

Portfolios in Family Science: A Template for Integrating Family Life Education

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ABSTRACT. As instructors of family science, we understand the challenges our students face in merging our field's multifaceted components. To this end, we conducted a heuristic study examining how instructors perceive their experiences of working with portfolios. Surveys investigated instructor perspectives related to overall useability, effectiveness, and assessment capability of portfolios. Five themes emerged from the data: student buy-in, preparation for the future, formal understanding of learning, application, and portfolio completion. The Family Life Education Portfolio Template and Guide were created based on experiences of the instructors surveyed and our observations of student development of portfolios. Future explorations should assess implementation of the Family Life Education Portfolio Template, other portfolio formats, and feasibility of various formats for instructors to provide feedback.

Keywords: portfolios; family science; CFLE; portfolio template

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As a discipline, family science is an extensive field. Practitioners can work in a variety of environments including community-based social services, government work, public policy, and international education and development. The field's range of opportunities can be difficult for students to conceptualize. A challenge that many students face is appreciating the many different avenues available for their careers, and succeeding with the ability to market their skills by using tools such as Family Life Education certification (CFLE; Mitchell, Hartenstein, & Markham, 2012). As instructors who teach family science, we often hear comments from students related to the fact that they know they want to work with families, but are not sure what they want to do. Or, students know they want to work only with a certain population (e.g., early childhood, adolescents, victims of intimate partner violence) and do not understand why they must take classes focused on multiple areas of working with families. Based on our experiences and on comments such as these, we feel the use of portfolios to integrate understanding of student learning may offer a means to bridge the gap between completing undergraduate studies and entering the realm of providing real world service.

Various disciplines (e.g., interior design, architecture, journalism) have long used showcase portfolios as a means of assembling and assessing students' best performances with the goal of impressing external reviewers (Sivakumaran, Wishart, & Holland, 2010). For more than a decade, undergraduate and graduate students in various disciplines have used hardcopy and electronic portfolios to "demonstrate best practices; showcase exemplary lessons and student products; show compliance with local, state, and national certification requirements and professional behaviors; and provide spaces for honest self-reflection and personal growth" (Stansberry & Kymes, 2007, p. 488).

Majors related to family science have begun to follow suit. However, the use of portfolios in family science is not consistent and has not been investigated empirically. There is no singular understanding of how to apply all the knowledge and skills garnered from an undergraduate family science degree. The purpose of this study was to employ a heuristic perspective in understanding how instructors perceive their experiences of working with portfolios, thus enabling us to construct a portfolio template that all family science students can use to produce career portfolios.

Use of Portfolios

In higher education, portfolios have been used in contexts of undergraduate seminar and to show development and progress across a longer continuum (Snaveley & Wright, 2003). Instructional portfolios compile a student's work over his or her academic career to provide a comprehensive view of progress, achievements, and efforts across multiple areas (Paulson, Paulson, & Meyer, 1991; Sivakumaran et al., 2010). Assessment portfolios are used increasingly widely as alternative instructional and evaluative approaches at all educational levels (Sivakumaran et al., 2010; Snaveley & Wright, 2003). They are tangible and systematic, they can support progressively more complex accomplishments and requirements; they can include other features such as self-reflection and teacher evaluation of a student's knowledge, skills, and abilities, which can be examined at more than one point in time (Callison, 1997; Sivakumaran et al., 2010). They provide opportunities for students and faculty to see work in larger contexts,

allowing patterns to emerge and revealing gaps that need filling. Portfolios support the setting of more meaningful and concrete goals, promote student self-assessment, and allow for assessment to be measured against students' own records rather than against those of other individuals or against artificial sets of external criteria (Callison, 1993).

In professions such as design, art, and architecture, the components, materials, and samples of work included in portfolios are fairly consistent across their disciplines; those who create the portfolios determine their content. This differs from the portfolio creation process in family science, where a variety of products and information can be included. Across each discipline, this sanctioned process represents generalized expectations about what is to be included to demonstrate skills, abilities, and designs of students to potential clients (Meeus, Questier, & Derks, 2006). Using a sanctioned or formal process has potential to generate a portfolio model to be used and replicated across the family science field.

