrable knowledge for any major as they explore what it means to be a professional as they move from their role as student.
References


Appendix A: Assignment Description for E-Portfolio

E-PORTFOLIO ASSIGNMENT:
In conjunction with the class presentation & discussion, the requirements of the assignment are as follows:

• A written explanation for EVERY Item / Artifact you have included (let the viewer know its significance and why they might want to see it – i.e. why it is relevant!)

  INCLUDE
    o **What** it is, **What** you did to complete it, **What** you learned in doing it

• Resume
• You can focus your portfolio to your strengths but show a breadth of knowledge. (See accompanying rubric below for guidance!)
• Keep it PROFESSIONAL! Both in content as well as visually.
• Participation in peer review on the last day of class.

In addition to the above requirements the e-portfolio will also be graded on:
+ Organization; ease of locating information and maneuvering around the web-space
+ Presentation / Customization

RUBRIC – Again, you will not necessarily have something in every category at this point but do aim for a breadth of categories with your personal strengths and focus demonstrating a depth.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portfolio Objectives</th>
<th>Support for Career Goals – What categories might you include?</th>
<th>Courses Taken and/or Experience</th>
<th>Project, Event, Experience</th>
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<td>Evidence of ability to set goals</td>
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<td>Evidence of ability to evaluate personal strengths</td>
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<td>Evidence of ability to express ethical base</td>
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<td>Evidence of ability to analyze &amp; forecast trends</td>
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<td>Evidence of effective communication skills (written, oral, graphic/visual)</td>
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<td>Evidence of creative and conceptual problem solving</td>
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<td>Aesthetic Understanding</td>
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<td>Group Work</td>
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<td>Evidence of ability to work with diverse populations</td>
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<td>Evidence of appreciation for life-long learning</td>
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Appendix B: Syllabus for the Career Search Strategies Course

Career Search Strategies – RFPD399: Fall Quarter 2011/2012
Call #16070; 3 Credit Hours
Class Meets: Wednesdays & Fridays 2:10 – 3:30
Classroom Location: Grover Center W123

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Final Exam:</th>
<th>Friday, November 18th @ 2:30 pm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Instructor:</td>
<td>J. Michelle Price</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office:</td>
<td>Building E172</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Hours:</td>
<td>Tuesdays/Thursdays 11:00-12:00, Wednesdays/Fridays 3:30-4:30 &amp; by appointment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office Phone:</td>
<td>I no longer have an office phone – office hours / email are the best ways to communicate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email:</td>
<td><a href="mailto:pricej1@ohio.edu">pricej1@ohio.edu</a></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In The Patton College, we prepare leader-educators, practitioners and human service professionals who share our commitment to lifelong learning and serving society responsibly as change agents in meeting diverse human and social needs.

COURSE DESCRIPTION:
The course objective is to further the professional development of students in the Retail Merchandising & Fashion Product Development major program. Focus with respect to career development in preparation for future work experiences and employment through resume & cover letter writing, development of interviewing skills, job search strategies, professional writing, discussion of current key topics within the industry and a variety of other professional experiences.

REQUIRED TEXT:
Careers! Professional Development for Retailing and Apparel Merchandising by V. Ann Paulins & Julie L. Hillary, Fairchild Books 2005

COMPETENCIES:
The following competencies should be gained through the completion of this course.
1 – Complete a professional yet personalized resume.
2 – Create a compelling and professional cover letter.
3 – Learn how to effectively begin and follow through on a job search strategy.
4 – Provide you with the skills to successfully and confidently interview with potential employers.
5 – Know the appropriate steps to take to follow-up on an interview.
6 - Demonstrate effective written and oral communication skills.
7 – Learn effective ways to Multi-task.
ATTENDANCE:
In following with the subject matter of this class – attendance will be treated much in the same manner that it would in a job situation! Consider it your responsibility to take care of the parts of your job as student while not adding to the workload of your boss (instructor).

You get 2 missed classes, period. These 2 days include BOTH “excused” and “unexcused” absences. USE THEM WISLEY – AND DO NOT FEEL OBLIGATED TO TAKE 2 ABSENCES JUST BECAUSE YOU CAN.

3 absences and your grade will be lowered one FULL letter grade, a 4th absence will result in an F.

FYI: Save ALL documentation for missed classes due to legitimate reasons – you will need the documentation ONLY if you go over 4 absences due to an additional legitimate reason; you will need these to make a case for yourself to not receive an “F.” Examples of situations where this would be necessary were discussed on the first day of class.

