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Guided Reflection, Greater Readiness: Enhancing Student Engagement and Career Readiness Through Curricular ePortfolio Integration

Sakile K. Camara and Kandace L. Harris
California State University, Northridge

As demands rise for graduates to demonstrate workplace-ready competencies, academic programs are turning to ePortfolios as tools to bridge the gap between classroom learning and career preparation. This case study analysis investigates how the integration of ePortfolios into the curriculum influences student engagement and career readiness across three internship programs. Using a descriptive case study design, the research analyzes pre- and post-test data from 608 students who self-assessed 10 core career competencies, including Communication, Technology, and Leadership. Programs that embedded ePortfolio development within their curriculum saw significantly higher ePortfolio development rates and greater student gains in perceived career readiness compared to those where students were expected to create portfolios independently. Descriptive statistics revealed consistent improvements across key competencies, with the strongest gains observed in programs offering structured guidance and curricular alignment. These findings suggest that curriculum-led ePortfolio initiatives not only foster deeper reflection and learning but also position students more confidently for post-graduation success. The study confirms the value of intentionally integrating ePortfolios into communication education

The transition from high school to college and, subsequently, to the workplace is a critical period that requires students to possess a wide range of skills to ensure their readiness for career success (Hora et al., 2018). However, there is a widespread and persistent assumption that graduating from college equates to being fully prepared for the demands of the professional world (Pandya et al., 2022). Many students leave college equipped with academic knowledge but lack the practical skills and competencies required to navigate the complexities of today's workforce (Whitney et al., 2021).

On the other hand, career readiness, which encompasses both hard and soft skills such as communication, problem-solving, leadership, and teamwork, is often insufficiently integrated into college curricula and is not consistently recognized as a core learning outcome across academic departments (Thornhill-Miller et al., 2023). As a result, many graduates struggle to translate their academic achievements into meaningful success in professional settings (Edmondson & Matthews, 2021). This underscores a pressing need for higher education to prioritize the development of workforce-ready competencies.

Given that Communication Studies programs in higher education emphasize essential soft skills, such as communication, collaboration, and critical thinking, within their curriculum (Morreale & Pearson, 2008), educators in the field are well-positioned to leverage ePortfolios as a powerful pedagogical tool. ePortfolio development offers students a structured opportunity to reflect on and demonstrate their competencies, transforming their academic experiences into compelling professional narratives (Eynon & Gambino, 2017). Within the context of Communication Studies, this process not only enhances students' self-awareness and career readiness but also increases their ability to pursue and attain meaningful professional opportunities.

Using a descriptive case study methodology, this study examined how integrating ePortfolios as a structured component of the curriculum influenced students' perceived career readiness. Research analyzed three distinct internship programs to explore the effectiveness of ePortfolio guidance in enhancing student portfolio creation and its impact on their confidence in career readiness. Each case represents a unique context for ePortfolio implementation and curricular integration, enabling cross-program comparisons of impact. Drawing on descriptive statistics, the study used percentage score changes across career readiness and employability frameworks of pro-active attitude (Seibert et al., 2001) and self-regulation (Gaumer Erickson & Noonan, 2021); and the eight National Association of Colleges and Employers (NACE) aligned competencies which include communication, leadership, technology use, and critical thinking (see NACE, 2022) to understand the role of structured ePortfolio engagement in supporting student learning and career preparation.

This study examined three distinct programs representing diverse institutional contexts: a four-year Hispanic-Serving institution (HSI) offering a Communication Studies internship program, a grant-funded STEM program at a Predominantly Black Institution (PBI) community college, and a nationally supported internship initiative serving students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). Across these varied educational environments, students participated in both structured and unstructured ePortfolio development using Bravofolio, an ePortfolio and career-readiness ecosystem that helps students turn coursework, projects, internships, and reflections into

evidence of competency, and receive scored feedback via a NACE-intelligence inspired rubric.

The findings from this comparative case analysis offer valuable insights into the potential of ePortfolios as a tool to bridge the gap between academic learning and career readiness (Sahin, 2009). The results underscore the importance of curricular integration and structured support in fostering both skill development and meaningful student engagement. Ultimately, this study aims to inform Communication Studies programs and higher education institutions on how to enhance career readiness by adopting intentional, curriculum-embedded ePortfolio practices that promote reflection, skill development, and professional identity formation.