Electronic Portfolios

The most common types of portfolio formats are hardcopy and electronic (i.e., e-portfolio), which contain multifaceted samples of student achievements and work (McDonald, 2012). As the world advances technologically, educators are challenged with the tasks of integrating technology into teaching and learning and, consequently, using e-portfolios. Typically, development of an e-portfolio is determined based on the goals of individuals and portfolio content is purposefully selected and strategically organized (Lorenzo & Ittelson, 2005; Paulson et al., 1991). E-portfolios provide opportunities to be customized to meet the specific goals, instructional theories, and circumstances of institutions (Dalton, 2007; Garis, 2007). These portfolios are used primarily for documenting, recording, and demonstrating student learning (Hewett, 2004). Woodbury, Addams, and Neal (2009) also found that compared to hardcopy portfolios, e-portfolios are (a) easier to reproduce, distribute, and access; (b) quicker and easier to duplicate; (c) allow for enhanced organization between headings through use of hyperlinks; (d) allow for linking of supporting documents; and (e) help demonstrate students' technology skills. For these reasons, this discussion focuses on the use of e-portfolios, but could easily be translated into work with hardcopy portfolios.

Portfolio Engagement

The wide range of uses for portfolios in various disciplines requires instructors helping with implementation of portfolios to clearly identify aspects such as their purposes, supporting materials, and users (Gibson, 2006). When students are not encouraged and engaged in the portfolio process, they often view portfolios as another obstacle to get through as opposed to a beneficial tool to aid their future endeavors (Tosh, Light, Fleming, & Haywood, 2005). Understanding what students perceive functions of portfolios to be is vital, along with knowing how students are interested in using these functions (Tzeng & Chen, 2012). Without understanding of how one can benefit from use of an e-portfolio and acceptance of the portfolio as a "holistic" means to reflect on their educational experiences, the e-portfolio's full potential will not be realized (Tosh et al., 2005).

Within the field of education, Tosh et al. (2005) identified student buy-in, motivation, assessment, and e-portfolio technology as tools for successful e-portfolio completion. As instructors in family science, we know that the needs of each student in our discipline are unique

and can vary greatly. Therefore, a one-portfolio-fits-all approach is not always suitable. Adjustments may be necessary within e-portfolio design when it is evident that one style of e-portfolio will not satisfy needs of all students and/or their programs (Wilhelm et al., 2006). Student perspectives and influences on how the e-portfolio is developed also affect how engaged and involved students are throughout the portfolio experience. Students' perceptions of the purpose of e-portfolios greatly influence their content and creation (Barrett & Carney, 2005). When they take ownership of their work, students are often self-motivated and try to do their best work (McDonald, 2012).

The Present Study

The formalized process of portfolio creation evident in other disciplines does not yet exist in family science. Nor is there clear consensus on what a family science portfolio is and how it should look. For instance, through a brief Internet search of family science programs that use portfolios, the authors found that the University of Washington allows students to choose from three portfolio types centered on direct service, program/policy, or guided research and requires completion during the students' senior years (University of Washington, n.d.). At Towson University, portfolios are created in hard copy format. While the Towson portfolio incorporates students' knowledge and philosophy of Family Life Education (FLE), the 10 content areas of CFLE do not drive and organize the entire portfolio because every family-focused major is not Family Life Education driven (Towson University, n.d.). At Portland State University, students create e-portfolios during their junior years in family studies. These portfolios focus on students' achievements and how they relate to campus-wide goals of communication, critical thinking, ethics, and diversity of human experience (Portland State University, n.d.).

Seeing the array of portfolio creation processes used in various programs, we wanted to use our experiences to create a foundational template that any family science program could use and expand on to create individual portfolios that are unique to each student. We feel that portfolios are well suited to a format aligned with Family Life Education (FLE) because FLE reduces the broad range of experiences related to working with families to 10 specific content areas. By creating a template of the portfolio process across family science programs, we as a discipline remain consistent in skills and knowledge that we help students showcase through their career portfolios. As they enter various career paths, this consensus among students can enhance understanding of Certified Family Life Education (CFLE) among diverse professional communities.