OTHER CLASS POLICIES:
You are expected to attend class, to arrive to class ON TIME and remain for the ENTIRE class period. Attendance will be taken. You are not permitted to leave class before it has been dismissed. Do not plan activities that may conflict with class time. Refrain from packing your class materials before the class has been dismissed.

OTHER CLASS POLICIES:
You are expected to attend class, to arrive to class ON TIME and remain for the ENTIRE class period. Attendance will be taken. You are not permitted to leave class before it has been dismissed. Do not plan activities that may conflict with class time. Refrain from packing your class materials before the class has been dismissed.

The instructor will provide an attendance sheet each class period. It is the responsibility of the student to sign the attendance sheet on the day attendance is taken. An unsigned attendance sheet, for any reason, constitutes an absence. If a student does not meet the above policies they will be counted absent.

It is to the discretion of the instructor to allow students to make up work or have extended due dates for an absence of any reason. Only missed days due to illness or emergency in the immediate family will be considered for project extension and make up. Students must be prepared to provide evidence to the reason of the absence if they desire to have extended due date or to make up work.

COMMUNICATION IS KEY! It is the sole responsibility of the student to acquire assignments, gather class notes, or find similar information due to an absence of any reason.

ASSIGNMENTS:
Any assignment(s) not turned in on the due date and at the time of IS DONE SO AT YOUR OWN RISK (i.e. emailed assignments, those slid under my office door, etc.) I do not guarantee credit for any late assignments.

Disability Services:
Any student who feels she/he may need an accommodation based on the impact of a disability should contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. If you are not yet registered as a student with a disability, please contact the Office of Disability Services at XXX-XXX-XXXX or visit the office in XXX Student University Center.
GRADING SCALE:
All students will be graded in the context and in accordance with the student’s appropriate background knowledge and prerequisite coursework. It should be clearly understood that evaluations and grades are made in this context.

Final grades are given under the following guidelines:

(A) Excellent and superior academic work. A clear and thorough demonstration to the knowledge of the topics studied in the course as initiated by the student and presented by the instructor. The student must also clearly demonstrate the ability to critically apply knowledge, skills, processes and ideas studied in the course with independent thought and creative expression. Students must clearly demonstrate that they have the ability to go beyond requirements in the course or class activities as outlined by the instructor in meaningful and thoughtful methods.

Receives a raise with promotion. In addition to meeting the requirements of the “B & C” standards; Went beyond the projects completed to create additional related items to expand on the original assignments.

(B) Above average, approaching excellence in academic work. A clear and thorough demonstration to the knowledge of the topics studied in the course. The student clearly demonstrates the ability to critically apply knowledge, skills, processes, and ideas studied in the course with limited implementation of independent thought and creative expression. The student may go beyond course requirements as outlined by the instructor, but may not have realized or demonstrated the full potential independent thinking and creative expression within the course or class activity.

Receives a raise (no promotion). In addition to meeting the requirements of the “C” standards; Took initiative to contribute to the overall welfare of the company and coworkers. Expanded on projects beyond the obvious.

(C) Average academic work. A clear understanding and knowledge of central topics, skills, processes and ideas studied in the course or class activity. The student sufficiently demonstrates the ability to critically apply knowledge, skills, processes, and ideas studied in the course Limited or misdirected independent thinking or effort to go beyond course requirements.

Gets to keep their job. Came to work on time, did not go over allotted amount of sick days. Turned in work projects on time. Worked well with coworkers.

(D) Below average academic work. Minimal acceptable understanding and knowledge of central topics, skills, processes, and ideas studied in the course or class activity.

Is put on employee watch and probation.

(F) Unacceptable academic work. Inability to demonstrate minimal understanding of central topics, skills, processes, and ideas studied in the course or class activity.

You’re Fired.
Professional Attitude:

REMEMBER! This is a professional development class! Students are to express and articulate clearly their view toward the topics in this course in a method that reflects the quality of a professional in the corporate world or any other discipline at Ohio University. It is the ethical responsibility of the student to support the learning community in this course in a positive and constructive manner. Maintaining a positive learning community is parallel to expectations one will experience in supporting a positive work environment after graduation.

Professional attitude includes, but is not limited to, the ability to maintain and contribute to a positive learning environment, professional attitude towards classmates, guests, and the instructor. To receive a positive evaluation, professional attitude must be clearly demonstrated on a consistent and daily basis. Do not take this portion of the course for granted—you are expected to demonstrate professional maturation processes within the course. The ability to receive and give critical feedback, respond to challenging situations with a positive attitude, and support an excellent working environment are all essential to receiving high marks in professional attitude evaluations.