Literature Review

The Changing Landscape of Career Readiness

The modern workforce expects graduates to possess career readiness skills beyond academic knowledge and technical expertise. However, the gap between these expectations and actual preparedness remains significant. According to Koehorst et al. (2021), there is a false assumption that graduates from high school and college are fully prepared for career success. Instead, many students lack key career competencies such as effective communication, teamwork, problem-solving, and operational skills, which are crucial for workplace success. Additionally, the responsibility of fostering these skills often falls outside the scope of academic curricula and is instead relegated to career centers or extracurricular activities (Reardon et al., 2015). This approach often leads to inconsistencies in career preparation, as it assumes that students will naturally develop these skills without formal guidance.

Research by Hora et al. (2018) emphasized the importance of integrating career readiness into the academic curriculum, thereby developing a more comprehensive approach to preparing students for life after graduation. The authors argued that while career centers provide resources, their reach is limited, and that career readiness must be more deeply integrated into coursework and classroom activities. Employers are emphasizing the need to engage graduates who possess 21st-century skills such as adaptability, cultural competency, and technology proficiency (Koehorst et al., 2021; van Laar et al., 2017). However, educational institutions are not fully aligned with these workforce expectations, resulting in a lack of systematic exposure to these essential competencies during the college experience (Edmondson & Matthews, 2021). This disconnection calls for innovative, integrative approaches that bridge academic learning with workplace application. The use of ePortfolios is promising in fostering and showcasing career readiness.

The Role of ePortfolios in Career Development

ePortfolios in higher education have been increasingly recognized as an effective tool for promoting career readiness, reflective learning, and documenting skills (Whitney et al., 2021). A digital collection of a student's academic and experiential work, ePortfolios showcase students' development over time and provide a platform for self-expression and career planning (Jenson & Treuer, 2014; Yancey, 2009). They bridge academic accomplishments and career development, enabling students to present a cohesive narrative of their skills, learning experiences, and goals; thus, improving self-efficacy, critical thinking, and metacognitive skills (Chen & Black, 2010).

ePortfolios enable students to engage in reflective practice, allowing them to critically analyze their learning experiences and career aspirations (Eynon & Gambino, 2017). Integrating various career readiness competencies into a single, organized digital space makes it easier for students and faculty to assess progress and areas for improvement. According to Bryant and Chittum (2013), ePortfolios support holistic learning as students can link academic coursework with professional development and make connections between their educational experiences and future career paths. When implemented effectively, ePortfolios also help students build a professional digital presence, a prudent aspect of modern career development.

While much of the early research on ePortfolio use is generally positive, Bryant and Chittum's (2013) critical review of the literature revealed a significant lack of empirical evidence supporting its effectiveness. They argued that much of the research is anecdotal, speculative, or methodologically weak, making it difficult to draw definitive conclusions about ePortfolios' impact on student learning or career readiness. In contrast, Yancey (2009) highlighted the importance of intentional implementation, noting that the successful adoption of ePortfolios depends on structured support and integration within the curriculum. Jenson and Treuer (2014) echoed this perspective, emphasizing the need for faculty training and institutional support to help students engage meaningfully with ePortfolio development. Without a clear framework and purposeful instructional design, students may not fully benefit from ePortfolio practices, limiting their potential as tools for reflection, skill development, and professional growth.

These insights collectively suggest that while ePortfolios hold considerable promise, their impact is contingent upon thoughtful integration and support. This leads to a broader issue: despite the growing attention ePortfolios receive in higher education, notable gaps remain in the research, particularly around how these tools can be embedded in curricula and better aligned with career readiness outcomes.

Missing Links Between Practice and Impact

Consequently, gaps may remain in how these tools are integrated within the academic curriculum, as current research indicates a limited focus on directly incorporating career competencies into coursework and structured learning activities (Finley & McNair, 2013). Hora et al. (2018) also suggested that career readiness initiatives are often viewed as supplementary activities within educational institutions. For instance, a study by Xing et al. (2019) found that while students participated in various college and career preparation activities, these were often optional and lacked integration into the standard curriculum, suggesting a need for more structured approaches to prepare students for post-secondary transitions effectively. Thus, despite the recognized importance of career readiness, a disconnect remains between educational programs and workforce expectations, with many institutions offering career development as separate initiatives rather than integrating them into the academic experience (Green et al., 2021).

