Reflective Essay

Elizabeth McElrath

Old Dominon University

IDS 493: Electronic Portfolio Project

Virginia Tucker Steffen Ph.D.

Reflection

As an older, non-traditional student who has been in the workforce for more than fifteen years, creating a portfolio is essential to advancing my professional and academic careers. An ePortfolio can demonstrate valuable marketable abilities, which allows me to "represent [my]self in a range of contexts" and create a competitive professional and academic identity to distinguish myself from my peers (Meade, 2023, Ch. 1). For this ePortfolio, I chose not to only curate my strongest work because this portfolio serves as "evidence of learning and showcase[s] competencies" (Meade, 2023, Ch. 6; Tucker Steffen, n.d., ePortfolio Artifacts). Each artifact was chosen to demonstrate development, progression, and competency in the following skillsets: research, design, and analysis. This ePortfolio was designed to provide grad school and professional recruiters with a comprehensive narrative about my academic and professional development while establishing a strong foundation to approach problem solving critically and creatively.

Research

For this section, I chose to demonstrate research skills such as critical thinking, literature reviews, knowledge synthesis, and analysis of quantitative and qualitative data by curating four artifacts that illustrate a steady progression of competency. Each paper explores methodologies and theoretical frameworks across different disciplines.

The first artifact in this section is a paper written for IDS 300W: Interdisciplinary Theories and Concepts. The assignment explored real-world problems through diverse disciplines, and asked students to integrate knowledges and frameworks to create interdisciplinary resolutions. It was the first time I'd ever had to synthesize and integrate knowledge and theories from different disciplines, which was an incredibly difficult task for me.

The paper explored gender biases in clinical research through the lens of disciplines such as public health and medicine, history, and public policy and law and examined how biases create gaps in research and affect treatment outcomes for female-bodied patients. I worked on the assignment throughout the semester which taught me time management skills in order to complete work by deadlines. The assignment also helped me develop my media literacy in several ways. Firstly, I learned to use databases such as PubMed to find appropriate literature, how to use a source's reference list to generate more literature, and to collect quotes and summaries in a spreadsheet to use for my research. Then, I learned to interrogate literature to understand how an author's purpose, conceptualizations, and biases may impact their research to determine whether I should use the source to support my argument. While this paper isn't my strongest, it rekindled my passion for patient advocacy and stoked a love for research.

The next artifact is quantitative research produced for the course PSYC 318W: Research methods. It examined the relationships between factors like work status (full-time/part-time work) and instructor presence on an online student's academic motivation. This assignment serves as a milestone in my development as a researcher because it allowed me to conduct my first quantitative study and practice analyzing data output from the statistical software SPSS. Analyzing statistical data is a hard skill as it's an ability that can be learned through formal education and practice and is often "required to perform job-related tasks" (Tucker Steffen, n.d., Career Skills and the New Economy). Being able to analyze and interpret quantitative data makes me a competitive candidate in the job market, broadening my career opportunities to include positions situated in statistical work.

I wrote the third artifact for ENGL 370: Linguistics. It's important to note that it was written during the same semester as the quantitative study. While the quantitative study was

written over the course of the semester, this paper was written within a week near the end of the semester. For the assignment, we were asked to collect a small corpus of documents that demonstrated a linguistic concept or theory we were interested in. I examined how men and women use different pragmatic meanings for the word "support" when engaging in online IVF forums. To assess the pragmatic meaning, I used coding to evaluate the context in which the word appeared. Coding is "an approach to data analysis" that allows investigators to "organize and describe data… to produce analytic insights" (Knott et al., 2022 p. 7). Coding also reveals patterns and common themes in the data (Knott et al., 2022). This assignment showcased my critical thinking skills as I had to describe how I analyzed pragmatic meanings, and how I determined the gender identity of online posters while considering the social and cultural constructs at play when those of differing gender identities ask for, give, and receive support. Being able to understand pragmatic meanings makes me a more effective communicator, which is a soft, interpersonal skill that "employers require regardless of industry or occupation" (Lipovac & Babac, 2021, p. 521).

The last artifact in this section is my most recent research which was written for ENGL 327W: Advanced Composition. The paper explored how varying educational levels may impact how individuals conceptualize and use health literacy through structured interviews. It was the first time I'd ever had to write interview questions, and I learned that questions needed to be crafted in a clear way that only asked about the phenomena I was studying. I also practiced coding on a larger scale by identifying common words and themes across all participants. This assignment is another milestone as a researcher as it was the first time I'd ever designed and conducted my own research study which demonstrated creativity, critical thinking, planning, organizing, analyzing, and communicating which are all transferable soft skills.

