

**The Atta Boy or Atta Girl Notebook:
What Louisiana Students Need to Know about an Academic Portfolio**
by Dr. Susan Thorson-Barnett & Mrs. Neeru Deep

The goals of this presentation are to:
1) define the purpose of the academic portfolio (Atta Boy or Atta Girl), 2) to demonstrate how this becomes students' personal resource guide, 3) to understand the meaning of their academic transcript.

The objectives of this presentation were to: 1) provide students with a tool that enables documentation of their learning achievements, 2) create a notebook where students can collect documents which will form the basis of a job or graduate school application, 3) organize an interview process, 4) teach students the how's, what's, and why's of their academic transcript and what can be done if the transcript says things that student do not like.

An academic portfolio is a purposeful collection of a student's work that tells the story of his/her efforts, progress, or achievement in a given period of time (Arter & Spandel, 2010). To create academic portfolio (Atta Boy or Atta Girl), students will need a few materials that include: a three-inch ring binder, dividers, and plastic page protectors. Over the next four years, students will begin to organize their academic and personal information. The Atta Boy or Atta Girl portfolio will be divided into these sections: Core Information, Academic Information, Employment Information, and Graduate

School Information. Listed below are the descriptions of these sections.

The Core Information includes a mission statement, career, personal, and community goals, the student's university catalog, degree audit, and the student's academic advisor's business card. Also, the student can place in this section employment options, areas of specialization, and suggested plan of action for graduate school. The second content area is Academic Information that includes documentation of all completed course work, course syllabi, sample papers or projects, awards and honors, research projects, paper and poster presentations, examples of service learning, clubs and organization membership letters, and offices held in those organizations, if applicable.

Employment Information is the third content area. This includes a sample cover letter, personal statement, resume, job searches, and references. The fourth content area is Graduate School Information. This includes a curriculum vita (CV), a personal statement, graduate school search, Graduate Records Examination Score, and three letters of recommendation. The curriculum vita is a detailed resume that takes into consideration research projects, publications, presentations, and relevant academic experiences. Having this information readily

available will assist the student with the interview process.

These four content areas can be easily incorporated into any academic course. The Psychology Department at Northwestern State University suggests the following timeline for incorporating the Atta Boy or Atta Girl portfolio. As freshmen in the Orientation class, students are taught about the portfolio and create the basic formatting for constructing a portfolio. In the sophomore year, students take Psychology as a Profession and are encouraged to create a portfolio. Finally, in the senior year, students take Advanced General Psychology, which is a capstone course. Students are directed to look over their portfolio and make sure they have relevant documents like a resume, curriculum vita, and a statement of purpose.

The next part of the presentation was to explain the meaning of academic transcripts. According to Appleby (2003), overall grades have a way of representing students in both a positive and negative light. In most cases it is a small glimpse into their academic career, but one that can have high potential for first impression bias. While a model transcript probably does not exist, the following components should be included in a well-rounded transcript: challenging courses, a uniformity of high grades, minimum withdrawals from courses, a steady increase of academic performance, relevant choice of electives, a pattern of classes that show skills (methods classes) and knowledge (content classes) and, finally, application of knowledge to research projects, jobs, or in the community.

Academic advisors can play a big role in teaching their advisees to take complete control over their transcript beginning their freshman year. However, if pitfalls do occur in the transcript, then repeating courses, telling their story, adding meaningful courses, and documenting their experiences are some of the strategies that can be implemented to recover the transcript.

This presentation can be summed up like this. Students spend on the average four years to obtain their degree. They need to be taught that they have control over their academic life. They are the masters of their fate and captains of their ships. This means that students have power over how they utilize time. It can be broken down into the following equation:

24 hours = one day

168 = one week

720 hours = one month

2, 688 hours = one semester

5,376 hours = one academic year

21, 504 hours = four years

The Atta Boy/Atta Girl portfolio is a reflection of how they have used their 21, 504 hours. The presenters feel that the greatest benefit of having college students develop a Atta Boy or Atta Girl binder is that it becomes their personal resource guide as they make the transition from college to graduate school or work.

References

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- like? *Eye on Psi Chi*, 7(2), 21-23.
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