Eynon and Gambino (2017) further suggested that ePortfolios are often implemented without the necessary training and support, resulting in inconsistent use and reduced student engagement. Using a standardized approach to assess career readiness within ePortfolios could provide more measurable outcomes and facilitate a clearer understanding of how students develop these skills throughout their academic journey (Cordie et al., 2019). Therefore, there is a need to align ePortfolio tools with recognized frameworks for career readiness, such as NACE (2024) competencies.

In summary, despite the growing emphasis on career readiness and the use of ePortfolios in higher education, research continues to reveal a lack of clarity on how to engage students in the use of these tools and how they can be effectively embedded into academic curricula to produce measurable outcomes (Lilly & Cooper, 2021). Many studies have highlighted the benefits of ePortfolios, yet few offer comparative analyses across diverse academic contexts or focus on the importance of structured curricular integration. Moreover, limited research has addressed how ePortfolios support the development of career readiness self-awareness when guided by faculty and supported by institutional frameworks. This gap underscores the need for research that not only evaluates the effectiveness of ePortfolios as assessment tools but also examines how incorporating structured support and curricular alignment influences students' success (see Kolade & Owoseni, 2022; McNair et al., 2017).

To address these gaps, this study employed a comparative multiple case study approach to explore the implementation of ePortfolios in structured and unstructured portfolio development. Each case provides a unique context for examining how ePortfolios were used within varying curricular structures, allowing for an analysis of their impact on student outcomes. The study also leveraged the Bravofolio platform to capture real-time data on student artifact reflection, skill development, and platform engagement. Based on this review, the study addressed the following research questions:

- RQ1: How does integrating ePortfolios into the academic curriculum affect students' career readiness?
- RQ2: How does structured support and training impact ePortfolio use and student engagement?

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

Case studies are often used as a methodology to explore issues when little theory is available, to describe processes and effects of an event or intervention, and to explain complex phenomena (Kohn, 1997). A case study is ideal for exploring real-world, contextual, or programmatic issues, making it an excellent fit for studies on career readiness, ePortfolio integration, and curriculum development. A case study methodology was chosen for this study due to its ability to offer nuanced comparisons for a deeper understanding of how program context, instructional approach, and structured support influence student engagement and outcomes (Hanson & Algozzine, 2016; Keutel et al., 2014).

This study employed what Hanson and Algozzine referred to as a "richly descriptive" (2016, p. 16) multiple case study design (Stake, 2006), which used Yin's (2003) conception of replication logic in exploring how embedded ePortfolios in academic curricula impact students' perceived career readiness across three distinct internship programs. Creswell and Creswell (2017) explained that case study research involves the study of an issue explored through one or more cases within a bounded system (i.e., a setting, a context), and they are particularly useful when researchers want to explore programs, events, or activities in depth, typically over a sustained period. The authors noted that data collection in case studies often involves multiple sources of information (e.g., interviews, documents, observations), which supports triangulation and enhances the depth of understanding. Creswell and Poth (2018) identified three kinds of case studies (i.e., intrinsic, instrumental, and collective) that can be effective in program evaluation and education-related research where a real-world context is essential.

This case study design reflects characteristics of both instrumental and collective approaches. It is instrumental in that the individual cases are examined to shed light on a broader issue—namely, fostering career readiness within programs where students are expected to develop key competencies (i.e., oral communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and media literacy). At the same time, it is collective because it involves

Table 1
Sample Career Readiness Assessment Questions

NACE readiness competency	Components	Example
Proactive Attitude	Goal setting, taking risks for improvement, and seeking opportunities for growth.	1. I always complete my projects before the deadline.
Self-Regulation	Time management, attention to detail, and self-discipline.	52. I pay attention to detail, resulting in few, if any, errors in my work.
Work Ethic/Professionalism	Dependability in performance, taking responsibility, and upholding workplace values.	4. I am always prepared to do what needs to be done.
Communication	Writing professionally, giving oral presentations, and summarizing complex information.	5. I can successfully write and edit memos and letters, and other technical documents.
Teamwork	Collaborating with others, conflict resolution, and delegating tasks.	25. I can build strong, positive working relationships with coworkers.
Equity & Inclusion	Cultural awareness, advocating for others, and inclusive decision-making.	56. I advocate for inclusion, equitable practices, justice, and empowerment for historically marginalized communities.
Critical Thinking	Evidence-based reasoning, problem scoping, and anticipating consequences.	27. To fully understand a problem, I gather and analyze information from multiple sources.
Research	Collecting and organizing data, documenting sources, and translating findings.	19. I can make numbers understandable to an audience.
Technology	Proficiency with tools, adapting to new technologies, and data management.	30. I have advanced knowledge of Word, Excel, PPT, and PDF.
Leadership	Inspiring others, strategic planning, and mentoring.	60. I often inspire others by encouraging them and building mutual trust.

analyzing multiple cases to identify patterns, differences, and similarities across diverse educational contexts.

