Developing an ePortfolio Initiative from the Ground Up

Summary

- Summary
- Project Overview
- Project History
- Future Directions

Hunter’s ePortfolio initiative began in 2009 with a small group of faculty. Our focus has been on deepening ePortfolio practice within specific departments and programs, including English, German, Nutrition, the Muse Scholars Program, and our School of Education. Professional development has been at the center of Hunter’s ePortfolio initiative from its beginning. Working with our Academic Center for Excellence in Research and Teaching (ACERT), we have incorporated faculty professional development around ePortfolios into existing programs and structures. We now have a strong foundation of ePortfolio practice from which to continue growing our initiative. We are currently exploring a school-wide ePortfolio initiative in our School of Education and looking at the Muse Scholars Program as a model for expanding the use of ePortfolios within other undergraduate cohorts.

Project Overview

More than 1600 students in 15 departments and programs have created ePortfolios since we began piloting Digication in 2010. More than 30 faculty members, most of whom have participated in our professional development seminars, have guided students in this endeavor and provided feedback on their portfolios.

Course-based portfolios
Faculty use ePortfolios within courses in areas such as English composition, German, and Special Education. The focus is generally on using ePortfolios for reflection and enhancing student learning. For example, in our English composition classes, ePortfolios are used as a way for students to reflect on their growth as writers over the course of the semester. In our German translation class, students reflect on the choices they make when translating a text from German to English.

Program portfolios
ePortfolios are used at the program level in our School of Education, School of Nursing, and School of Public Health. In our professional programs, ePortfolios are primarily used to demonstrate the achievement of professional competencies, often as part of a capstone course in the program. For example, in our Master’s in Literacy program, students use their ePortfolios to collect and reflect on artifacts that meet specific professional standards. ePortfolios are also used to showcase achievements for potential employers. For example, students in our Nutrition program create portfolios that include a personal statement, reflections on their practicum experience, and information about other relevant work experiences.
In fall 2013, we began working with our first undergraduate program cohort – students in the Muse Scholar program. ePortfolios are a central part of the seminar for incoming Muse Scholars and are being made available to students throughout the program.

**Project History**

**The Early Years**

Hunter’s ePortfolio initiative began in fall 2009, with a small group of interested faculty and the support of our Associate Provost of Instructional Technology. Members of our first faculty cohort all had experience with “folio thinking” and several had used paper portfolios in the past. Our initial goal was to select and pilot an ePortfolio platform. After speaking to other CUNY campuses, such as Lehman College, and evaluating several tools, we decided to pilot Digication in spring 2010.

During this first semester, participation was limited to a small number of faculty, including faculty in English (with the support of the directors of our Writing Across the Curriculum program) and the Master’s in Literacy program (with the support of the chair of the Department of Curriculum and Teaching). We initially focused primarily on ePortfolios within courses.

“The idea of starting ePortfolios with a small group of faculty is an ideal way to proceed. As more and more faculty see exemplary uses of ePortfolios, I believe there will be widespread interest in their uses.” —A faculty member

Our initiative grew steadily in response to increasing faculty interest, which we were able to generate and sustain through our existing faculty development structures. At the end of the spring 2010 semester, the three faculty who participated in our pilot presented on their experiences at one of our weekly Tech Thursday seminars. These presentations generated additional faculty interest in ePortfolios. We also decided to make ePortfolios an area of focus for our Faculty Innovations in Teaching with Technology (FITT) program, which awards faculty stipends to work on incorporating technology in their teaching. In summer 2010, we supported four ePortfolio projects as part of FITT.

In 2011, the participants in our ePortfolio pilot (Jennifer Tuten and Yang Hu from Curriculum and Teaching, Wendy Hayden from English, and Gina Cherry from Technology Teaching and Learning) became our initial C2L leadership team.

**Nurturing Growth**

**Connecting to Existing Professional Development Resources**

ePortfolios are one component of our Tech Thursdays lunchtime series and Faculty Innovations in Teaching with Technology (FITT) grant program. Faculty interested in ePortfolios can apply for a FITT grant to work on an ePortfolio project during the summer. FITT awardees receive a small stipend and support from an educational technologist and a faculty fellow with experience using ePortfolios. Awardees are asked to present about their projects at our weekly, faculty-led Tech Thursdays series. This series, which is attended by faculty from throughout the college, provides a forum for expanding interest in ePortfolios.