Also included in the professional attitude category is the timely submission of the absence forms (see attendance policy above, and the form posted under “course documents” on Black Board). **ANY ATTITUDE DEEMED UNPROFESSIONAL WILL RESULT IN A POINTS DEDUCTION UP TO 20% OF YOUR TOTAL GRADE.**

NO TEXTING / CELL PHONE USE IN CLASS!!! Laptops are not permitted in class unless specifically specified by the instructor.

EMAIL: If your question/situation/inquiry is really important—see me in person. DO NOT email me if; your inquiry is conversational. For any longer explanations please see me after class or during my office hours. If your question can be clarified by information found on Black Board or the class syllabus. Any question that’s answer can be found in either place will not receive a reply. WHEN EMAILING ME: 1 – Put the class # in the SUBJECT LINE (i.e. RFPD 399) 2- Include your FULL NAME in all correspondence. I DO NOT DISCUSS GRADES THROUGH EMAIL. I do not guarantee a speedy or timely response through email. BEWARE: If you are having your email forwarded from your student account – there is no guarantee it will arrive – Often email systems mark student email as ‘spam’ – I take no responsibility for information not received concerning class and assignments due to this problem.

DIGITAL MEDIA POLICY:
All electronic files created for course work in this course are the responsibility of the student. Each student is to maintain back-up files for all work. Lost, damaged, or erased computer files will be considered incomplete work and may be evaluated as if the assignment or project was not completed.

ACADEMIC MISCONDUCT:
Academic misconduct of any form will not be tolerated. Refer to the University Bulletin for the consequences of such behavior. Academic misconduct refers to dishonesty in assignments or examinations (cheating); presenting the ideas or the writing of someone else as your own (plagiarism); or knowingly furnishing false information to the University by forgery, alteration, or misuse of University documents. Academic misconduct includes, but is not limited to; permitting another student to plagiarize or cheat from your work, submitting an academic exercise (written work, printing, sculpture, computer program, etc.) that has been prepared totally or in part by another, acquiring improper knowledge of the contents of an exam, using unauthorized material during and exam, submitting the same paper in two different courses without the consent of your professors, submitting a forged grade change slip or signing someone else’s name to an attendance sheet who is not present.
STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS:
Evaluation of this course: The Patton College of Education & Human Service uses paper evaluations. The date the evaluations will be handed out for completion is noted on the course schedule. This is the only time that you will have the opportunity to complete a course evaluation so please make every effort to attend class on that day. Your responses provide essential performance data for instructors and help the College improve its curriculum.

COURSE SCHEDULE: Tentative dates, subject to change according to class pace and needs.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 1</th>
<th>September</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLASS #1</td>
<td>Wednesday 7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASS #2</td>
<td>Friday 9</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>WEEK 2</th>
<th>Chapter 5 Resumes</th>
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<tr>
<td>CLASS #3</td>
<td>Wednesday 14</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLASS #4</td>
<td>Friday 16</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 3</th>
<th>CHAPTER 3: PORTFOLIOS</th>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>CLASS #5</td>
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<tr>
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<th>CHAPTER 4: THE JOB SEARCH</th>
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<tr>
<td>CLASS #7</td>
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<tr>
<td>CLASS #8</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>CLASS #9</td>
<td>Wednesday 5</td>
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<td>CLASS #10</td>
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<table>
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<tr>
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<table>
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<tr>
<th>WEEK 7</th>
<th>CHAPTER 6: INTERVIEWING</th>
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<tr>
<td>CLASS #13</td>
<td>Wednesday 19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CLASS #14</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 8</th>
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<tr>
<td>CLASS #16</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WEEK 9</th>
<th>November</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CLASS #17</td>
<td>Wednesday 2</td>
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7: Final Exam: Friday, November 18th @ 2:30 pm

