# An Electronic Fingerprint: Using ePortfolios to Help Students Discover their Authentic Professional Voices

## Key challenges

PLNU is committed to the continuous improvement of student learning by aligning programs to the highest national standards in their respective disciplines. PLNU has an annual cycle of assessment where student learning outcomes are assessed, assessment results are analyzed, and improvements to curricula are then made — culminating in a six-year program review during which assessment findings inform strategic planning.

### Assessing Learning

Assessing student learning is central to the University's educational quality assurance processes and ensuring that the University serves its mission. However, the manual, paper-based processes in place were proving inadequate to support program reviews, inform curricular changes, or provide evidence of student learning in a dynamic manner.

With multiple campuses, the University also sought to implement more consistent practices with an aim of aggregating assessment data over time and across programs. Without a centralized repository of assessment data, any sort of cross-program or cross-campus, longitudinal reporting on aggregated assessment data was challenging.

### Engaging Students

At the student level, paper-based portfolios limited faculty's ability to provide timely feedback and hindered the University from developing a community that more deeply engaged students in their learning. As isolated projects rather than living, growing representations of

students' academic careers, the three-ring portfolio binders simply sat on shelves. Students could not easily reflect on signature assignments in a meaningful way. There was no opportunity to review assessment feedback, and there was little opportunity to help students showcase who they had become.

*"These portfolio projects were impressive and full of rich content, but no one would ever know. It seemed like a lost opportunity to not use portfolios as valuable houses of assessment data for the institution, and also as modes of helping students develop themselves professionally,"* said Susan Rogers, Co-Chair and Academic Director, Department of Sociology, Social Work, and Family at PLNU.

Overall, these antiquated processes seemed counterintuitive to what the University's mission intended — preparing students for a post-graduation world with the knowledge, skills, and experiences needed to make positive impacts. The University needed to move their manual, paper-based processes to a more sustainable, technology-driven approach.

## The solution

PLNU determined that transitioning to an educational intelligence system would help them better meet their goals. The institution began researching and evaluating systems. After ample demonstration of a variety of systems, PLNU's assessment committee decided that LiveText would best support their students' learning and growth.

### About Point Loma Nazarene University

Founded in 1902, Point Loma Nazarene University is a Christian liberal arts institution serving more than 4,000 students and offering more than 60 undergraduate areas of study and graduate program degrees on several campuses in San Diego County and Bakersfield, California. The University's mission aims to teach, shape, and send students out into the world with the knowledge, skills, and experiences that will allow them to make a positive impact.



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*"Part of my job is to helping students develop strong, unique, professional voices – sort of like a fingerprint – and articulate who they are through their work. To do this job more effectively, we chose to implement LiveText by Watermark™,"* said Rogers.

The use of LiveText by Watermark ePortfolios is an ongoing process that spans the students' entire academic careers at PLNU. At different junctures throughout their programs, students write personal philosophies, personal professional codes of ethics, letters and resumes, compile work samples that show growth, and reflect on how they believe their education is preparing them after graduation. Students include reflections on service and volunteer work, internships, research, and co-curricular activities.

In their senior seminar, students choose four signature assignments to reflect on and share how these learning experiences have shaped who they have become. Throughout this process, faculty assess the ePortfolios and provide feedback within the platform, which allows students to review it in a timely manner and work to improve on those areas in future work.

As graduation approaches, they prepare for their public capstone presentation by curating specific samples of work into a polished, professional electronic showcase. In a four-minute presentation to faculty, administrators, and their peers, students share the key PLNU learning experiences that have shaped who they have become as students and professionals—using their LiveText by Watermark ePortfolios as guides. Faculty, administrators, and student peers use rubrics to assess the student's showcase presentation, particularly focusing on oral competencies. Students then receive these rubric assessments and write a

reflection on the experience, which also becomes part of their ePortfolio.

To put it simply, PLNU students build academic and professional confidence in their work by:

▶ Building ePortfolios over the course of their academic careers

▶ Using feedback to continue to improve their work

▶ Preparing their professional voice and personal brand for the public presentation

▶ Completing this process...students feel more confident in their abilities to write, reflect, and think critically, as well as use technology effectively and present to large groups.

For the institution, LiveText by Watermark serves as a rich source of assessment data, showing evidence of student learning related to specific program learning outcomes. The data collected allows the University to show their accreditor what they are doing, how they're doing it, and how they plan to improve.

## The win
ePortfolios are adding more value for students than the University ever imagined.

## Student Engagement & Growth
They allow students to not only demonstrate competencies and mastery of program learning outcomes but also showcase their journey. Curating past assignments and reflecting on these learning experiences encourages students to be thoughtful of their time at PLNU and present a whole picture of themselves.

*"We work so hard putting together our projects... yet I often found myself throwing them aside after they were graded,"* said PLNU student Dottie

*Crummy from the Child and Adolescent Development program.*

*"LiveText by Watermark helped me to pull old projects together and reflect upon them. I was able to appreciate the skills I had acquired and the talents that I will bring to an employer. I found myself being really proud of my accomplishments."*

*"Whoever looks at one of our student's ePortfolios will see immediately an academic and professional journey in progress, rather than just a student checking boxes and completing courses. Students are thinking critically about their work and reflecting on experiences, and that is something employers want to see,"* said Rogers.

## Using Assessment Data to Improve
The assessment data captured in the ePortfolios is also serving as a critical input to help the University improve its programs and design new offerings to better serve students.

*"LiveText by Watermark ePortfolios have become an integral part of our culture here at the University. The mid-term rubric data, along with assessment data collected at other benchmarks within the ePortfolios, is helping us gain insight into what we should be changing in courses. In fact, it helped us develop a more tailored, non-traditional working adult program on one of our campuses that is proving to be very successful,"* Rogers said.

As Point Loma looks to the future, it is clear that LiveText by Watermark will remain an important part of their mission to prepare students for success and build a culture of continuous reflection and improvement at every level in the University.