

The Power of Portfolios in Veterinary Education and Career-Seeking

With Jorge Colon

[Cornell University](#)

The veterinary education industry faces challenges today, from a content-heavy curriculum that creates a gap in business and soft skills to mental health concerns and limited access to diverse clinical opportunities. These challenges present significant difficulties for career-seekers in the field.

This article discusses the power of ePortfolios in veterinary education as a valuable tool for showcasing achievements and differentiating oneself with insights from Jorge Colon. Jorge, an associate professor of practice at the Center for Veterinary Business and Entrepreneurship at the College of Veterinary Medicine, Cornell University, spoke to Jeff Yan, co-founder and the CEO of Digication.

Becoming a Highly Introspective Veterinarian

The Guayanilla, Puerto Rico native "stumbled upon" the Digication ePortfolio and assessment tool during a showcase by Pat Graham, instructional technology specialist in the Center for Teaching Innovation at Cornell University. The veterinarian, who combines his passion for business with his love for animals, tells Jeff that he's "hooked on it now, and there are some courses that I can't live without (Digication)."

After studying biology and attending veterinary school, Jorge spent 25 years practicing in Lexington, Kentucky. During that time, he developed a keen interest in business and finance and earned a Master's in Business Administration. Today, he shares his expertise with fellow veterinarians and students.

Although his primary focus is education, Jorge still maintains his hands-on work as an equine veterinarian and enjoys teaching students about working with horses. Jorge's ultimate goal has been to help others grow and positively impact their lives throughout his career.

Challenges for Career-Seekers in Veterinary Education Today

The challenges for career-seekers in veterinary education today include a gap in business and soft skills, a lack of effective mentorship, difficulty in showcasing skills and accomplishments, and mental health and high employee turnover.

Some professionals argue that veterinary schools need to sufficiently equip graduates with essential business and soft skills, such as communication, leadership, financial management, and client relationship building. This can make it harder for graduates to excel in various career paths, particularly business ownership and managerial roles.

According to the American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA), mentorship is the #1 reason new veterinarians accept job offers in 2022. Aside from the fact that mentorship can be challenging to deliver in today's busy schedule, Jorge suggests that many vet practitioners need to be more effective mentors.

Vet graduates may have the required skills but need help to showcase those skills effectively. This hinders the ability to differentiate themselves in the job market and makes it harder for employers to review potential candidates. They spend time building up their resumes and showing all their certificates and qualifications when, in fact, those qualities are traditionally not the most substantial prerequisites for recruitment.

The number of pet-owning U.S. households is increasing at 1.5% annually, but there aren't enough veterinarians to care for them. In fact, up to 55,000 new veterinarians are needed to meet projected demand in 2030. While this abundance of jobs represents a positive for veterinary graduates, job selection requires that, beyond skill and certifications, graduates demonstrate that they possess the sheer dedication, passion, and care factor needed to succeed.

"I can teach you any skill. I can teach you how to suture a patient after a spay. I can teach you how to do a nerve block on an animal for a lameness exam. I can't teach you how to care. I can't teach you how to have passion for what you do. I can't teach you how to have pride in the work being done."

Jorge Colon

Associate Professor, Center for Veterinary Business and Entrepreneurship, Cornell University

The Power of a Vet Education ePortfolio: A Tool for Reflection, Differentiation, and Discovery

The ePortfolio is a tool that allows students to demonstrate their drive and passion beyond certification requirements. ePortfolios created in Digication allow for a more dynamic and comprehensive representation of a student's abilities and accomplishments.

It can include various multimedia elements, such as images, videos, and documents, effectively conveying the depth and breadth of a student's learning experiences. Additionally, ePortfolios can be easily shared and accessed online, making it convenient for potential employers or educational institutions to review and evaluate a student's work.

ePortfolios can give students a competitive edge in job applications or college admissions by providing tangible evidence of their skills and achievements.

ePortfolios help students showcase their unique abilities through reflective learning, which helps them stand out from their peers. Reflective learning is a personal development tool. It involves students consciously examining and evaluating past experiences to extract meaningful lessons that can inform future actions.

According to Jorge, students who use reflection in learning and record their experiences can stand out better than recruiters because their ePortfolio showcases qualities and moral compasses that

have shaped their experiences and approach to veterinary practice. That way, recruiters can decide what makes such students different from those who also took the same curriculum.

In addition to serving as a tool for differentiation, Jorge believes ePortfolios also function as a discovery tool. In our interconnected world, where every activity leaves a digital footprint, recruiters prefer finding information that reflects your life goals and reflections rather than casual party pictures. Without a comprehensive ePortfolio, recruiters struggle to evaluate you beyond superficial online profiles.

“When you read their portfolio, and then you discover through self-reflection that maybe a parent died when they were young because of something related to cancer. And that drove them to be the type of scientist they want to be in the future. And now that who, why and why they want to be an oncologist has much deeper meaning and significance.”

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Other Benefits of ePortfolios in Veterinary Careers

Continuous ePortfolio-based reflection can deepen student learning through their degree years. ePortfolio recording can help instructors and mentors identify and address gaps in knowledge or skills. ePortfolios and the practice of recording help students define and refine their identity and take ownership of learning. ePortfolio-based learning encourages regular student-tutor dialogue, which aids the development of critical interpersonal skills. ePortfolios serve as a job-finding tool through networking and feedback from alumni reviewers.

Creating an ePortfolio effectively differentiates yourself by showcasing your unique skills, experience, and personal development. Jorge encourages students to develop and update their ePortfolio, reflecting on their experiences, goals, and moral compass, seek opportunities to gain diverse skills and experiences in veterinary medicine and related fields, seek feedback on their ePortfolios from alumni and network, and use it for continuous improvement and self-regulated learning.

“I have alumni and friends of the college who serve as portfolio reviewers, providing feedback to students as part of a course that I now teach called ePortfolio. And the end result of this portfolio feedback system by alumni of the college, et cetera, is that people finding jobs without looking for them is becoming a very common occurrence.”

Jorge Colon

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