### COURSE ASSIGNMENT OVERVIEW:

<table>
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<tr>
<th>ASSIGNMENTS</th>
<th>POINTS</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
<th>DUE DATES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1 Resumes &amp; References</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Points include: 1st &amp; final draft – participation in in-class critique</td>
<td>Fri. Sept. 23 (1st draft)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Fri. Sept 30 (final draft)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Company Research</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>3 companies WITH Pros and Cons</td>
<td>Fri. Oct. 14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Fair!</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>EXTRA CREDIT!</td>
<td>Oct. 4 ; 10am-3pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Cover Letters w/ Job Description</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Points includes both job description, letter &amp; participation in in-class critique</td>
<td>Wed. Oct. 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Interview Exercise</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Questions as assigned &amp; in class participation</td>
<td>Wed. Oct 26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 Road Trip Nation</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Quiz, questions &amp; discussion</td>
<td>Fri. Nov. 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 Portfolios</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>MUST include descriptions!</td>
<td>Wed. Nov. 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 Final Exam</td>
<td>50</td>
<td></td>
<td>Fri. Nov. 18 @ 2:30pm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 Class Participation</td>
<td>75</td>
<td>Various assignments throughout quarter!</td>
<td>Throughout Quarter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(in-class assignments)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 Blog Entries</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>Weekly</td>
<td>Start each Friday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<td>Due each Wednesday</td>
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<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>B+</td>
<td>607-685</td>
<td>C+</td>
<td>539-518</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>675-630</td>
<td>B</td>
<td>684-563</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A-</td>
<td>629-608</td>
<td>B-</td>
<td>562-540</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reminder! Must receive a C or better to Advance!

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Appendix C: IRB Form

A determination has been made that the following research study is exempt from IRB review because it involves:

Category 1 - research conducted in established or commonly accepted educational settings, involving normal educational practices

Project Title: Electronic Portfolio (e-portfolio) Exploration into Professional Presentation for RFPD Students

Primary Investigator: J. Michelle Price

Co-Investigator(s):

Advisor: Teresa Franklin

Department: Retail Merchandising & Fashion Product Development

Robin Stack, CIP, Human Subjects Research Coordinator Office of Research Compliance

Date: Sept. 19, 2011

The approval remains in effect provided the study is conducted exactly as described in your application for review. Any additions or modifications to the project must be approved (as an amendment) prior to implementation.
### Appendix D: Coding Chart

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Career Focus</th>
<th>Course content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Honestly, I think that, well, taking 399 with you, I just thought it was a simpler, easier version to put all my work together and have it all in one place. Because when I was in DAP, I had actual portfolios. It was just a mess. It was hard to keep track of, hard to lug around with you, and it just didn’t make sense. Putting portfolios a lot more convenient and its easy. I just upload my work right away. I can hide pages and I can add things to it and delete things so easily. It takes me like 10 minutes to go over and redo it. I continuously update it because of all my projects and things that I want shown, and what kinds of internships I’m looking for and things like that.&quot;</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Career Focus</td>
<td>Course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I'm not like a tech-savvy person at all. I need things to be somewhat straightforward and easy.&quot;</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Career Focus</td>
<td>Course content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Career Focus</th>
<th>Course content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Yeah, absolutely. I actually use it for my interview with the internship that I’m doing in the summer. My sister’s friend works there, so I sent it to her and she was really impressed by having all your work in one place. She liked that. Then when I got there, she was like, “Do you have any of your work?” I was like, “Oh, I have my online portfolio. I can pull it up.” They were all so impressed by that. It’s been nice.”</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Career Focus</td>
<td>Course content</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I don’t know. I feel like in class when we worked on it, it was more of like getting it complete and not editing it for like correctness or relation to actual things that you would be doing outside, like how we related to jobs or internships. I think it was more like a process of compiling your work and putting what you wanted on there. I think that, as I’ve edited mine and looked over mine, I continuously try to tweak it in a way that whatever internship or job that I’m looking for, it kind of makes sense to them and it kind of— I don’t know how to say that.”</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Career Focus</td>
<td>Course content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Career Focus</th>
<th>Course content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;Right because I— I mean some of the things that I put on there were projects that, I don’t know, didn’t necessarily have any relevance. Now I have different things that I wanna put on there or I’ve had pages that I like for certain jobs and that I’ll hide for other ones because I don’t want—I don’t know, I think that maybe just editing better. Overall I thought it was awesome. I think that’s the most valuable thing that I learned in 399.”</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Career Focus</td>
<td>Course content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quote</th>
<th>Reflection</th>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Career Focus</th>
<th>Course content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&quot;I remember some of them were very much like just getting the work done, and then others were actually like people were taking it as their online identity. They wanted to be portrayed in a certain way and it definitely showed through. I know a couple people that I looked at had pictures of themselves, or just pictures of their work in general speaks more volumes than any five paragraphs could say about what you did. I thought that was cool. I don’t know, the different themes for Wix just stood out to me because some of them are geared more towards images, and some are geared more towards writing, and literature, and stuff like that. I’m a visual person so I liked the ones with lots of pictures and a little explanation so as to know what the project was and what their overall objective was. I like those, yeah.”</td>
<td>Reflection</td>
<td>Understanding</td>
<td>Career Focus</td>
<td>Course content</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix E: Focus Group Questions

