

## Scaling Up: Growing Effective ePortfolio Initiatives

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*This essay is adapted from “What Difference Can ePortfolio Make? A Field Report from the Connect to Learning Project” in a special research issue of the International Journal of ePortfolio (IJeP) co-sponsored by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U).*

Launching a campus ePortfolio initiative is no guarantee of success. On some campuses, ePortfolio projects grow and thrive; others stagnate or disappear altogether. What are the strategies that effective ePortfolio leaders use to launch and grow the use of ePortfolio at their institution? In what ways do these leaders connect ePortfolio to key institutional structures and processes? How do these connections help catalyze growth and learning across an institution?

Building a successful ePortfolio initiative is a complex process that requires deliberate and thoughtful effort. Special attention must be paid to work taking place in the areas identified as sectors of the [Catalyst Framework](#): Pedagogy, Technology, Outcomes Assessment and Professional Development. Across the C2L network we see

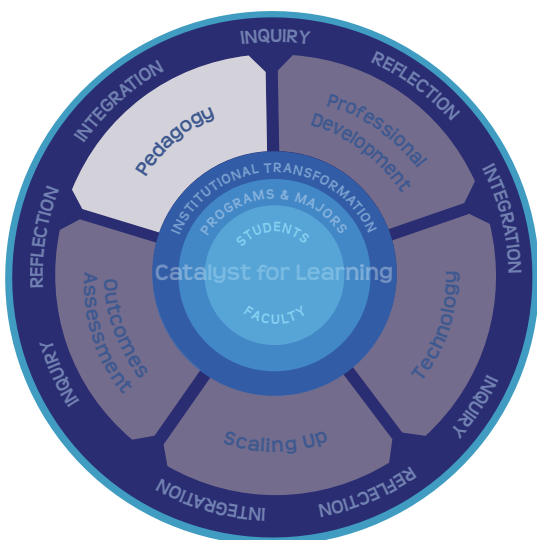
that the most successful ePortfolio teams work intentionally across these sectors, developing reflective social pedagogies, managing new technologies, and guiding professional development and outcomes assessment processes.

Leaders of successful campus ePortfolio initiatives also attend to a range of other tasks, issues and processes that build campus engagement and institutional support -- what could be termed “Scaling Up.” By Scaling Up, we mean the strategies and approaches by which ePortfolio projects begin within small segments of an institution and then expand, as additional faculty, courses, and programs begin to work with ePortfolio.

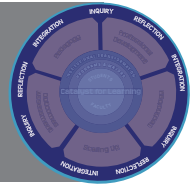
These tasks are instrumentally important in and of themselves. And in bringing together diverse campus constituencies for collaboration focused on student learning, they also create

opportunities for deeper systemic change. As Randy Bass observed in his work with C2L campuses: “Integrating ePortfolio practice into institutional culture helps to create and catalyze an institutional ethos of learning.”

ePortfolios provide a context for bringing together stakeholders from across boundaries, creating a network of connections that respond to the ecosystemic nature of institutions. By their integrative nature, ePortfolio initiatives foster collaborations across silos, connecting faculty, academic staff, student affairs professionals, advising, writing centers, technologists, librarians, employers, alumni, internship coordinators, community partners, and many more. As the Catalyst Framework details, successful initiatives partner also with departments and



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programs, General Education, outcomes assessment, and high-impact practices, especially First-Year and Capstone Experiences, as well as service learning, undergraduate research and study abroad.<sup>ii</sup>

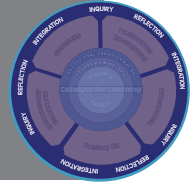
“As it scales within institutions,” Bass concludes, “ePortfolio increasingly serves as a network of connections [that] inform and deepen emerging pedagogical practices and introduce increasingly rich views of student learning into the everyday flows of teaching, assessment, and curriculum design.”<sup>iii</sup> (Read more from Bass’ essay, “[Scaling Strategies and ePortfolio as a Catalyst for Change](#).”)

The Scaling Up Stories of C2L campuses demonstrate the ways ePortfolio initiatives build campus connections. [Northeastern University’s](#) C2L team, for example, describes the strategic value of building alliances with key programs, as part of a broader process of building the campus initiative:

The Scaling Up Stories of C2L campuses demonstrate the ways ePortfolio initiatives build campus connections. Northeastern University’s C2L team, for example, describes the strategic value of building alliances with key programs, as part of a broader process of building campus initiative: “At the undergraduate level, ePortfolios have taken the strongest hold in two programs that cut across departments and colleges: the Writing Program and the Honors Program. ...At the graduate level, ePortfolios are operating at scale within the Master of Education program, with a program-wide requirement, and in the beginning phase of taking hold across multiple programs....Once one program has an ePortfolio requirement, and the system of support is put into place, it becomes easier for other programs to adapt the innovator’s materials and systems for their own purposes.”

