Chapter VII

Introducing Integrated E-Portfolio across Courses in a Postgraduate Program in Distance and Online Education

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Abstract

This chapter presents a description and analysis of salient issues related to the development of an integrated e-portfolio application implemented at Massey University to help students track and accumulate evidence of skills developed over their period of study, particularly associated with the three core papers in the program. The Web-based e-portfolio project was initiated to help students provide evidence required by employers and research supervisors in a progressive and reflective manner by identifying the links across different papers and demonstrating their own conceptual understanding. Administrative issues are discussed, as well as considerations for future developments based on the experiences of this study.
Introduction

This chapter reports on the conceptualization and implementation of the integrated e-portfolio project initiated at the College of Education, Massey University, New Zealand. The conceptual model of the integrated e-portfolio is based on the assessment related tasks and the graduate profile of students in the distance and online education postgraduate program in the College of Education at Massey University. The portfolio framework was designed to allow students to display a range of their work completed in three core papers/courses in the program. The e-portfolio became a means for students in the area of distance and online education to display key aspects of their expertise. The making of integrated portfolio supports a programmatic approach to assessment and knowledge development. Initially the digital portfolio platform of John Hopkins University has been used. It is a Web browser-based framework for e-portfolio for its use across different papers and subject areas. The framework for e-portfolio enables students to edit multimedia objects. The task of developing e-portfolio has been introduced initially for the three core papers only. The coordinators of the three core papers have designed the assignments, keeping objectives of the papers and graduate profile into consideration, interrelating and overlapping tasks so that students are able to visualize the links among different courses and understand the ways in which learning in one paper is complemented in another paper. The portfolio is a part of student’s assessment. On completion of their study students will have a portfolio of assessed work that will provide a presentation of key knowledge and skills developed throughout the program of the postgraduate studies. The author envisages that the employers will be able to see students work in an electronic form that demonstrates their skills and knowledge. Through this process of learning students were led to reflect on their strengths and weaknesses in a manner that gave direction for future study. Creation and development of integrated e-portfolio also enabled students to learn and develop research skills useful for project/thesis work in the later part of their study.

E-Learning Program

E-learning is defined by the New Zealand Ministry of Education (2004, p. 3) as “learning that is enabled or supported by the use of digital tools and content. It typically involves some form of interactivity, which may include online interaction between the learner and their teacher or peers. E-learning opportunities are usually accessed via the Internet, though other technologies such as CD-ROM are also used in e-learning.” It would be an extremely rare tertiary institution that does not have a learning management system (LMS) for online delivery, and a body of staff already using it in their courses (Nichols & Anderson, 2005). At Massey University we have acquired WebCT as the LMS since 2002 for delivery of courses at a distance. At Massey University we also use CMC platforms such as Horizon Wimba and Macromedia Breeze for conducting real-time meeting sessions with the distance students. We have about 20,000 extramural (distance) students which is double the number of internal (on campus) students.