Methods

To expand on our experiences of working with family science students and helping them create portfolios, we relied on a heuristic method to seek insight on the experiences of other instructors who use portfolios aligned with FLE. Moustakas and Douglass (1985) found that experience and self-disclosure lie at the center of heuristic inquiry. Therefore, we were actively involved in discussing our experiences of working with portfolios.

Portfolios are currently used in senior capstone courses in the Family Studies and Human Services (FSHS) department at a Midwestern university. The portfolios are organized according

to the 10 CFLE content areas; they incorporate academic courses, work/volunteer experience, professional training, and supporting materials (e.g., class assignments). Portfolios were completed in hardcopy format and through use of an online software system to create e-portfolios. We explored the portfolio creation process through qualitative evaluation of the experiences of instructors who assigned and evaluated portfolios.

Instructor Perspectives

The authors conducted a survey to assess instructors' perceptions of their experience using portfolios in the FSHS capstone courses. At the time of the survey, the department had been administering portfolios in these courses for four semesters. Using an online survey system, we surveyed seven instructors who at some point had been responsible for assigning and/or introducing these portfolios. The instructors included four assistant professors, one associate professor, one advisor, and one graduate teaching assistant. The instructors had experience using the portfolios for periods ranging from one semester to four semesters. All instructors who were invited to participate in the online survey completed the survey. The instructor survey consisted of 14 open-ended questions that assessed (a) how instructors introduced portfolios to students, (b) instructors preferences for hardcopy or e-portfolios, (c) benefits and disadvantages of each type of portfolio, (d) how the portfolio was used as an assessment tool, and (e) use of the portfolio in the family science field.

Data Analysis

Data analysis included inductive analysis techniques designed to help identify themes that arose from the data. The first two authors analyzed responses from all participants individually; next, the fourth author cross-coded those responses for consensus. Initially, we coded within each question. Then we coded across the questions, and finally, across surveys for common themes. Coders in this study attempted to achieve epoche by examining their personal biases to become aware of viewpoints, assumptions, and prejudices related to working with portfolios. Moustakas (1994) characterizes epoche as beginning the research with an unbiased but informed, receptive presence. During the research process the coders accomplished epoche by attempting to see things as they truly were, or the way the participants truly presented those things, and by discussing personal thoughts and issues as they arose.

Results

The purpose of this study was to expand on our understanding of how instructors perceive their experiences of working with portfolios in an effort to construct a portfolio template to produce a career portfolio in family science. The five common themes revealed across instructors' responses and utilized in creation of the Family Life Education Portfolio Template and Guide included areas of *student buy-in*, *preparation for the future*, *formal understanding of learning*, *application*, and *portfolio completion*. Many factors influenced instructors' positive and negative experiences. These experiences, the instructors' facilitation, and our observed student use of the portfolio (from the creation process through graduation and entrance into the field) formed the basis for building the template and guide.

Student Buy-In

Student buy-in is related to student levels of interest in and understanding of developing portfolios and to how instructors facilitated portfolio completion. Since the portfolios were a relatively new component in the curriculum (and for some instructors) and were constructed entirely during one semester of the students' senior year, some instructors viewed the current process negatively. Regarding the amount of time students had to learn about and complete their portfolios, one instructor noted, "It [the portfolio] needs to continue to be integrated into the curriculum throughout the students' [entire] FSHS careers. They need to be exposed to it over and over again so that they are building it across classes and experiences."

The amount of involvement students had in designing layout and components of the portfolio was another issue. In general, students followed a specific set of requirements for how to organize their portfolios, such as requirements to include (a) each of the 10 CFLE content areas; (b) corresponding university courses; (c) an introduction, summary, and reflection; and (d) whether to create a hard copy or electronic portfolio. However, students had flexibility to incorporate other information that was important to their individual career paths, such as work/volunteer experience, photographs, and other types of supporting material. One instructor implied that this particular set up was too strict:

I definitely think it is important to have students involved in the process of designing their individual portfolios. I think if students had more of a say, they would understand the purpose more and would take more pride in completing it. It would be less elusive and not just "another class assignment."