Each case represents a unique educational environment and approach to ePortfolio integration, allowing for a comparative exploration of similarities and differences across programs (based on Stake, 2006). Quantitative data in the form of pre- and post-test assessment measures were used to assess changes in students' self-perceived competencies (see Table 1). Interpretive insights from student reflections, ePortfolio artifacts, and usage patterns within the Bravofolio platform then supplemented these data. Descriptive statistics (calculated using percentage scores) were used to examine changes in the 10 career readiness competencies. This analytic strategy supported within-case analysis (patterns within each program) and cross-case comparison (how different structural and curricular approaches influenced outcomes).

Participants and Program Contexts

Participants ($n = 608$) were drawn from three internship programs to represent a range of institutional types, student populations, and curricular approaches to career readiness. The diversity of these programs enhanced the transferability of findings and offered insight into how programmatic structure shapes ePortfolio success.

Case 1: Four-Year University Communication Internship Program

This credit-bearing internship course was offered at a mid-sized, four-year public teaching institution. It was specifically designed for undergraduate Communication Studies majors who were either currently enrolled in an internship or preparing to begin one in the following semester. The course served as a professional development bridge, helping students connect classroom knowledge to workplace expectations. Through a structured curriculum that emphasized reflective practice, goal-setting, and career planning, students explored themes such as professional communication, organizational culture, and ethical leadership. ePortfolio development was fully integrated into the course design, with students using Bravofolio to articulate their academic and experiential learning, craft professional bios, and develop digital artifacts showcasing their

readiness for the workforce. Weekly discussions, peer feedback, and instructor-guided assignments helped students refine their career narratives and document key competencies such as communication, critical thinking, and teamwork (see Table 2).

*Case 2: Two-Year Community College STEM Grant Program (***n** *= 9)*

This program was part of a STEM pathways initiative at a community college, funded through a national grant aimed at increasing access to high-demand technical careers. Designed to support students traditionally underrepresented in STEM fields, the program provided intensive, hands-on training through a series of STEM boot camps, where students engaged in applied learning experiences in areas such as coding, robotics, data analysis, and engineering design. The curriculum emphasized scientific inquiry, technical skill development, and collaborative problem-solving to prepare students for internships, undergraduate research opportunities, or direct entry into STEM careers.

Table 2
Case 1: Guided ePortfolio Assignment Prompt

Section	Content
Assignment title	e-Portfolio Final Assignment
Assignment objective	Provide an opportunity to construct an ePortfolio to showcase career readiness to potential employers.
Platform	Use Bravofolio (https://bravofolio.com) to construct the ePortfolio.
Required artifacts	Include at least nine (9) examples or artifacts in the portfolio. Artifacts may map to multiple skills.
Acceptable artifact types	• Résumé • Sample papers • A speech or performance; a performance script • Brochures, editorials, flyers, etc., you created • Certificates of achievement • Photos of you working on the job or in group work • Presentation slides (e.g., PowerPoint) used for a presentation/assignment • Excel files • Artwork • Video links of your work (YouTube/Vimeo) • Websites of organizations you have worked with or volunteered for • LinkedIn or other professional social media accounts • Clean photos with family/friends, or you engaged in a hobby
Career Readiness Skills to Demonstrate	• Career & Self-Development • Written Communication • Oral Communication • Teamwork • Equity & Inclusion • Technology • Leadership • Critical Thinking • Professionalism
Grading criteria	You will be graded on the extent to which the ePortfolio showcases each of the nine career readiness skills. Some artifacts may demonstrate multiple skills; however, a minimum of nine (9) total artifacts is still required.
Additional note	Use clear, professional formatting and ensure that all artifacts are your own work or are properly credited. Maintain professional tone and visuals suitable for employer review.

