

# Mentoring Moments through Portfolios: Connecting Students with Alumni

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**Context:** Outside of class; Students participated in a pilot program linking them to alumni through portfolio creation

**Keywords:** preparedness, mentoring, portfolios

**Student Activity Time:** 1-3 hours

*Students created ePortfolios to facilitate meaningful conversations with alumni.*

## Introducing the Reflection Activity

A pilot program as a part of a partnership between the Office of the Registrar and the alumni association at Stanford explored the possibility of how ePortfolios can facilitate deeper and more meaningful mentoring interactions between geographically dispersed Stanford alumni and current Stanford undergraduates. The purpose of these ePortfolios was to (1) encourage students to think broadly about the bigger picture of their undergraduate education and to (2) connect students with alumni, so they could receive “expert” opinions and advice about their evolving learning careers as communicated in their portfolios.

A portfolio is described as a “purposeful selection of artifacts, together with reflections, that represent some aspect of the owner’s learning.” The ePortfolio focuses not just on the electronic platform but also engaging and empowering students to document their learning using evidence. The student portfolios included four components: (1) an introduction/biography; (2) a description of a memorable intellectual experience; (3) advice to their future self; (4) and a short introduction to their ePortfolio with specific questions to guide the discussions with their alumni reviewers. Invited students from all academic years (freshmen to graduating seniors) were provided with a template with prompts for each of the four sections. Each of the aforementioned prompts also suggested adding multimedia artifacts such as a photo, website, etc. The ePortfolios were created on a digital portfolio platform provided by Stanford. Students were given 2-3 weeks to assemble their portfolios and also received coaching and support from the educator in the process. When the portfolios were completed, they were shared with alumni living outside of the Bay Area who were selected by the Stanford Alumni Association, and later, alumnae/student pairs or small groups ‘met’ virtually to discuss the questions posed by the students and guided by the portfolio content.

The guided portfolio creation process supported students in the use of ePortfolios to articulate the breadth of their learning and to create a more authentic and holistic digital representation of their education to share with external stakeholders such as advisors, mentors, prospective employers and graduate schools. Students took advantage of this opportunity to consider the connections between their formal and informal learning experiences, on and off campus and prior to coming to Stanford, and to engage alumni in helping them to think about their learning in service of their future.

### Recreating the Reflection Activity

	Description
1	Solicit students to participate in a program to create ePortfolios to connect with alumni.
2	Meet with individual students to orient them to the ePortfolio platform and guiding prompts and the benefits of using ePortfolios to facilitate student-alumni interactions.
3	Send students the ePortfolio template and provide feedback and coaching as they build their ePortfolios.
4	Recruit alumni to review student portfolios in partnership with campus alumni association. Orient alumni reviewers with background information about the definition and purpose of ePortfolios, and set expectations for their role in providing feedback based on the students' questions.
5	Create alumni-student pairs or small groups. Arrange and coordinate the logistics for the virtual meet-ups between alumni and students.
6	Send students' ePortfolios to alumni for review.
7	Host and facilitate student-alumni virtual meet-ups individually (one-on-one) or in small groups (1-2 alumni, 1-2 students) via phone, FaceTime, Skype, or some other video conferencing platform. Alumni and students should have easy access to the student ePortfolios for reference during their conversations.

### In the words of the Educator: Tips and Inspiration

*Recognize the value of the shared undergraduate experience.* It is not necessary to match students and alumni based specifically on major or career interest; the main thing the two groups should have in common is a shared educational experience of being a student at the institution and that, in many cases, is enough of a starting point for conversation and connection.

*"We've never met, but I feel like I already know you."* Done well, the portfolio can provide compelling insights into the students' interests and what the student is thinking at this moment of his/her education. Asking the students to articulate their questions and the feedback they would like from alumni is critical since the reviewers may have their own preconceived notions about what kinds of advice students are seeking (e.g., on careers or employment) but some students may be more interested in hearing about what the alumni found memorable in their own undergraduate experiences.

*Make it a meaningful exchange for both the students and the alumni.* Because of our partnership with our alumni association, it was important to create an experience that was compelling for both alumni and student participants. The success of our proof-of-concept pilot program was confirmed by our post-experience survey where 100% of alumni and students said they would be interested in participating in these kinds of ePortfolio-related interactions in the future.

*What was the inspiration for the reflection activity?* The initial brainstorming on how to facilitate mentoring moments between undergraduate students and alumni elicited a range of interesting ideas. This particular implementation is based on my research on portfolios in higher education and the need for more authentic, learner-centered records of learning. What is unique about this initiative is the opportunity to use student-created ePortfolios as a means to engage geographically distant alumni – wherever they are in the world – who have an interest in mentoring and connecting to current students as well as to the university.