Our experiences echo this instructor's thoughts. We have had several students who complain they are told what they must include in the portfolio without room for flexibility outside of their own writing.

Another concern that arose was related to whether students should be required to complete hard copy or e-portfolios. We have often experienced this in terms of students wanting flexibility to choose between their own preferred formats and the specific requirements of their departments. Some students we have worked with enjoyed completing paper portfolios; many others have complained that this process was outdated and would be easier if done electronically. While our experiences lead us to believe e-portfolios are more beneficial than hard copies in today's society, allowing students the opportunity to choose may increase student buy-in. One instructor noted challenges of hard copy portfolios:

Physically transporting the thing to and from school, and then to the office and back [is cumbersome]. It is more challenging to make several copies than it is to have a website printed on one's business card or résumé. [It is] more difficult to include optional additions like papers, certificates, photos, etc., without making it a large and bulky product. With the ability to use links, students can make a lot of things available that can be accessed at the employer's discretion.

In reference to e-portfolios, another instructor felt "It's not theirs long term [when having to pay subscription fees]. Doesn't allow creative flexibility in preparing a unique product for each

potential viewer. Doesn't readily lend itself to assessment teams photocopying relevant pages for review. Template limits personalization.”

Preparation for the Future

The theme of preparation for the future emerged based on how instructors described uses of a portfolio in relation to students' future aspirations and usefulness in the field. This process appeared to be generally regarded as positive. Two instructors reported similar methods of introduction; one said, “I tell them [the students] it is for the purpose of helping them reflect on their undergraduate education, and to see how it integrates with life experiences to really help them be prepared to be Family Life Educators.” Another remarked, “I tell them that their portfolio is their opportunity to showcase their knowledge and skills in FSHS to potential employers and others.”

While helping students organize portfolios, we have had some take the completed components to job interviews. Students reported positive acceptance of the visual representation of their skills. On two separate occasions we have had students who were on job interviews be asked about the portfolios they were creating, since word of the portfolio requirement had spread to surrounding community agencies. In discussions with us, these students said that even though they did not have their portfolios with them, the fact that they had been through the process of creating the portfolio helped them feel prepared and offered a platform for them to discuss their experiences.

Formal Understanding of Learning

Formal understanding of learning was evident in several ways in relation to department assessment and student conceptualization of their skills. For instructors, most noted that the portfolio had many uses. One instructor summed this up: The portfolio allows for departments to assess the areas students are gaining the most knowledge as well as lacking the most skills. As an instructor you can gauge the students' writing ability, depth of their reflective skills, ability to apply their knowledge, and understanding of the content areas used to format the portfolio. Once portfolios are completed, several students often remark to us that the portfolio helped them bring their coursework together and see some of the benefits to applying for CFLE.

Application

Development of the theme of application was based on instructor comments associated with how students actually were applying their coursework to real world experiences of working with individuals and families or were entering graduate school, and with how potential employers in the field accepted and used portfolios. According to an instructor who had taught the seminar course and worked with students to complete portfolios during the entire four semesters it was offered,

I tell my students the portfolio can be used for a variety of reasons. We discuss how it can be a way to showcase their broad range of skills and education to potential employers and/or graduate school; it serves an opportunity to think reflectively and pull together all the work and academic experience they've gained throughout their collegiate career; it

can help them think about how to apply their skills to their future careers and/or the population they are interested in working with.

By contrast, while many of our students see the benefits of creating a portfolio, we typically have a few students who do not buy into the process. These students are adamant that portfolios are not useful in helping them appreciate the vast areas where they have knowledge and will not help them find jobs.