Case 3: National Internship STEM and Financial Literacy Program

This case involved a large-scale, grant-funded national internship program designed to prepare undergraduate students from Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) for competitive placements in the STEM and financial services industries. The program partnered with major corporations to offer students real-world work experiences while simultaneously delivering targeted professional development. With a cohort of 308 participants, this initiative was the largest and most widely distributed of the three case studies. The program's curriculum emphasized technical skill development, financial literacy, and professional preparedness, with students participating in a series of interactive workshops, alumni-led panels, and mock interview sessions. These activities were designed to expose students to workplace expectations and industry standards while reinforcing core competencies such as communication, teamwork, and professionalism. Workshops on coding, data analysis, and business finance were paired with sessions focused on resume building, workplace etiquette, and navigating corporate environments.

Comparing the Cases

Despite their differences in institutional context, focus, and design, all three programs shared a foundational emphasis on career readiness through internship-based learning. Each case provided students with real-world exposure to professional environments, whether through internal internships, communication-focused internships, STEM-intensive boot camps, or corporate partnerships in the tech and financial sectors. These experiences served as a unifying thread across the study and underscored the value of internships as high-impact practices that facilitate the application of academic knowledge to career development.

However, the programs diverged significantly in their approach to structure, curriculum integration, and the type of competencies emphasized. Case 1 (University Internship Course) adopted a guided, course-embedded model, where ePortfolio use was fully integrated into a scaffolded curriculum. The program was intentionally designed to support reflective learning and the formation of digital professional identity. Through structured assignments, faculty mentoring, and consistent feedback loops, students in these cases engaged deeply with career readiness concepts, particularly in areas such as soft skills, including communication, leadership, and teamwork.

In contrast, Case 2 (STEM Community College Program) and Case 3 (National Internship Program for HBCU Students) both featured a more flexible structure, with career readiness activities situated outside of their formal coursework. While these programs still offered intensive instruction through STEM bootcamps, technical workshops, financial literacy training, and mock interviews, their design placed greater responsibility on students to self-direct their learning and reflection.

Bravofolio served as the common platform for documenting student learning, professional development, and career readiness growth for all three internship programs. Regardless of the program's instructional style or disciplinary focus, Bravofolio was made available to students to build comprehensive digital portfolios that captured their academic work, professional experiences, and reflections on skill development. In more structured programs, such as Case 1, Bravofolio was fully integrated into course requirements, culminating in portfolio presentations where students articulated their competencies and received formative feedback. In Cases 2 and 3, the platform was not embedded in formal coursework but still provided a space for students to upload technical projects, showcase lab work, and record experiential learning from extracurricular workshops. More importantly, students completed a standardized career readiness assessment measure embedded within the Bravofolio system, which allowed for consistent measurement of competency development across each institutional context. Thus, Bravofolio functioned as both a digital learning tool and a unifying assessment mechanism, offering a shared structure through which students could reflect on their growth and demonstrate readiness for the workforce.

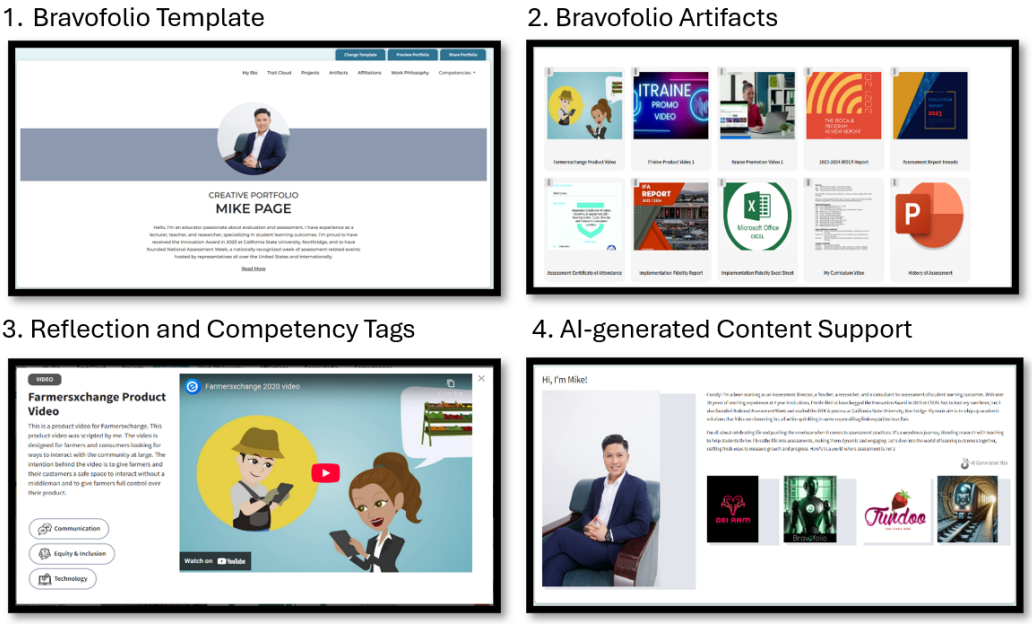
Overall, the comparison revealed that while all programs aimed to enhance students' career readiness through internship preparation, the degree of curricular guidance and the emphasis on soft versus technical skills played a significant role in shaping student outcomes.