The C2L team at [Pace University](#) addressed the need to bring together diverse campus groups with an Advisory Board that encompassed “members from each of our academic areas and also the Library, Information Technology Services, Center for Teaching Learning and Technology, Office of Students Success, and Assessment Office.” For the Pace team, this was part of a broader change effort:

One of our major goals has been to have ePortfolios permeate our Pace culture... Integrating learning and making connections have been our mantras... We have built partnerships with faculty, staff, and administrators from all schools, many disciplines, as well as Student Life, Office of Assessment, and Career Services... ePortfolios are now being used by Student Life on one campus as part of a new Leadership Certificate Program; students in the program—first year and second year students, and their upper class mentors, are using the ePortfolio to document and reflect on their activities, workshops, and leadership development....We are also using ePortfolios for Tenure and Promotion review, which has been helpful in getting faculty experienced with the platform...



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## Connecting to Core Strategies

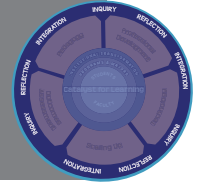
Reviewing campus practices across the Connect to Learning network, our analysis identified a list of ten core strategies that teams use to scale their initiatives. A partial list of these demanding and recursive tasks include: engaging institutional leaders to help them understand ePortfolio's potential value; securing internal and external funding; managing meaningful evaluation processes; building alliances with departments and programs; linking to High Impact Practices; and building a campus-wide ePortfolio culture. The sidebars provide a full list, along with links to more detailed essays on each strategy. Here we can do a summary overview.

Many of the Core Strategies focus in on particular types of campus connections, the deliberate efforts by campus ePortfolio leaders to foster learning-center collaborations. **Core Strategy #2, Building Alliances with Departments and Programs**, suggests that “an ePortfolio implementation is more likely to be successful when there are strong connections to degree programs; facilitating curricular integration and supporting student learning, programmatic assessment, and accreditation.” Cohesive professional programs, such as Education, Business, Nursing and Engineering, along with programs in the fine and commercial arts, seem to be particularly congenial to growing a flourishing, department-wide implementation. Building a base in specific departments or programs helps those students and faculty value their ePortfolio work and models fully-rounded curricular articulation that links discipline with General Education and demonstrates success to the broader campus.

**Core Strategy #3, Connecting to High Impact Practices**, spotlights a different type of linkage. Many successful ePortfolio initiatives flourish in alliance with programs on the margins of the traditional curriculum, in the areas identified by George Kuh as High Impact Practices<sup>iv</sup>: First Year Experience programs, Learning Communities, Writing Intensive Courses Internships, and Capstone Courses. In the C2L network, First Year Experience programs seem to be particularly fruitful locations for ePortfolio work, perhaps because of their inherently integrative qualities. [Virginia Tech](#), [Tunxis Community College](#), [IUPUI](#), [Guttman Community College \(CUNY\)](#), [Manhattanville College](#) and others have developed robust ePortfolio implementations in their FY programs.

## Ten Core Strategies for Scaling Up Group 1

- #1. Developing an Effective Campus ePortfolio Team:** Successful ePortfolio initiatives build effective leadership teams that possess diverse composition representing different roles in the institution and have strong connections to key stakeholders in the institution.
- #2. Connecting to Programs:** Successful ePortfolio initiatives build relationships with degree programs, engaging a wider community of faculty and serving as catalyst for other departments at the institution.
- #3. Connecting to High-Impact Practices:** Successful ePortfolio initiatives build connections to the ten high-impact practices that have been revealed through broad research to demonstrably improve student success and learning in higher education.
- #4. Engaging Students:** Successful ePortfolio implementations make student work visible and engage students as stakeholders.
- #5. Advancing through Professional Development:** Successful ePortfolio initiatives are advanced through thoughtful professional development activities for faculty and staff to explore both ePortfolio-related pedagogy and practice, and to build crucial buy-in for broad change.



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Meanwhile, [LaGuardia](#), [IUPUI](#), [Lehman College](#) and others have created similarly powerful linkages with Capstone courses and programs.

Students are an important constituency for ePortfolio initiatives. **Core Strategy #4** identifies ways that student involvements can assist project leaders in scaling up their ePortfolio work, including: helping to gain the support of college administrators; encouraging faculty and staff participation; and engaging other students. Allying with student government, honor societies, and clubs and holding student portfolio showcases that highlight student accomplishment are strategies used on multiple campuses. Equally important is the widespread use of students as peer mentors, helping faculty and other students learn about and effectively use ePortfolio technology.

As **Core Strategy #1** details, the creation of an ePortfolio leadership team can itself further campuswide connections and collaboration. Successful ePortfolio initiatives assemble robust and committed leadership teams, who guide and build the project over time. Qualities of effective teams and leaders include a strong understanding of ePortfolio as an integrative social pedagogy, skills as effective communicators, and campus diversity, meaning the representation of different roles in the institution, including faculty, staff, and administrative leadership. The Scaling Up Stories of [IUPUI](#), [Manhattanville](#), and [Pace](#) provide rich examples of the importance of this strategy.