Portfolio Completion

The final theme of portfolio completion centers on finalization of the portfolio project and students' realization of what they have accomplished and what they have potential to achieve. This theme also continues the application theme of how to use portfolios in the field. For our students who do not buy into the idea of creating portfolios, this theme is moot since they mostly dislike the entire process, are lax in their efforts to complete the work, and do not attempt to use their portfolios. For instructors, the portfolio completion theme was a reflection on the entire process and its potential to have an impact on students. One instructor reflected on the process:

I think the entire portfolio process should be something that not only involves students, but evolves over the entire academic experience. Expecting students to pull it all together within one semester overwhelms some students. In addition, we introduce CFLE in the same semester we introduce the portfolios; students are learning a new way to conceptualize their abilities while they're trying to put the portfolio together. If the portfolio/FLE was incorporated in all their FSHS courses it would be less overwhelming and more feasible when it came time to pull it all together.

Another instructor said, "If they embrace the opportunities it offers, they will truly benefit."

Discussion

Numerous factors regarding the use of portfolios need consideration in family science. These include (a) how instructors introduce the portfolio, (b) how students use the portfolio, (c) how professionals use the portfolio, (d) the number of needs portfolios can meet, and especially, (d) student contributions and creativity. We have developed a Family Life Education Portfolio Template (Table 1) based on the results of our inquiry. This template is based on the 10 FLE content areas and provides instructors with a common template that they can use as a foundation for building students' portfolios. We also extrapolated from the data to relate the themes found in our analysis to the ways in which students can learn about and utilize components of FLE, resulting in creation of the Guide to Implement the Family Life Education Portfolio Template (Table 2). Instructors can use this guide to introduce and incorporate various aspects of the portfolio to students throughout their academic careers, which likely will increase their understandings of and future uses of their portfolios.

We asked no questions of instructors relating to their perceptions of how they learned about or teach about FLE. However, since two of the authors teach components of the portfolio

and two hold certification as family life educators, we are in classrooms where we strive continuously to form understanding of how we can best help students understand our field. As practitioners with understanding of CFLE, we feel the Family Life Education Portfolio Template and Guide are tools that can aid students' understanding of the relationship between their undergraduate work and entering the family science field.

Student Buy-In

As discussed in the literature, and as holistic analysis of the responses and our experiences show, student buy-in is the fundamental feature of using portfolios to create meaningful student experiences. Student buy-in serves as the first area of focus in the Guide to Implement the Family Life Education Portfolio Template. Meeting these needs should start at the beginning of a student's enrollment as a family science student. Students should be introduced to the portfolio and encouraged to design portfolios that are creative, that express their personal interests in family science, and that motivate them to learn throughout their program. At the same time, students should have introductions to the concepts of the National Council on Family Relations (NCFR) as the organization that offers the CFLE designation. Information on the organization and certification introduces students not only to a systematic construct for organizing their knowledge of families according to the 10 content areas, but also to an attainable goal in achieving certification through graduation from a CFLE-approved program or by taking the CFLE exam.

Introducing the portfolio to students is also critical. Since instructors are often those who introduce portfolios to students, they have great power over and influence on how students will perceive and engage in the portfolio development process. The introduction of portfolios should be conducted carefully and uniformly (Chang, Tseng, & Lou, 2012). To make portfolios successful, students must know what they are and how to use them (Tosh et al., 2005). In general, students need to know why knowledge they will gain is important and beneficial to them (Ramaley & Zia, 2005). These factors are necessary for proper learning and development to occur and they must be realized before instructors and students move to the next step.

Since use of portfolios in the family science field is a relatively new venture, it is increasingly necessary for family science students to have thorough understanding of portfolios and their potential uses in our field. Selection of portfolio type (i.e., iWebfolio, Google Sites, Weebly.com, Wix.com, Moonfruit.com) is important within this process. Offering students opportunities to choose their format and providing room for additional content vital to students' needs encourages an increase in student buy-in. Each portfolio type offers different opportunities for meeting individual student needs, but no single portfolio format can meet every student need. Moreover, offering students opportunities for involvement in the ways they showcase their knowledge of the 10 FLE content areas, and in the ordering of how content areas are displayed to help students demonstrate their strengths or focus areas, will also increase the probability of student buy-in.