Instruments and Data Collection

Data were collected using a pre- and post-career readiness inventory consisting of 60 statements aligned with the 10 career and employability competencies: Communication, Critical Thinking, Equity and Inclusion, Leadership, Proactive Attitude, Research, Self-Regulation, Teamwork, Technology, and Work Ethic/Professionalism. Participants completed the inventory at the beginning and end of their internship experience. Additionally, students participated in reflective activities through Bravofolio, which captured bio reviews, project artifacts, and written artifact descriptions, with records of AI-generated writing support (see Figure 1). These data provided additional insight into students' skill development and engagement levels.

Figure 1

Bravofolio Portfolio Interface (Demo Account): Landing Views for Sample User ("Mike Page")



Note. Students using a guided approach to ePortfolios developed these types of pages. Screenshots of the Bravofolio interface captured using a demo account. Copyright 2025 by MSSRA, LLC. Reprinted with permission. Embedded photo by Tran Nhu Tuan, Pexels (https://www.pexels.com/license).

Data Analysis and Interpretation

Descriptive statistics were calculated to determine average competency scores for each group before and after the intervention. Case analyses then identified which competencies improved most in each program and helped interpret the influence of specific curricular elements (e.g., guided reflection, faculty mentorship, project-based learning). Cross-case comparisons were then conducted to examine patterns across programs and identify which structural or instructional features contributed most to positive outcomes. Bravofolio's real-time analytics tracked student engagement and usage trends, which helped to triangulate the findings with behavioral indicators of participation and reflection (see Figure 2). By integrating descriptive statistics with contextual analysis, the study design provided a comprehensive picture of how ePortfolio engagement within varied academic environments influenced career readiness.

Results and Findings

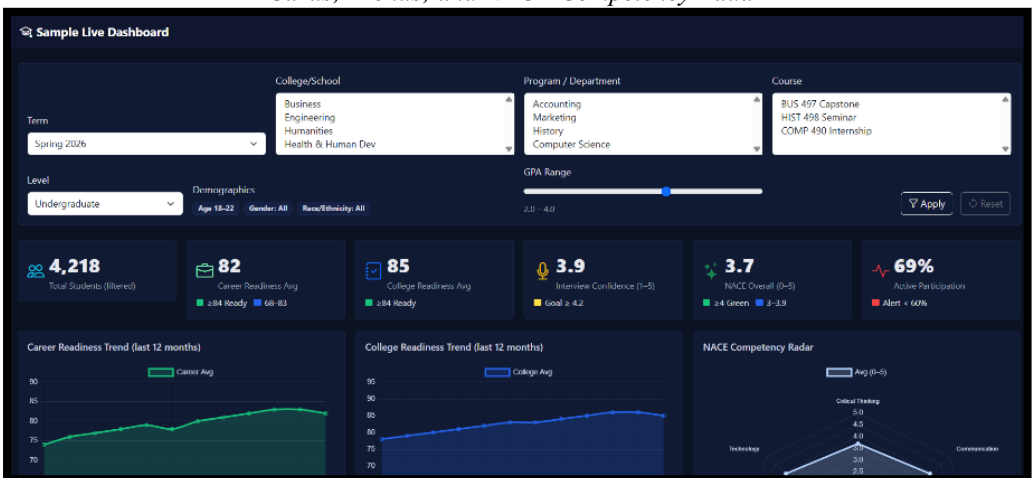
Through examining the three case studies, students demonstrated varying levels of competency, yet a clear pattern emerged linking program structure to student career readiness outcomes. Case 1, which administered both pre- and post-tests, yielded the strongest results, with measurable gains across all 10 competencies (see Table 3). In contrast, Cases 2 and 3 administered only post-tests, resulting in comparatively lower overall readiness scores. These findings underscore the value of an immediate curricular-integrated design in supporting well-rounded career preparedness.