### Catalyzing Campus Change

Our most successful C2L campus teams facilitate connection and collaboration across the institution, encouraging systemic conversations about student learning. Sustained effort in this regard is critical to the ability to broaden and deepen an ePortfolio initiative. But such effort yields dividends. The conversations and collaborations required for ePortfolio success can help to illuminate the holistic nature of the student learning experience, sparking structural change and building campus-wide commitment to learning-centered activities and processes.

Changes in institutional structures and a growing commitment to a learning culture are evident on campuses across the C2L network. At [Manhattanville College](#), for example, the ePortfolio team initiated sustained professional development, “the first on our campus after a long period of no professional development.” The

### Ten Core Strategies for Scaling Up Group 2

#### #6. Building Strategic Connections to Outcomes

**Assessment:** Successful ePortfolio implementations build strategic connections to assessment of student learning at programmatic and institutional levels.

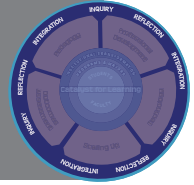
**#7. Making Use of Evidence:** Successful ePortfolio initiatives gather, analyze, and share meaningful evidence of impact on student learning.

**#8. Leveraging Resources:** Successful ePortfolio implementations require financial resources to support the leadership team, faculty professional development, and technology.

**#9. Aligning with Institutional Planning:** Successful ePortfolio initiatives align with institutional planning efforts through a variety of key strategies, including working with key allies in administration, and working to include ePortfolios in program-level and institutional strategic plans and planning processes.

**#10. Building a Culture of Learning:** Successful ePortfolio initiatives build an ePortfolio awareness and culture at the department and program level, among students, faculty, administrators, advisors, in formal and informal ways.

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power of the process drew faculty support, which led in turn to administrative support. The College made a commitment to launch and support a new campus-wide Center for Teaching and Learning, responsible for ePortfolio and broader pedagogical support.

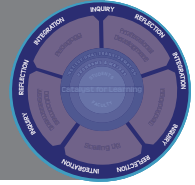
At [San Francisco State University](#), evidence demonstrating the success of the integrative Metro Health Academies attracted institutional and external support. Beginning in Fall 2013, the ePortfolio-based learning community approach was expanded to serve as much as 40% of the incoming student population at SFSU. The Provost of [Boston University](#) recently highlighted the ePortfolio initiative of the College of General Studies as an assessment model for other BU Colleges and Divisions. Similarly, at [Three Rivers Community College](#) the ePortfolio effort had been limited to the Nursing program, but now is planning for growth. Demonstrating success in one area, this C2L team persuaded institutional leaders to support a broader ePortfolio initiative and to use ePortfolio to support Gen Ed outcomes assessment.

Meanwhile, the ePortfolio initiative at [LaGuardia Community College](#), is helping to support a sweeping institutional change effort, aligning student affairs and academic affairs, rethinking advisement and rebuilding our First Year Experience. ePortfolio's capacity to spotlight integrative or holistic learning, support educational planning and identity development, and link curricular and co-curricular experiences makes it invaluable to the alignment of academic and student affairs. These two areas are now collaborating with academic departments and the Center for Teaching and Learning to design and launch a new, discipline-based, credit-bearing First Year Seminar, which will incorporate ePortfolio as a required and central element.

Observing campus developments across our network, particularly those related to scaling up processes, we see that the growth of an ePortfolio initiative both requires and spurs broader changes in institutional culture and structure. In his essay *Scaling Strategies and ePortfolio as a Catalyst for Change*, Bass<sup>v</sup> argues that ePortfolio initiatives grow and deepen most successfully when they align themselves with efforts to build a campus-wide culture of learning. He suggests that integrative ePortfolio initiatives can serve as a catalyst for positive change, with three layers or dimensions:

- **Integrative learning culture:** The shift to a student-organized view of learning, bridging curriculum and co-curriculum, where learners pull from knowledge resources and offerings to construct an increasingly customized educational experience, that is both professionally productive and personally meaningful.
- **Integrative learning analytics:** The development of an institutional conversation on student learning that can provide a framework for integrating data on student achievement and move the institution towards a learning-centered culture and structure.
- **Strategic Change:** A context for institutions to engage faculty and other stakeholders in institutional change and to define and renew their local institutional value and character.

By implementing strategies that connect ePortfolio to institutional structures and processes, successful ePortfolio initiatives develop a network of connections that catalyze learning and change. While the C2L evidence is still preliminary, it suggests that ePortfolios promote learning-centered connection, making student learning visible



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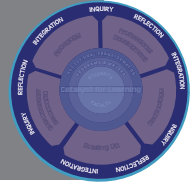
to faculty and staff across institutional boundaries. Requiring and facilitating collaboration across disciplines and departments, ePortfolio initiatives can help to break down traditional institutional silos. Supporting a richer view of learning; encouraging a learning-centered institutional conversation; and catalyzing broad institutional change in structure and culture, ePortfolios can help colleges become more adaptive learning organizations.

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