Professional development has been at the center of Hunter’s ePortfolio initiative from its beginning. When we embarked on our ePortfolio initiative, we already had a successful faculty development program for teaching and learning with technology in place; we were able to incorporate professional development around ePortfolios into this existing framework, which has since grown to include ongoing seminars for faculty.
The growth of our ePortfolio initiative coincided with the emergence of a new professional development center for Hunter faculty. Aligning our initiative with Hunter’s Academic Center for Excellence in Research and Teaching (ACERT) enabled us to expand the range of professional development opportunities we offer. Within the framework of ACERT, we developed two additional programs that have helped us deepen our initiative: Guided Explorations and Teaching Scholarship Circles.

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Guided Explorations are a series of seminars that introduce the concept of ePortfolios. We invite participation from faculty who are planning to implement ePortfolios in a course or program the following semester. Teaching Scholarship Circles provide ongoing support for ePortfolio practitioners. Faculty participating in this semester-long series read scholarly articles and share their ePortfolio experiences with their colleagues. After several cycles of these workshops series, we have a core group of faculty who are well-versed in ePortfolio pedagogy.

Expanding Our Leadership Team
In Fall 2012, we expanded our team to include Lisa Anderson from the Department of German. Professor Anderson was also a member of the ACERT steering committee (and is now an ACERT co-director), which enabled us to strengthen our ties to ACERT.

Developing Core Groups within Academic Programs
One of our early decisions was to focus on deepening ePortfolio practice within departments and programs. We now have core groups of ePortfolio practitioners in departments and programs such as English 120, the Master’s in Literacy program, the Department of Curriculum and Teaching, and the German Department. These faculty support one another and serve as models for faculty in their own disciplines:

- Yang Hu’s work on ePortfolios in the Master’s in Literacy program has served as a model for several other programs in Hunter’s Department of Curriculum and Teaching (one of the largest departments at Hunter). Professor Hu has also involved the other faculty in her program in reviewing and giving feedback on student ePortfolios.

- Lisa Anderson and Aine Zimmerman from the German Department presented their work with ePortfolios at a seminar for foreign language faculty.

- Wendy Hayden has developed a cohort of ePortfolio practitioners within English 120
Future Directions

Supporting student work
As our ePortfolio initiative grows, we are exploring scalable ways to support students with both the technology and the content of their ePortfolios. During the coming year, we plan to work more closely with existing student support structures, such as the student help desk, student computer labs, and the Reading Writing Center.

We are also thinking about ways to showcase the work that students have been doing. This year, we plan to have our first student ePortfolio showcase event, as well as create a virtual student showcase of ePortfolios.

Integration throughout programs
We are exploring ways to integrate ePortfolios more fully into programs, rather than using them simply for individual classes or as part of a capstone experience at the end of a program. We see several opportunities to move in this direction. In our German department, faculty are beginning to use ePortfolios in multiple courses, giving students more opportunities to reflect across courses. ePortfolios are being integrated throughout the Muse Scholars program, which has the potential to serve as a model for other undergraduate programs. Students in our Master’s in Literacy program now begin their portfolios at the beginning of the program and receive feedback from a faculty advisor throughout the program. This approach is being emulated by other professional programs at Hunter.

Diversifying our technology
While we have had a good experience with Digication, we recognize that a single ePortfolio platform may not meet the needs of all of our diverse ePortfolio practitioners. As we clarify how portfolios are being used across all our programs and departments, we are exploring additional platforms that might be a better fit for specific needs.

Focusing on assessment
Assessment is central to our School of Education’s work towards integrating ePortfolios throughout its curriculum. In the upcoming year, we plan to conduct focus group interviews with a core group of ePortfolio practitioners to gauge their perceptions about ePortfolio use and to gather their insights about how ePortfolio, particularly the use of social pedagogies, has enhanced their students’ learning. We also plan to collect evidence of student learning from two pilot groups within the School of Education.

Broadening our scope
Professional development has always been at the heart of our ePortfolio initiative, and we plan to continue growing and broadening our ePortfolio initiative by maintaining this focus. Over the coming year, last summer’s ePortfolio projects will be presented at our faculty seminars, continuing the cycle of generating interest and involving new faculty and programs.