

## Stakeholder Summary

### Students, faculty and employers see potential value in ePortfolios

By assembling a digital record of a student's skills and academic accomplishments, ePortfolios have the potential to improve educators' assessments of students and the ability of students to clearly communicate and connect with employers. But are they effective? A new study from the Higher Education Quality Council of Ontario (HEQCO) examined the use of ePortfolios at Durham College and found that while awareness and use of ePortfolios is still developing, students, faculty and employers all see potential value in these digital tools.

Students found ePortfolios useful for learning about and articulating essential skills and the importance of these skills in the labour market. Faculty felt the tools were useful for assessing students' work and providing students an opportunity to reflect on their learning. Employers saw value in the potential for improving the recruitment, selection and hiring process. However, many employers were confused as to what constituted an ePortfolio, and their unfamiliarity with them was the primary reason that ePortfolios are not used more widely. Without employer awareness and recognition of ePortfolios, students were concerned about the usefulness of the tools.

This project was funded through HEQCO's [Learning Outcomes Assessment Consortium](#), a collection of Ontario institutions developing and piloting skills assessment tools and techniques ranging from ePortfolios to analytic rubrics that are expected to be scalable to the institutional level in the future.

### Project Description

*Student Success ePortfolio: Student, Faculty and Employer Perspectives on the Value of ePortfolios in Assessing the Development of Essential Employability Skills* is the result of a two-phase study at Durham College. Phase one examined the implementation of a comprehensive ePortfolio study in four programs at the college: Fitness Health and Promotion, Practical Nursing, Personal Support Worker and Social Service Worker. More than 600 students and faculty participated in the project. Participants were provided with various materials to help them develop and use ePortfolios. After two semesters, 224 students and seven faculty members participated in surveys and small focus groups on the uses, benefits and challenges of ePortfolios. Phase two examined employers' perceptions and use of ePortfolios through a survey completed by 326 employers.

### Findings

The Ministry of Advanced Education and Skills Development outlines 11 Essential Employability Skills (EES) that are used by every college in the province and are required learning outcomes expected of their graduates. The study found that using ePortfolios created greater awareness by students of EES and their importance to employers.

Following the study, the four programs continued to use the ePortfolios. Students who used the ePortfolios found them useful and the majority agreed they should be strongly promoted and encouraged, but not made mandatory. Students proposed integrating ePortfolios into aspects of the curriculum, student services and campus activities as well as linking them with experiential and work integrated learning. However, students noted the need for ongoing training in using these types of digital tools, something highlighted by faculty as well as a potential challenge for expanded use.

Slightly more than half of surveyed employers said they used ePortfolios, though the definitions and distinctions between them and other digital tools was, at times, unclear to them. Among those not using ePortfolios, the top reason given was their unfamiliarity with the tools, however, 65% stated they would consider using them in the future.

*Student Success ePortfolio: Student, Faculty and Employer Perspectives on the Value of ePortfolios in Assessing the Development of Essential Employability Skills* is written by Chris Hinton, Jacqueline Towell, Alexandra MacFarlane, Erica Refling, Ursula McCloy and Judith Amesbury.