Bridging the Skills Communication Gap:

The ODU LeADERS Distinction

Lanah Stafford, Ph.D.
Josie Momberger
May 14, 2025

Office *of* Academic Innovation
& Learning Support
Division of Academic Affairs

Session Goals

Learn what the LeADERS distinction is

Learn how LeADERS prepares graduates for life post-college

Provide feedback on program and ePortfolio

Background

Our graduates at a glance

Last year, the University awarded over **3,500** Bachelor's degrees:

93%
In-State

33%
First Generation

38%
Employed Full Time

51%
Hampton Roads

28%
Low Income

32%
Seeking Employment

525

Graduates in Hampton Roads seeking employment (2023-24)

What happens the day after graduation?

- How do we make sure students have the hands-on skills and experiences?
- How do we make sure that students have the skills to articulate these skills and competencies to external audiences?
- How do we **Bridge the Gap?**

What is LeADERS?

- Learning through Active Discovery, Engagement, Reflection, and Showcase (LeADERS) is **a graduation distinction** awarded to students who complete multiple high-impact, experiential courses and activities during their undergraduate career.

- **The goal of LeADERS is to prepare students for life after graduation** by incentivizing participation in high-quality learning experiences paired with guided reframing of these experiences through the lens of **professional competencies and skills**.

Two Pronged Approach

Learning Experiences

Digital Showcase

LeADERS Categories

L — **Leadership:** Developing relationship skills such as collaboration and interpersonal communication, problem solving, conflict resolution, and change management.

e — **elective:** Course or co-curricular experience selected by student and approved by LeADERS program.

A — **Applied Work-Based Learning:** Direct experience with applying classroom knowledge in a professional setting.

D — **Diversity:** Exploration of cultures, life experiences and worldviews different from a student's lived experiences.

E — **Entrepreneurship:** Combining and using disciplinary and interdisciplinary knowledge and principles to create products, businesses, programs, or other innovations.

R — **Research / Writing:** Making novel discoveries through active involvement in systematic investigation. / Demonstrating a reasoning process supported by research and reflection on a problem, topic or issue.

S — **Service Learning:** Field-based experiences with issues students are studying in the curriculum paired with reflection on these service experiences.

Discussion

What do you find **most valuable** about this approach?

Is there a **skills** gap?

Or is there a **skills communication** gap?

HELLO, I'M

Olivia Gee.