Preparation for the Future

As students begin to narrow down their career aspirations for the field, the next step of preparation for the future becomes important. Although the ultimate decision to attend graduate school, to enter the field as a practitioner, or to pursue other goals may not be complete,

preparation for these ventures should take place early in a student's academic career to ensure greater opportunities for success. Given the breadth of the family science field, organizing the portfolio and creating a rhythm for inclusion of materials that work towards achieving the students' goals are essential. It is vitally important that students know what they gain from completing their portfolios. Instructors must act early to address the portfolio's benefits and what students will gain from completing portfolios as they relate to their future aspirations (Tosh et al., 2005) on a more individual student basis. In the buy-in and preparation for the future steps, (a) providing examples of completed portfolios, (b) having an instructor's understanding of how to use and teach students to use different portfolio systems, (c) demonstrating the use of various portfolio formats, and (d), most importantly (according to Tosh et al., 2005) showing them your portfolio, are helpful methods for making portfolios relevant to future student goals.

During this timeframe, students need educating on the 10 content areas of CFLE. These content areas also offer a means to organizing portfolio information and a way for students to conceptualize the many facets of family science into universally recognizable areas. As students create goals for their educational and professional futures, they can begin identifying specific content areas where they are interested in becoming most proficient. Instructors can provide parameters for levels of CFLE inclusion in portfolios or allow students flexibility in their designs.

Formal Understanding of Learning

Formal understanding of learning is where achievement of academic reflection on and summary of student learning take place. Portfolios allow students the opportunity to reflect on their work and track their learning throughout the process (Snively & Wright, 2003). In this step, students strive to form comprehensive understanding of their coursework and understand its role in their development as future practitioners. At this level, students can apply their coursework to various content areas to develop integrated understanding of how their curricula relate to FLE. An important aspect of this level is that instructors assign tasks and projects that incorporate FLE components requiring student application.

Instructor feedback and assessment are also relevant to this level. Another way to describe assessment is how reflections and documentation provided by students demonstrate support for and evidence of their learning (Tosh et al., 2005). Assessment provides a way for instructors to recognize areas of strength and weakness in student abilities. The opportunity arises for students to make improvements. Wilhelm et al. (2006) found that for implementation of the e-portfolio, faculty must coordinate with and remain in contact with each other. Respondents discussed the need to determine what material, assignments, and documents met standards and requirements. Developing similar rubrics and assessment structures was also important. Faculty members must also establish valid, reliable goals that are common across the course sections but do not encroach on the academic freedom of students. There were times when faculty members reported reexamining program matrices as changes occurred in courses or when faculty members proposed new assignments.

Many of our students reported they would not have completed portfolios if they were not going to be assessed; again, this supports the importance of student buy-in of the portfolio. However, even if portfolios were not to be assessed by instructors, students who seek to reach

their goals should have *desire* for summation of their learning by the time they reach the formal understanding of learning step.

Application

The application step assists students in (a) transferring the knowledge they received in class, (b) understanding what they have accomplished, and (c) gaining confidence in their skills and abilities to complete future projects on their own (Snavey & Wright, 2003) while applying these to real world service. In this step, students seek recognition and respect from others, whether through interacting with future instructors, securing internships, and even receiving praise from peers. Written reflection (e.g., reflection papers, journal writing) or oral presentations relevant to volunteer hours, internships, and work experience offer the best means of ensuring and assessing student application of curricula and FLE components to their hands-on experiences.

Portfolio Completion

By completing portfolios, students gain comprehensive views of their educations, skills, and experiences. In life and work students never reach complete self-actualization, but through continuous inclusion of skills in their portfolios and continuing education to increase their repertoire of knowledge, students constantly seek fulfillment in pursuit of meeting needs of the population they serve. Even after graduation and as earlier goals are met and surpassed, there is creation of new goals that offer a medium toward which to work. The portfolio itself then becomes a “platform” students can “stand on” to continuously strive to meet new goals.

