Scaling up while drilling down: How an expanding ePortfolio initiative dives into the first-year experience

AlyciaShada

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Since 2005, San Francisco State University has been building resident expertise and organizational capacity to advance efforts on the development, use, and sustainability of electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) and related support services. The project began within one graduate program and has continued to grow from "the ground up" through departmental/program implementation to 22 programs. From 2009-12, the demand for ePortfolios continued to grow with approximately 1,600-2,000 accounts being issued annually and actively used for an average of two years prior to graduation by students across a range of 22 department/programs (3,000-4,000 active portfolios during students time at SF State). While Academic Technology has helped SF State 'scale up' its number of users, it also took on a project to 'drill down' and provide extensive support to assist the Metro Academies undergraduate retention program with deeply integrating ePortfolios into its program. All accounts (supported with Academic Technology) are created through a hosted solution, **MyeFolio**, and have continued to be maintained for potential program accreditation purposes when requested.

Author

The ePortfolio Metro Leadership Team

Our Scaling Up Story

Current Status

Campus status: In academic year 2013/14, the demand for ePortfolios continued to grow with more programs throughout the university requesting ePortfolios. Academic Technology along with Academic Institutional Research is exploring implementing ePortfolios institution wide. Challenges continue with limited resources and staffing.

Catalyst and Connector

As a large decentralized campus (28,000 students, 79 programs/departments), finding connectors and catalyst for change can be challenging. However, the following efforts have helped connect different elements of the campus and grow institutional inquiry into student learning.

A few possibilities:

- The Metro Academies Program has been a visible success story, with a growing body of evidence around the effectiveness of high-impact practices, including ePortfolios. This is why we've focused our C2L research efforts around the Metro Academies Program implementation of ePortfolios.
- The ePortfolio project has begun plans to host a series of centralized events for all ePortfolio departments in the coming year.
- A revision of the General Education structure has been underway and portfolios are being explored as a way to track Gen Education.
- Academic Technology has just moved into a new centralized library office, with a faculty drop-in lab where we hope to feature some of the portfolio work.
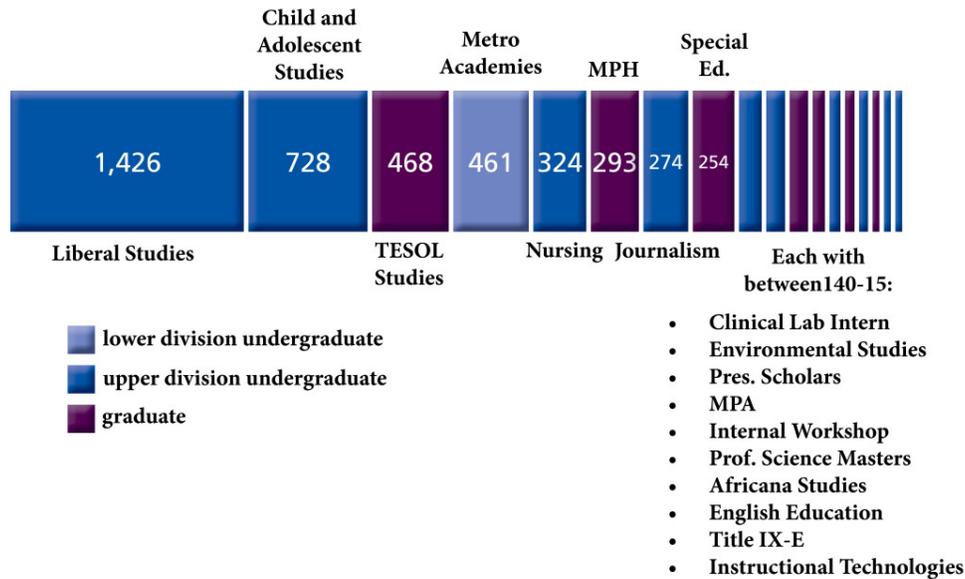
Developmental History

Since 2005, San Francisco State University has been building resident expertise and organizational capacity to advance efforts on the development, use, and sustainability of electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) and related support services.

Pivotal Stories/Key Stages: The project began within one graduate program and has continued to grow from "the ground up" through departmental/program implementation to 22 programs.

Below is a chart with the current distribution of active eFolio departments 2011/12.

ePortfolios Program Distribution at SF State

Child and Adolescent Studies — **Metro Academies** — **MPH** — **Special Ed.**

| 1,426 | 728 | 468 | 461 | 324 | 293 | 274 | 254 |

Liberal Studies — **TESOL Studies** — **Nursing** — **Journalism** — **Each with between 140-15:**

- lower division undergraduate
- upper division undergraduate
- graduate

Each with between 140-15:
- Clinical Lab Intern
- Environmental Studies
- Pres. Scholars
- MPA
- Internal Workshop
- Prof. Science Masters
- Africana Studies
- English Education
- Title IX-E
- Instructional Technologies

Key stages included (**=most important tipping points):

- 2005: Conducting a campus-wide needs assessment (via email to Deans/Chairs) to see how many departments were already using portfolios (of any kind).

- 2006: Small seed funding from Academic Affairs helped to build on the needs assessment and attempt to consolidate and coordinate ePortfolio growth (many departments were already using a range of portfolio solutions).

- 2006-07 Executive decision from Academic Affairs (Academic Tech) to consolidate, fund, and offer a common solution.

