

Reflecting on Internship Experiences in Community-Based Learning

With Gina Woodall

[Arizona State University](#)

From an ambitious undergrad to an impactful professor, Gina Woodall's story at Arizona State University is nothing short of extraordinary.

In this episode of the Digication Scholars Conversations, Gina Woodall shares her experience as she has happily evolved within the hallowed halls of ASU from her undergrad days to donning the hat of a professor.

Aside from her role as a Teaching Professor in the School of Politics and Global Studies at Arizona State University, she is also the Director of the Capital Scholars Internship Program.

Gina joined us to discuss how she empowers student growth and success through high-impact practices, including experiential learning, internships, and reflective practice utilizing ePortfolio pedagogy.

Importance of Mentoring and Guiding Students in Reflective Practices

Reflective practices in internship experiences involve a deliberate and thoughtful analysis of one's actions, experiences, and learnings. It goes beyond the surface level, encouraging individuals to delve deeper into the meaning and implications of their encounters.

As a Gen Xer, Gina attests that the inclination to reflect was not as prevalent during her academic journey -- and for most people in her generation. However, the current generation displays an innate ability to introspect, pondering the significance of their work, experiences, and their transformative impact on their personal and professional growth.

Reflective practices, particularly within internship experiences, are pivotal in guiding students toward a more nuanced understanding of themselves and their interests. A case in point is Gina's observation that, despite an initial inclination towards law school, many students undergo a significant shift in perspective through reflective experiences during internships. Whether engaged as policy analysts, campaigners, or contributors to city government or chambers of commerce, students discover a broader spectrum of possibilities beyond the traditional law school paths.

Thaddaeus Canuel, one of Gina's students, exemplifies the ePortfolio's power in internship experiences, as he has gone from being an ambitious student to securing a spot in the House of Representatives.

While the innate skill for reflective practices exists within students, practical guidance and mentoring are crucial.

Selective Sharing

This method involves skillfully guiding students in crafting reflections that balance openness and discretion.

For instance, a student navigating the intricacies of reporting experiences in a regulated environment like the Supreme Court's Press. Gina counsels them to focus on publicly available information, like opinions discussed in the press.

What makes this approach to reflection extraordinary is the dual nature of growth. Students not only discover how to present themselves effectively but also engage in critical thinking about what's appropriate to share and in what context.

The method instills a valuable skill set, extending beyond academia and preparing students for nuanced communication in diverse professional landscapes.

Alumni Connection and Community-Based Learning

This approach leverages the enduring connections Gina has cultivated within the ASU community and the alumni community's enthusiasm to give back to their alma mater. Harnessing the longevity of her ASU tenure, she can forge partnerships with individuals who were once in her current students' seats.

Beyond the practical aspects of ePortfolio development, these alumni play a pivotal role in shaping the narrative. They assess the image the student is projecting and provide constructive feedback to refine and enhance their professional identity. The mentorship doesn't stop at technicalities; it extends to the nuanced art of presenting oneself in the professional realm.

As a result, reviewing ePortfolios becomes a dynamic dialogue, with alumni guiding students on what to include or modify. This collaborative effort ensures the outcome aligns with industry expectations and fosters a sense of pride and accomplishment for the students.

Nurturing Agency and Autonomy

The role of mentors and alumni in shaping student ePortfolios is to mold them for real-world consumption, aligning with recruiter expectations. However, trainers must be flexible and allow students to break free from predefined skills and qualifications when necessary.

Gina allows students to take the reins of their ePortfolios, emphasizing the importance of identifying and showcasing the skills and competencies they have acquired. This flexibility leads to discovering a wide range of skills beyond the conventional ones typically highlighted in general education outcomes. Gina has observed her students showcasing intriguing competencies such as appropriations, flexibility, critical analysis, and advocacy attributes not commonly seen in traditional templates.

Consider a student who was also a professional cook besides being an online political science major. Merging these two disparate worlds, the student engaged in community outreach, using her culinary skills to serve unsheltered individuals. This truly unique experience transcended the

constraints of traditional ePortfolio templates and will be suppressed if the student is not allowed autonomy.

Nurturing autonomy and agency is a testament to the diverse and exciting skill sets that students can showcase. It underlines the importance of flexibility in allowing students to express their journey in their own words, which creates a culture of confidence and encourages a more holistic and authentic representation of their skills and experiences.

How ePortfolio Supports Experiential Learning Through Internships

As the Director of the Capital Scholars Internship Program, Gina Woodall seamlessly integrates ePortfolio into experiential learning, utilizing this dynamic tool to foster personal growth and development among her students.

Adopting ePortfolio for experiential learning, however, is not without its challenges. Students accustomed to platforms like LinkedIn, initially grapple with the unique environment of ePortfolio.

The unfamiliarity might lead to resistance, often reflected in ePortfolios adorned with generic stock images rather than meaningfully reflecting their experiences.

Yet, Gina, with her astute leadership, transforms this learning curve into an opportunity for growth, drawing inspiration from sample templates provided by ASU's ePortfolio team.

Recognizing the potential of ePortfolio to transcend traditional platforms, she navigates through constant iteration, interaction, and feedback provided to students throughout the internship experience.

"The e-portfolio, I think, is kind of a different animal and that it really goes in depth about what that person experienced and the work that they produced at the internship."

Gina Woodall

Teaching Professor, School of Politics and Global Studies, Arizona State University

Inviting Real-World Leaders to Educate Her Class

An innovative approach Gina Woodall employs to enrich student learning involves the active engagement of real-world leaders in the learning process. In her 400-level class, "Women in Politics," Gina takes experiential learning to the next level by inviting influential figures, such as a friend from Maryland's assembly, to connect with her students via Zoom.

This intentional effort to bring real-world leaders into the classroom serves multiple purposes. Firstly, it adds a layer of authenticity to the learning experience, allowing students to glean insights directly from practitioners in the field. Secondly, it allows students to record and reflect on these valuable interactions. These interactions, whether discussions, Q&A sessions, or personal anecdotes, provide students with a depth of understanding beyond textbooks.

Embedding ePortfolio into the Program with Precise Grading and Assessment Measures

Incorporating the ePortfolio tool into a course's syllabus and providing clear expectations for how they will be graded serves as a deliberate strategy to ensure students approach this reflective tool with the seriousness it deserves. Effective strategies can be orchestrating the process as an iterative journey, fostering accountability, and setting clear measures for growth and personal development.

For example, students can start with a template with a page to write their bio and a page to add their resume, a task deemed accessible yet impactful. This initial step is assigned a tangible point value providing a clear benchmark for performance.

You can introduce a flexible revision policy to ensure the final result is a strong ePortfolio that aptly captures a student's experiential experience. If students receive initial feedback suggesting improvement, they can revise and enhance their work.

"It really lets the employer, you know, really look and see what work you produced or what your day-to-day was like. And I think that just gives more insight, you know, and that gives more insight into the person."

Gina Woodall

Teaching Professor, School of Politics and Global Studies, Arizona State University

[Learn more at digication.com](https://digication.com)