Chapter VI

ePortfolio Thinking: A Provost Perspective

Ronald J. Henry
Georgia State University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter introduces an electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) that includes student work, student reflection, and faculty comments as a means of capturing student progress through a program of study. It argues that with an ePortfolio, a student could record progress through a program of study and then graduate on demonstrated mastery of learning outcomes rather than on credits earned and hours in class. Alternatively, it could contain evidence of mastery of a particular literacy or skill that might give a student a credential that is more than a course but less than a degree. Further, an ePortfolio has the potential to enhance advising and admissions practices for students transferring from one institution to another. Once in an institution, an ePortfolio has the potential to be linked to a student tracking system, where advisers could be automatically alerted about student progress on development towards program learning outcomes and could intervene as necessary.

SCENARIO

August 2008: Andrea is in her eighth semester out of high school. She transferred to her current university after three semesters in a community college. She was immediately well placed in a program of study through use of an ePortfolio that she learned to develop at her community college. This structured ePortfolio was organized around eight dimensions of general learning. Documents on Andrea’s progress towards these learning outcomes included some of her student work, her reflections on the work and its relevance to the learning outcomes, and comments from her instructors and advisers on her progress towards each learning outcome. This ePortfolio allowed her new university to place Andrea in a program towards her chosen major. She was advised of the courses to take over the subsequent five semesters assuming...
that she would be a full-time student. Further, she was given the set of learning outcomes for the major that complement the general learning outcomes. A software program at the university provides automatic monitoring of Andrea’s progress on her chosen path towards a degree, with e-mail to her adviser if she deviates from the path. Also, the software prompts her instructors and advisers to examine her ePortfolio at set milestones and to add comments on her progress towards each outcome. In her third semester at the university, as a result of discussion with her adviser who had been prompted by the software that Andrea was not making satisfactory progress towards her chosen degree, Andrea decided to change her major. She was given a set of learning outcomes for this new major and her ePortfolio was restructured to reflect her new path. Andrea is currently anticipating graduation next semester.

INTRODUCTION

The above hypothetical scenario might someday be a reality for all students. I am interested in the development of an electronic portfolio (ePortfolio) as a vehicle to trace student progress as she or he journeys through the curriculum. From my perspective, an ePortfolio has the potential to provide an environment with tools to demonstrate and assess student learning so that a student can demonstrate mastery learning with deep understanding. Learning is the centerpiece of any ePortfolio.

I have been interested for a number of years in trying to change our culture to judge students’ progress based on results, rather than hours in class; that is, in graduating students who have demonstrated mastery of learning outcomes—results—rather than on credits earned and the hours they sit in class. Working smarter rather than harder can sometimes produce results. We must reward students who get their results quicker by allowing them to graduate when they demonstrate proficiency in all learning outcomes.

For the last seven years, I have been involved with Quality in Undergraduate Education (QUE) (Albertine & Henry, 2004), a national project of higher education faculty at selected four-year public institutions and partner two-year colleges who are establishing draft, voluntary discipline-based learning outcomes in the undergraduate majors for biology, chemistry, English, history, and mathematics. We have learned to approach assessment as a register of each student’s progress through the curriculum, not just in a particular course. Some participants in QUE have found that conceptual mapping of the curriculum helps to locate courses within the program and begins to suggest how skill development or higher-order thinking ought to emerge in students’ performance at certain points. We have been challenged to understand and document what students learn when they take courses randomly, as is frequently the case for transfer, working, and part-time students. For many participants in QUE, an ePortfolio appears to be an essential feature of a student-centered learning curriculum.

The number of transfer students will continue to increase rapidly, since two-year college tuition is generally significantly less than that of four-year colleges. However, to reach the goal of a bachelor’s degree, these students need to transfer. Agreement between two- and four-year institutions on learning outcomes will lead to better alignment of curricula, assuring more timely progress towards a degree for both the native and the transfer student. Although many two- and four-year institutions forge articulation agreements that govern transfer of credits, true seamless transfer from a two-year to a four-year institution occurs when the insti-
Related Content

Lessons Learned From the Implementation of a Technology-Focused Professional Learning Community
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/lessons-learned-implementation-technology-focused/61946?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/lessons-learned-implementation-technology-focused/61946?camid=4v1a)

History as Method or Does Chronology Count?
Amy D. Rose (2016). *International Journal of Adult Vocational Education and Technology* (pp. 51-61).
[www.igi-global.com/article/history-as-method-or-does-chronology-count/167781?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/history-as-method-or-does-chronology-count/167781?camid=4v1a)

Development and Sustainability of Learning Societies
[www.igi-global.com/chapter/development-sustainability-learning-societies/70157?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/chapter/development-sustainability-learning-societies/70157?camid=4v1a)

Mixed Methods Research: What are the Key Issues to Consider?
[www.igi-global.com/article/mixed-methods-research/154941?camid=4v1a](www.igi-global.com/article/mixed-methods-research/154941?camid=4v1a)