The research skills I've learned would be especially valuable if I decided to pursue a career in medical/science communications. For instance, understanding which databases will yield the best results when looking for literature and the ability to analyze and interpret data are skills needed to make an individual a competent medical/science writer (Clemow et al., 2018; Sharma, 2010).

Design

This section demonstrates my abilities to abide by best design practices and use rhetoric to create effective media to call an audience to action. All flyers in this section were produced using the online design program Canva.

The first artifact is a flyer designed during ENGL 307T: Digital Writing. For this assignment we were asked to create a flyer for a local nonprofit using the design principles and visual rhetorical theories we'd learned in class. I had to learn how to use Canva well enough to complete the assignment. While we were allowed to use the templates provided by Canva, I designed my flyer without it. The assignment forced me to analyze the rhetorical situation so that I crafted an effective flyer targeting college students looking for volunteer opportunities.

The second artifact is two flyers I created for a Ph.D. student's study about racial discrimination among Asian college students. This artifact taught me a valuable lesson in communication. At the start of the project, I had asked the Ph.D. student if she had any preferences about the aesthetics of the flyer instead of asking about designs that would be eye-capturing and meaningful for her audience, and how she envisioned the finished product. Because I didn't know exactly what she wanted, I'd created seven flyers (the artifact only displays the two best). After completing the work, she asked that I edit the typography as the

flyers needed to use the same font that the lab we volunteer for used as the study was heavily associated with the organization.

Both the first and second artifacts taught me to be rhetorically mindful when creating media for different purposes and audiences. For instance, I had designed a flyer with a yellow color scheme for the Ph.D. student's study because the color holds cultural significance to some Asian cultures; however, in the USA, the color yellow is a negative association with the Asian community. The artifact taught me to consider diverse perspectives and to be very intentional about how I communicate with people from groups I do not belong to. This can be a particularly valuable skill in the workplace, allowing me to examine other points of view when problem solving or navigating interpersonal issues. I also learned that when producing media to consult the stakeholders to clarify their expectations for the project.

The last artifact in this section was written for ENGL 439: Writing in Digital Spaces. This assignment analyzed the user interface (UI) of Donate Life CT's homepage through rhetorical theory. I then applied best design practices to redesign the UI to create a more user-friendly homepage. The assignment taught me how to assess and redesign UIs in a way that accommodates the unique needs of varying audiences so that the UI is inclusive and useable.

Being able to tailor documents so that information is "presented to suit the level of understanding of the target audience" is a valuable skill to have when producing technical and medical/science communications. (Sharma, 2010, p. 33).

Analysis

This section explores my development of different types of analyses. Each artifact was chose to demonstrate competency in analyses such as document analysis, critical discourse analysis, and rhetorical analysis.

The first artifact was written for ENGL 334: Technical Writing. The purpose of the assignment was to analyze a document and recommend changes that would make the document more effective. I chose to analyze Lifenet Health's instructions for cryopreserved cardiac and vascular allografts. For this assignment, I used principles of rhetoric and document design to assess the strengths and weaknesses of the design then provided evidence-based constructive feedback. Being able to provide feedback is a valuable skill in the workplace as it demonstrates that you can identify and resolve issues.

The next artifact is a critical discourse analysis that I wrote for ENGL 370: Linguistics. We were asked to use critical discourse framework to identify and analyze an author's biases for or against a certain group of people. This assignment examined how the author's feminist identity and word choice revealed her biases toward women by criticizing the body positive movement. Critical discourse analysis demonstrates skills such as critical thinking and media literacy by allowing us to identify biases and understand how those biases may impact the way an author presents information.

Finally, the last artifact is a rhetorical analysis with apologia written for ENGL 325: Rhetorical Studies. The paper examined how rhetorical strategies help organ procurement organizations (OPOs) create effective social media campaigns to persuade individuals toward anatomical donation. This assignment examined which visual and cultural rhetoric concepts were used when designers crafted LiveOnNY's flyer. This has been my favorite assignment I've written because it incorporates my industry knowledge and rhetorical analysis. It is also one of the most complicated assignments I've completed because not only did it require rhetorical analysis, but it asked that I develop my own rhetorical theory, which demonstrated how I can think about information in terms of both practical and theoretical uses.

Being able to analyze information with varied analytical methods demonstrates adaptability and versatility by being able to choose the most appropriate method based on factors such as the type of research question and the discipline in which the research is being conducted.

This portfolio demonstrates my competence in hard and soft skills. These skills and academic and industry experiences distinguish me from my peers so that I am a competitive candidate for future grad school and career opportunities.

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