- 2006 **Central clearinghouse website built with reference information about ePortfolios including: Information for students ; Departments/Faculty, step-by-step processes to get started ; One solution focus ; Standard 90 minute training and script with resources developed ; Capacity Building: Cross-training a group of 5 instructional designers to give eFolio workshops

- 2007 **Project coordinator time assigned and time/duties re-assigned for project assistant within Academic Technology, 2 student assistants assigned to the project

- 2008 **Primary solution chosen/training materials created (eFolio)

- 2009-2012: Academic Technology responded by semester to requests from departments, launching approximately 6 departments each year.

Deliberate decisions for progress:

- Stopped accommodating requests for portfolios at the course/semester level, shifting exclusively to departmental/program implementation.

- Within departments, portfolios are always launched in *Gateway courses and are required for completion in Capstone courses within a discipline.*

- Some programs using ePortfolios in their WASC accreditation processes. Playing a leadership role in WASC's Essential Assessment Education workshops.

- Taking an active leadership role within AAC & U's VALUE rubric development, annual conferences, and receiving 2 mini-grants related to ePortfolio work including this 3-year Connect to Learning: ePortfolio, Engagement and Student Success.

Focused on the Metro Academies Project at SF State to more closely document effective ePortfolio usage as a high-impact practice.

In the fall of 2011, due to budgetary constraints, growth was capped to serve existing projects. We are still accommodating smaller pilot requests.

Connection to Core Strategies

Connecting to Programs: At SF State our ePortfolio initiative is built through relationships within programs and departments. ePortfolios help illustrate core competencies in each discipline and allow students to collect, reflect, and connect their work within their field as well as their co-curricular work. Thus, we have found that it is essential to have portfolios be established within gateway courses and required for completion.

Program Spotlight: Why ePortfolios in Metro Academies?

Overview: Metro Academies (http://metrohealth.sfsu.edu/index.html) focus on increasing college completion through a redesign of the first two years. Each Metro Academy (Metro) is a 'school within a school' giving students a personalized educational home over four semesters. Each Metro cohort of some 140 students takes two linked courses together each semester, building a strong learning community for academic and social support. Instead of taking a scatter pattern of disconnected courses, Metro students are part of a coherent program with a relevant and rigorous curriculum. Metro's student recruitment is focused on students who are first-generation, low-income, and/or under-represented. Student services are tied in to classes. To read the *International Journal of ePortfolio* article on Metro and its ePortfolio implementation, click here.

Metro students:

- Receive one-on-one support from faculty
- Develop individual education plans with an academic counselor who follows each student over time
- Receive academic advising, tutoring, access to financial aid advising and early intervention if they start falling behind.

ePortfolios in Metro

We piloted ePortfolios in Metro in 2009 and have continued to integrate for the past three years. Every student in the Metro Health and Metro STEM program at SF State have an ePortfolio, uploads assignments and reflects upon them in both their Metro core class and their linked general education classes (additional classes are optional). Last year, we piloted using adapted VALUE rubrics to assess ePortfolios and will continue to build on the pilot this coming year. We host an ePortfolio showcase at the end of the year to give students an opportunity to present their ePortfolios to their peers and instructors.

ePortfolios in Metro are seen as an additional high impact practice in a model program with national attention and the potential to grow. The faculty learning community model provided a rich opportunity within the C2L project to introduce and integrate portfolios & leverage assessment/rubric development with specific application to GE disciplines.

Next Steps

We have the possibility of expanding the Metro Academies project to additional undergraduate programs. The vision is to expand to 4 new departments in the next 5 years with 24% of the incoming freshmen (1,000 students) being tracked annually into a Metro program (STEM, child development, health, etc.).

Essential needs for campus-wide growth:

Funding! Academic Technology is at a bare bones stage and renewal of support may be jeopardized next spring.

Leadership—the top Administration (President, Provost, Deans Council) are still not fully aware of the project or it's potential.

Capacity building and stability for teams—People!

Space—a steady studio lab space to run workshops and allowing us to establish a student/peer mentoring program

Below is a graph showing growth of the SF State ePortfolio project over time:

ePortfolio Growth at SF State 2009 - 2013

# of ePortfolios

2009	2010	2011-12	2012-13
1,145	1,145	1,538	1,517

Connections to Other Sectors of The Catalyst

Pedagogy

Our Connect to Learning project focused on the Metro Academies (Metro) program, which is a retention program for the first two-years of college. Metro instructors are very enthusiastic about integrative, reflective and social pedagogies. The challenge has been deeply integrating ePortfolios into these practices, and moving beyond the feeling of 'ePortfolios as an add-on.'

Professional Development

In the Metro Academies program, professional development has been a key piece of moving forward with ePortfolios. Providing faculty with time carved out for discussing ePortfolios and their role in the classroom and assessment has given our project a lot more depth than it otherwise would have.

Outcomes Assessment

We have piloted and are working on further developing a program assessment using ePortfolios. Inquiry, reflection, and integration are themes woven throughout our program. Metro's approach to academic excellence has helped it grow to soon serve 25% of all first-time freshmen.

Technology

Our ePortfolio platform is accessible and affordable relative to many other platforms and thus has enhanced our scale up efforts.

Attachments and Supporting Documents

Conclusion

Particularly at a large, diverse campus, ePortfolio implementation cannot be a 'one size fits all' approach. Our ePortfolio projects vary greatly, depending on students' class level, type of program, and ultimate goal of the ePortfolio. ePortfolios do require substantial resources and staff time, so it is important to continuously examine the impact and effect of ePortfolios in all the various implementations.