Case 1: Four-Year University Communication Internship Program

Students in this structured, curriculum-embedded communication internship course demonstrated consistent improvement in every category, with an overall score increase from 86% to 89%. The most notable gains were seen in Self-Regulation (from 86% to 91%), Work Ethic/Professionalism (from 89% to 93%), and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (from 87% to 93%). The program's strong emphasis on reflective learning, faculty mentoring, and guided ePortfolio creation likely contributed to these results. Communication also improved from 80% to 86%, aligning with the program's disciplinary focus. The structured approach ensured that students received consistent opportunities to reflect on and document their skill development, leading to across-the-board growth in readiness.

Figure 2

Bravofolio Analytics Interface (Demo Data): Sample Live Dashboard With Term, Program, and Course Filters; KPI Cards; Trends; and NACE Competency Radar



Note. Screenshot of the Bravofolio interface captured using a demo account with synthetic data. No real student information is displayed. Copyright 2025 by MSSRA, LLC. Reprinted with permission.

Table 3

Career Readiness by Case

Category	Case 1 (n = 291) Pre M (%)	Case 1 (n = 291) Post M (%)	Case 2 (n = 9) Post M (%)	Case 3 (n = 308) Post M (%)
Pro-active attitude	87	90	81	84
Self-regulation	86	91	84	86
Work Ethic/professionalism	89	93	82	87
Communication	80	86	79	76
Teamwork	88	93	80	83
Diversity, equity, and inclusion	87	93	77	82
Critical thinking	87	92	80	83
Research	78	86	74	79
Technology	85	90	83	86
Leadership	87	90	84	81
Overall	86	89	81	83

Case 2: Two-Year Community College STEM Grant Program

Case 2 involved a small group of students in a grant-funded STEM pathway program at a community college. These students completed only a post-assessment, with no pre-test for comparison. Their average post-test score was 81% overall, with the highest competencies being Technology (83%), Leadership (84%), and Self-Regulation (84%). However, lower scores were observed in areas such as Research (74%), Communication (79%), and DEI (77%). The lack of structured reflection, mentoring, and guided integration of the ePortfolio into coursework may have limited the program's ability to foster higher self-assessed readiness in soft skills and critical thinking competencies. The strong scores in technical categories, such as Technology, reflect the emphasis on content in the bootcamps and workshops. In contrast, lower outcomes in communication and DEI suggest a need for more integrated development of soft skills within the curriculum.

Case 3: National Internship STEM and Financial Literacy Program

This national program, which served a large cohort of 308 students from HBCUs, also followed an

unstructured model, offering professional development, industry exposure, and real-world internships without formally embedding reflective or ePortfolio assignments into course-based structures. Students completed a post-test only, reporting an overall readiness score of 83%. Their strongest scores were in Technology (86%), Self-Regulation (86%), and Work Ethic/Professionalism (87%). Like Case 2, the emphasis on technical and professional workplace skills is reflected in these outcomes. However, categories such as Communication (76%), Leadership (81%), and DEI (82%) were comparatively lower, mirroring the trend seen in Case 2 and reinforcing the challenge of developing interpersonal and reflective competencies without structured curricular support.

Cross-Case Competency Comparison and Insights

When comparing the three cases, the structured approach yielded stronger, more balanced outcomes across both soft and technical skills. In contrast, the unstructured programs, despite emphasizing high-demand fields such as STEM and finance, reported lower career readiness in categories that relied on self-awareness, communication, and interpersonal reflection.

Case 1 stands out not only because of its structured design, but also because it included both pre- and post-assessments, allowing students to track and reflect on their growth. This intentionality resulted in post-test scores at or above 90% in 6 of the 10 competencies and improvements in all areas. In contrast, both Cases 2 and 3, though impactful in developing technical readiness, had lower post-test scores in Communication (79% and 76%, respectively), DEI (77% and 82%), and Research (74% and 79%), suggesting a gap in their perceived growth and development of soft skills that structured ePortfolio integration could help address.

Ultimately, this comparative analysis highlights the importance of implementing curriculum-guided, reflective ePortfolio implementation, particularly in fostering balanced career readiness that encompasses both technical expertise and transferable soft skills. For higher education programs, particularly those in Communication Studies, aiming to optimize student preparation for the workforce, this evidence suggests the need for intentional design, scaffolded support, and integrated assessment practices.