1. How many of you have Facebook accounts?
2. When did you get your Facebook account?
3. Are you thinking ahead towards you know what your legacy is going to be?
4. Are you thinking about it now?
5. What kinds of things did you guys consider when you were trying to make it professional?
6. What were some of your concerns?
7. When you were looking at each other’s what were some things that stood out?
8. What made a picture more professional or more appropriate or less appropriate when you were taking a look at what people had chosen?
9. How did you choose your photo?
10. How did you pick out what to wear?
11. Do you find that balance (of aesthetic vs. analytical) a difficult thing about your major?
12. Do you think that’s a unique thing to your major?
13. How do you guys figure out that line?
14. Did you find yourself thinking about some of those same things when you were putting together your electronic portfolio?
15. Have any of you done your Fieldwork Experience already?
16. Do you think that changed your perspective at all when you were putting together your electronic portfolio?
17. What are some of the concerns that you or kind of that generation that first it’s been raised on Facebook and social media and Twitter?

18. How many of you guys have LinkedIn accounts?

19. Do you think that you will use the electronic portfolio?

20. Did you get ideas from each other?

21. Do you think you guys will keep up with the electronic portfolio?

22. Do you think about it as a young professional or do you think young professional and young professional online?

23. Do you ever think about wow, this could be a really great tool for self-marketing?

24. Do you think that’s going to catch on at all?

25. Do you think about using the Internet as a marketing tool?

26. How many people have Googled their name?

27. How do you see your electronic portfolio fitting into this puzzle, this kind of new ground for your generation?

28. Does it give you at least a little bit of control?

29. Do you think about what employers are looking at?

30. What they are thinking while they are looking at what you have put there?

31. Do you kind of look at it from their perspective or try to the best you can?

32. Do you think about what employers are looking at?

33. Do you kind of look at it from their perspective or try to the best you can?

34. Are there instances where you got to know someone online first and you are like I don't know if I would really want to know them?
35. Were there any that you were just, oh my God. What were they thinking?
36. What were they?
37. How much is too much cleavage?
38. When you were thinking about an electronic portfolio, were you thinking about who’s looking at it?
39. Do you think it’s trickier being a woman?
40. When thinking about your transition to the professional world, who are your professional models?
41. Are you thinking about that as you transition?
42. Do you feel that it varies per, what industry you are going into when you graduate?
43. What are some just cues you get before that person even opens their mouth?
44. What are some of the visual choices that you can make?
45. If their first impression of you is going to be online, what do you think about the choices you should be making?
46. What do you think stood out when you guys were looking at each other’s portfolios?
47. What are some of the ones that stick in your mind in a positive way?
48. Do you think that those matched up?
49. Do you still feel like it was part of yourself?
50. Do you think it’s compounded by being a woman?
51. Do you see like the electronic portfolio as being an advantage?
52. Can you sometimes look at a picture and guess someone’s personality?

53. We did look at each other’s resumes in class, what stood out there?

54. Any other things you want to add about the class, creating your E portfolio, thinking of yourselves as young professionals?

55. Do you all think you will use it?
Appendix F: Tables 1 and 2

Table 1

*Internal Codes as Emerged From Data and Compared to Eliot and Turns (2011)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eliot and Turns (2011, p. 641)</th>
<th>Alignment with RFPD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Constructing the future</td>
<td>Thinking of future</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reframing of personal history</td>
<td>E-portfolio</td>
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<tr>
<td>Finding new meaning in their</td>
<td>Course content</td>
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<td>Internships</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Reflection</td>
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<td>Role transition</td>
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Table 2

*External Codes as Emerged From Data and Compared to Eliot and Turns (2011)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Eliot and Turns (2011, p. 641)</th>
<th>Alignment with RFPD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
<td><strong>Themes</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comparing self to others</td>
<td>Mentor &amp;/or</td>
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<tr>
<td>Meeting other’s expectations</td>
<td>Role model</td>
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<td>Creating a persuasive case</td>
<td>E-portfolios</td>
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<tr>
<td>Framing self as applicant</td>
<td>Course content</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Internships</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Point of view</td>
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<td></td>
<td>of employer</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Role transition</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>and the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiation</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>of work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>identities</td>
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</table>
## Appendix G: Table 3

Table 3

*RFPD Combined Internal and External Codes as Emerged From Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Codes/Tools</th>
<th>Theory</th>
</tr>
</thead>
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<td>E-portfolio</td>
<td>Role transition and the</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Course content</td>
<td>Negotiation of work identities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Authenticity of roles</td>
<td>Internships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>