Old Dominion University Computer Science graduate

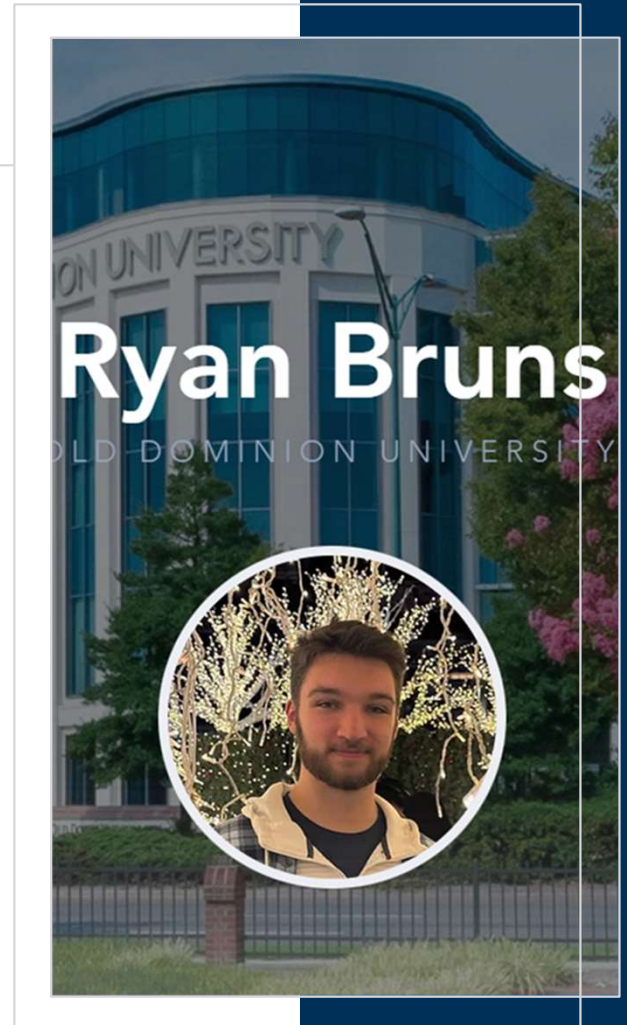**Bridging the Gap: ePortfolio**

Bridging the Gap: ePortfolio

Uses the students' post-graduate aspirations as the narrative framework

- Integrate their learning experiences in service to their **professional aspirations**
- How do these experiences collectively build toward their unique **professional identity** and contributions to the world?

Goals:

1. Establish the student as a professional in their chosen field
2. Articulate and tie the student's learning experiences to their professional aspirations
3. Provide examples from courses and experiences that demonstrate their knowledge, skills, and abilities

Bridging the Gap: ePortfolio

Required components:

- Introduction with brief biography, professional focus/philosophy statement, and **career aspirations**.
- "About LeADERS" section that explains LeADERS in a student's own words and reflects on their experiences overall **as it relates to their professional development**
- Detailed explanation of each LeADERS experience, providing insight into what it was, what they did in it, and **relevance of category to their career**
- A "Work Samples" section that demonstrates the skills gained from each LeADERS experience, with context explaining what the sample is and **the knowledge and/or skills it demonstrates**
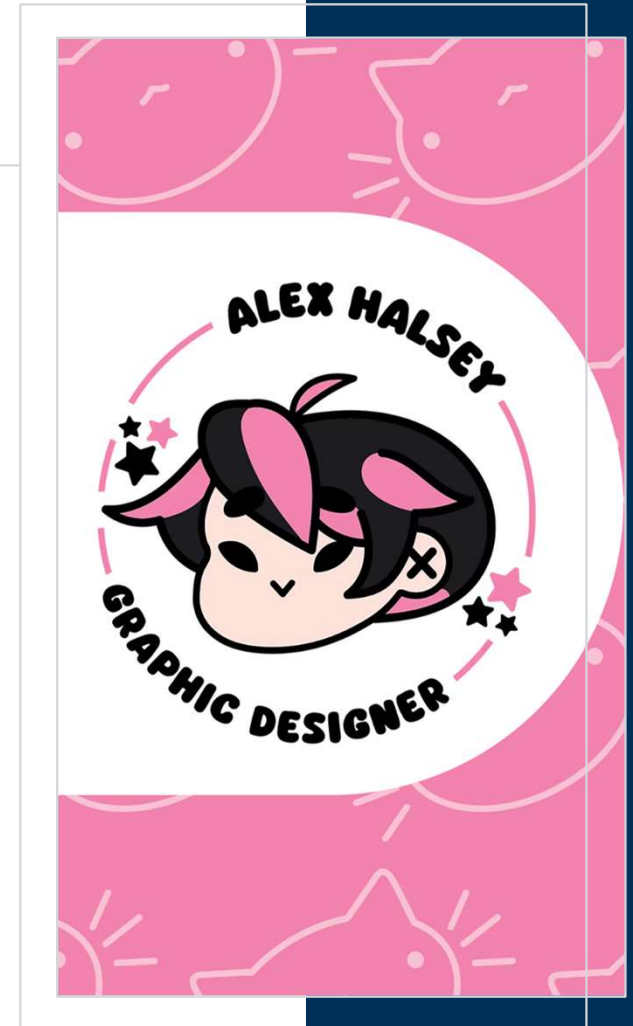
Bridging the Gap: ePortfolio

Example prompt

Identify one key skill or professional insight that you gained from each of your LeADERS experiences. Then, talk about **how those skills fit together as part of your emerging professional identity**. Consider the following:

- Why is it important for someone in your field to have these skills?
- What did you learn about your strengths and areas for improvement when it comes to these skills?
- How might you apply these skills or insights in your career?