The achievement of provisional FLE certification through graduation or by passing the exam offers similar fulfillment. To maintain certification, continuing education credits are required. These credits parallel the continuous inclusion of skills students will need to operate as family scientists. Students may also seek fulfillment by gaining professional experience that applies towards moving from provisional to full status as a CFLE.

Completion of career e-portfolios is an asset to students when they are seeking employment, especially when portfolios are designed with their foundation in FLE. In some instances, a portfolio is viewed as what may set one candidate apart from other candidates who are applying for the same position. The e-portfolio provides students opportunities to demonstrate to future employers the skills and abilities they have already attained, as well a foundational knowledge base rooted in family science they can apply to future experiences. Students are able to present portfolios that document their entire educational and work experiences and show how their skills can be used effectively if they are hired for the positions.

The portfolio also provides supplemental materials students can utilize to further communicate their qualifications for a position. In job interviews, students may be asked to discuss leadership experiences. These students will recognize the strengths they have relative to leadership because they have thought through this context while compiling their portfolios. The student can supply concrete answers on different leadership activities (e.g., leading volunteer projects for a Boys & Girls Club), then show support for their experience through materials such as pamphlets on Boys & Girls Club volunteer requirements, positive evaluations from volunteer coordinators, and peer evaluations. The same is true for other commonly discussed interview

questions, such as why do you want to work with this particular population? What specific experience do you have working with families? Discuss how you manage multiple tasks? Through completion of e-portfolios, students receive guidance on how to apply their academic experiences to the careers they seek.

Moreover, completion of an e-portfolio demonstrates many supplementary skills such as written communication, use of technology, creativity, organization, and certification in FLE. Before hiring a student for a position, an employer with access to an e-portfolio is able to garner a more inclusive glimpse of the type of employee he or she would have—a glimpse that may not be so evident from reviewing a résumé or job application. Since the family science field is so broad, an e-portfolio based on the 10 FLE content areas and reinforced by the ability to be certified helps a potential employer identify a focused area where the student has skills proficiency, and the understanding that their knowledge base extends to all areas of need that intersect when one works with individuals and families. The e-portfolio also helps increase the recognition of family science as a discipline in the general population. Although the field is expansive and not as centrally focused as advanced degree programs (such as marriage and family therapy and social work, which fall under the realm of family science themselves), the FLE framework provides the field with a set of ethics, guidelines, and educational requirements that strengthen the answer to the question of “What is family science?”

Suggestions for Future Research

To our knowledge, based on a thorough search of previous literature, there has not been empirical examination of the use of portfolios in family science. This heuristic study is a first step to investigating the use of portfolios in family science, but additional research in this area is needed to help us better understand how portfolios can be implemented successfully in the family science field. The Family Life Education Portfolio Template and Guide provide an overview of steps that are helpful in completing portfolio projects for undergraduate majors in family science while integrating FLE components. Although this investigation explored perspectives of instructors who have implemented portfolios in their curricula, it did not explore integration of these tools into the process. Follow-up investigations should explore student experiences in relation to the portfolio creation process and the use of e-portfolios in helping instructors prepare students for careers and/or graduate school after implementation of the FLE Portfolio Template.

Specific portfolio formats that these instructors offered limited our ability to assess e-portfolio formats such as web pages, CD-ROMs, and various portfolio software programs. We also recognize the need for balance between meeting student needs and feasibility of instructor feedback to various formats among multiple students. There is a need for further research in this area to attest to the convergence of department and student needs.

Conclusion

Results from this study contribute to the literature relevant to portfolio use, specifically in family science curricula and the ability of career e-portfolios to help students centralize their work and earn jobs after graduation. This heuristic study opens the door to increase our

knowledge in this area. By incorporating the Family Life Education Portfolio Template and Guide, universities offer an approach to the portfolio process that increases the likelihood of student buy-in, which in turn increases the odds in favor of student success related to completing portfolio projects. The Family Life Education Portfolio Template also offers the opportunity for family science programs across the country to be more homogeneous in creating student portfolios.

