Electronic Portfolios for Accreditation?
Colleen A. Mayowski, EdD
University of Pittsburgh Institute for Clinical Research Education

Introduction

1. This study1 aimed to measure the prevalence of institution-level eportfolios implementation at accredited United States colleges and universities for support of regional accreditation and/or reaffirmation.

2. It was inspired by Trudy Banta’s 2003 editorial2, in which she asked important questions about the future of electronic portfolios for accreditation.

Method

- Eportfolio definition developed based on extensive literature review.
- Population: All US institutions of higher education accredited by 1 of the 6 regional accrediting agencies.
- Sample: 100 Accreditation Liaison Officers (ALOs) randomly chosen from each of the 6 regional accrediting agencies (N=600).

Results (cont.)

Future Use?

“Institution-level electronic portfolios are the way regional accreditation evidence, such as self-study documents, or enrollment or graduate data, will be collected, prepared, and/or showcased in the future.” (n = 190)

Prevalence?

Does your institution currently use an institution-level electronic portfolio to help collect, prepare, and/or showcase evidence in support of regional accreditation or reaffirmation? (n = 193)

 Paper Version Required?

Does your institution’s regional accrediting agency require your institution to prepare and submit a paper copy of the evidence presented in the institution-level electronic portfolio? (n = 58)

Discussion

Prevalence: The extensive literature review carried out for this study found significant support for use of eportfolios to support regional accreditation or reaffirmation. The responses to the survey indicate that this support is not carried over into practice. Survey participants indicate possible reasons for this include the lack of clear messages of support from regional accreditors, budget and staffing limitations, and faculty resistance.

Future use: The institutions who participated in the Urban Universities Portfolio Project (UUPP) likely would have expressed the same optimism when they were pioneering institution-level eportfolios for accreditation back in 1999. These pioneers felt they were “building a better mousetrap.” If they considered 2013 to be the future, their optimism has not been rewarded by the findings of this study.

Paper version required: Survey results indicate a paper copy of an institution’s self-study is required by every regional accreditor. This finding is somewhat problematic because the results of the survey appear to indicate some confusion among the participants. This finding can be extended to indicate a possible lack of clear messaging from regional accrediting agencies.

Eportfolios encouraged: Maybe. Regional accreditors, and state and federal governments, are pressuring higher education institutions to provide publicly accessible proof of accountability and institutional effectiveness. Will higher education institutions ever be allowed to take full advantage of the capacity of the Web to use a picture to convey a thousand words? There seems to be no strong consensus among the participants on this issue. This finding can be extended to indicate a possible lack of clear messaging from regional accrediting agencies.

Bibliography