Bridging the Gap: ePortfolio

"There are 8 traits that you have to possess as human service professional and one of them is **empathy**. As cliché as it is to say these days, I think that is the most important trait to have as a human being, but **especially as a human service professional**. In working with such a diverse group of people, different populations and in different settings - we will come across so many stories and we need to have empathy for the situations that we sit in front of on a daily basis. We need to always be **diversely aware and culturally competent**, we need to **stay up to date with research** and the evolution of different treatments and ways to go about helping people in different situations. **This is how we succeed in helping the people that we work with.**"
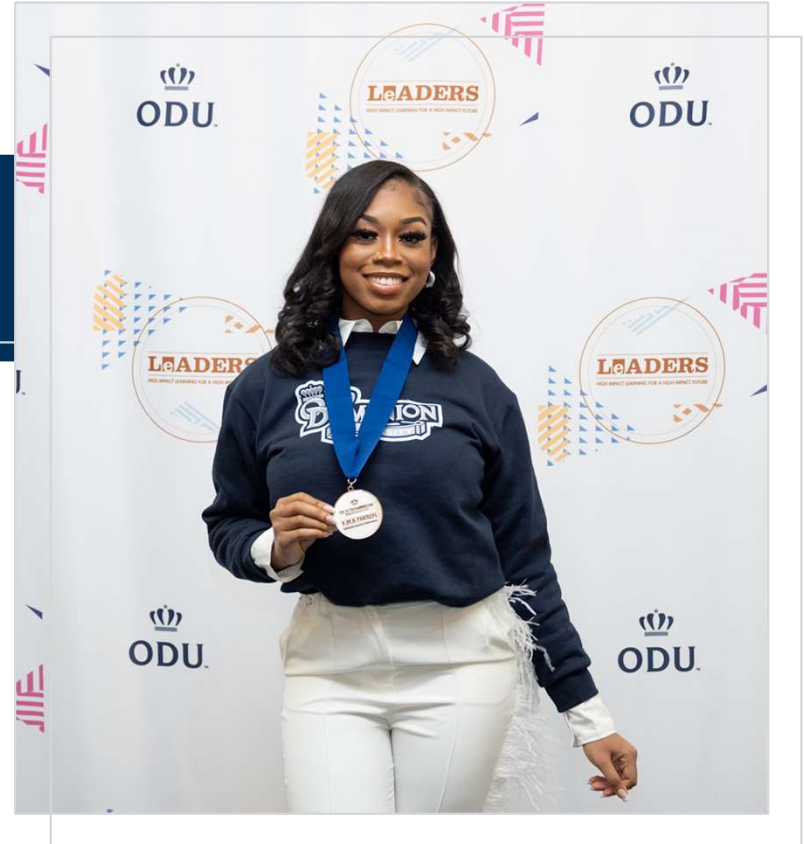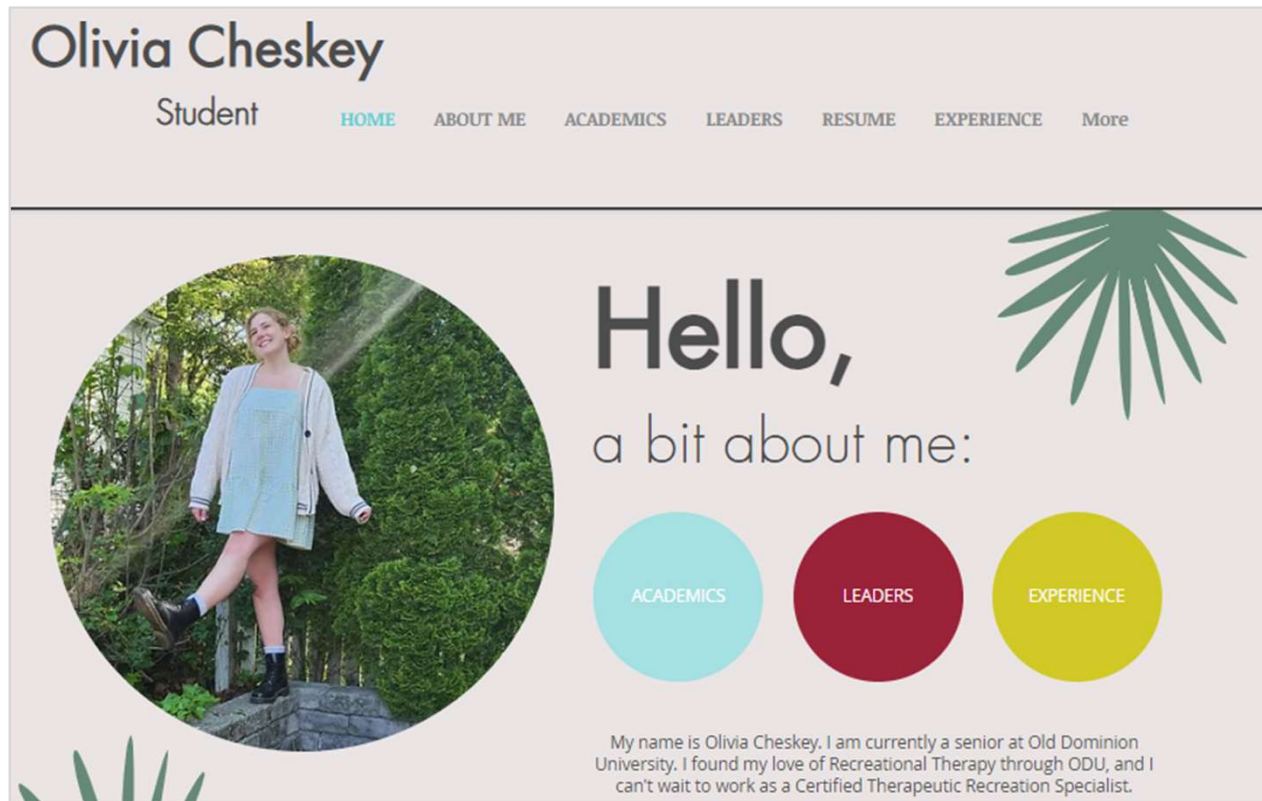
Skylar LeBron