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Table 1

Family Life Education Portfolio Template

Required Component	Rationale
1. Introduction of Student	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides background of the candidate as a knowledgeable and experienced professional, reducing the focus on student status.
2. Description of FLE with emphasis on ability to be certified and certification requirements.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sets the tone of the portfolio and provides a rationale for the materials presented. Certification supports students' work as coming from a recognized organization with certification requirements.
3. Career/population focus of the e-portfolio	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Focuses the students' knowledge to a targeted population and guides the remaining aspects of the portfolio.
4. Resume or vita	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a summary of experiences and more details that may not be highlighted in the portfolio.
5. Description of the 10 FLE content areas with connections between the content area and the career/population focus of the portfolio.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Shows the students' understanding of the content area as well as how their experiences apply to the content area and population they seek to work with.
6. Work/volunteer experience*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Supplements academic knowledge and shows real world experience.
7. Academic experience*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Provides a breadth of research-based foundations for the real world experiences.
8. Supporting material*	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reinforces components 1-7.

Note. *Should be listed with or included in the same section with the corresponding content area.

Table 2
Guide to Implement the Family Life Education Portfolio Template

	Student Needs met by the Portfolio	FLE Areas to Address	Department Requirements	Areas of Student Input
<p><i>STEP 1:</i> <i>Student Buy-In</i> Address freshman year or in an introductory course students take when transferring into the program</p>	<p>Motivation, Meaningfulness, Creativity</p>	<p>Education on NCFR & CFLE: What are they and how do I get them?</p>	<p>Faculty explain what the portfolio is and why student should complete one.* Provide students with the guidelines and rubric for grading the portfolio.* Provide portfolio examples created by faculty and students working with various populations.* Have students establish accounts with the software or program they will complete their portfolio in. Have students write an introductory statement about themselves.** Provide feedback to students.*</p>	<p>Students select the portfolio type/layout they will create.** Students decide how to format their introductory statement and what relevant information to include.**</p>
<p><i>STEP 2:</i> <i>Preparation for the Future</i> Address in freshman/sophomore year or in 200 level courses</p>	<p>Usefulness in application to graduate school, interviewing, employment, meeting future goals</p>	<p>Introduction and education on the 10 CFLE Content Areas.</p>	<p>Have students begin to create a resume or vita for inclusion in the portfolio.** Require students to include a section that discusses ALL of the 10 content areas. Include information on what the content area is and how it addresses the needs of the specific population they plan to work with.</p>	<p>Students decide which population they want to focus their career/portfolio on.**</p>

<p><i>STEP 3: Formal Understanding of Learning</i> Address sophomore/junior year or 300-400 level courses</p>	<p>Academic reflection, summary of learning</p>	<p>Application of Content Areas to Academic Work.</p>	<p>Instructors indicate on their syllabus which content area(s) their course relates to.* Students begin to add a department specified minimum number of experiences in each content area (e.g., list at least 3 academic courses and provide at least 1 form of supplemental material related to this content area).</p>	<p>Students select the assignments, photos, graphics, and other supplemental materials to include.**</p>
<p><i>STEP 4: Application</i> Address junior/senior year or 500-600 level courses</p>	<p>Real World Service</p>	<p>Real World Application of Content Areas</p>	<p>Internships research projects, volunteer work, honors programs, etc.</p>	<p>Students incorporate their choice of activities that reflect on their application experiences (e.g., journals, poems, papers, notes from families they've helped, positive evaluations, etc.).**</p>
<p><i>STEP 5: Portfolio Completion</i> Address senior year or continue into graduate school/work</p>	<p>Bridging the Gap</p>	<p>Certification as FLE through Exam (non-accredited programs) or Abbreviated Application Process (accredited programs)</p>	<p>Faculty discuss with students how their portfolio can be used to communicate their knowledge with potential employers.*</p>	<p>Students seek ways to use the portfolio when communicating with employers and/or graduate school admissions contacts. Continuing education. Students continue to add various aspects to the portfolio that emphasizes new skills, abilities, and experiences.</p>

Note. *Task is repeated in each subsequent step. **Task should be reviewed by students in each subsequent step.