Recommendations

To fully realize the potential of ePortfolios in preparing students for professional success, institutions should prioritize the structured integration of ePortfolios into the academic curriculum. Treating the ePortfolio as a central instructional tool rather than an optional add-on ensures that students engage deeply with the reflective and developmental processes necessary for competency growth. Embedding ePortfolio assignments into internship courses, senior seminars, and capstone experiences allows students to curate a professional narrative that reflects both their academic and experiential learning.

Faculty development is also critical as instructors must be supported in learning how to effectively use ePortfolios to facilitate reflection, assess competencies, and provide meaningful feedback. Training sessions, collaborative workshops, and access to user-friendly digital platforms such as Bravofolio can empower faculty to guide students in articulating their strengths and identifying areas for growth.

Competency alignment remains another essential step. When ePortfolio tasks are directly mapped to established career and employability frameworks such as NACE competencies, students gain clarity in what they are expected to learn and how that learning connects to professional expectations. This alignment also helps programs to assess outcomes more systematically and communicate the value of their graduates to employers and stakeholders.

Finally, targeted support is necessary for underdeveloped competencies—particularly Self-Regulation and Proactive Attitude. Institutions should explore co-curricular strategies such as workshops on time management and goal-setting, mentorship opportunities, and the integration of AI-driven self-assessment tools following the pre-test assessment. These self-starting and self-management supports can help students build the internal habits required for lifelong learning and adaptability in a rapidly changing workforce.

Conclusion

This study examined two central questions: How does integrating ePortfolios into the academic curriculum affect students' career readiness? And how does structured support impact student engagement with the ePortfolio process? The findings from this multi-case analysis clearly demonstrate that structured, curriculum-guided ePortfolio use can contribute to broader and deeper competency development. Programs that implemented more reflective writing, ongoing mentoring, and aligned assessments, as demonstrated in the Communication Studies internship in Case 1, outperformed those that offered more flexible or informal approaches, as seen in Cases 2 and 3.

The implications for Communication Studies programs are especially promising, as Communication majors are uniquely positioned to benefit from ePortfolios, given their ongoing engagement with rhetorical, interpersonal, and critical thinking skills, as well as their designated career tracks. When used intentionally, ePortfolios can become powerful tools for these students to reflect on their experiences, demonstrate transferable

skills, and craft a compelling professional identity. However, the absence of structured guidance limits the effectiveness of these platforms and risks reducing the ePortfolio to a simple checklist exercise rather than a meaningful learning opportunity.

As a call to action, Communication Studies departments should take the lead in embedding ePortfolio practices into required coursework, internships, and senior-level projects. This ensures that students graduate not only with academic knowledge but also with a curated, digital representation of their learning journey—an asset increasingly valued by employers and graduate programs alike.

Looking forward, future research should examine the long-term effects of guided ePortfolio engagement, particularly its role in shaping students' employment outcomes, professional confidence, and lifelong learning behaviors. There is also a need to explore scalable strategies, such as peer mentorship and AI-based reflection tools, to support competencies like Self-Regulation and Proactive Attitude, as the work environment is rapidly changing and is more collaborative. As the landscape of higher education evolves, the field of Communication Studies is well-positioned to lead the way in modeling intentional, reflective, and career-aligned learning strategies that prepare students for success beyond graduation.

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SAKILE K. CAMARA, PhD, is a professor of Communication and Director of Academic Assessment and Program Review at California State University, Northridge. A campus leader in evidence-based, equity-minded assessment, she created the iROCA model and guides CSUN's implementation of assessment as a shared responsibility model. Dr. Camara founded National Assessment Week, and as an entrepreneur, she designed and owns Bravofolio. Since 1996, she has consulted with universities and nonprofits on course- and program-embedded assessment and evaluation. She is an alumna of The Ohio State University, and her scholarship focuses on advancing co-cultural theory and the inextricable relationship between communication, culture, and power in interpersonal interactions.

KANDACE L. HARRIS, PhD, is the Associate Dean of the Mike Curb College of Arts, Media, and Communication at California State University, Northridge. A seasoned administrator, leader, and advocate for student success, she leads the Curb College's Student Success and Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion initiatives and has held leadership roles at three HBCUs. Her experience and efforts inform policy and institutional practices aimed at advancing student achievement. A media studies scholar and triple alumna of Howard University, her work focuses on media representation and advancing the rights of women and underrepresented groups.