PORTFOLIO

Discussion

- What **do you use** to assess applicants?
- What do you **wish you had** to assess applicants?
- **Would you use** something like this?

Activity: Sample ePortfolio

Scan the QR code to view Olivia's ePortfolio!

Discussion

- What did you **find compelling** about this ePortfolio?
- What do you **wish you saw** in this ePortfolio?
- How might you use an ePortfolio such as this **within your hiring practices**?

LeADERS Graduates

Students who complete the LeADERS requirements are awarded a transcript designation and medallion to enhance their commencement ceremony regalia.
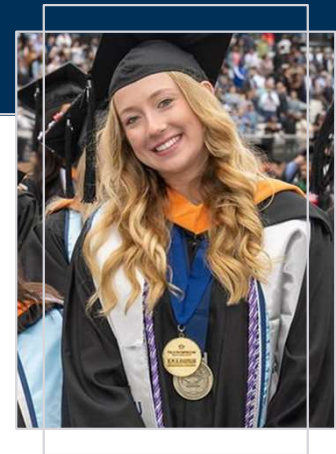
Bronze

Complete **3** categories
+ ePortfolio

Silver

Complete **4** categories
+ ePortfolio

Gold

Complete **5+** categories
+ ePortfolio

Discussion

- What **value** do you find in this distinction?
- How might we make this distinction **more valuable** to you?

Questions?

Lanah Stafford, Ph.D.
lstaffor@odu.edu

Josie Momberger
jmomberg@odu.edu

Office *of* Academic Innovation
& Learning Support
Division of Academic Affairs