

Assessment – Integral to the TLA

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The University of Delaware has ePortfolio projects at various stages. New programs such as Nursing would be identified as emerging as they explore the best platform to meet their accreditation needs. While other more seasoned programs such as the Undergraduate Research Program resides at the other end of the spectrum and provides students with a transformational ePortfolio experience where they reflect upon their research experience and receive feedback from peers, program assistants, and other external parties. Inquiry is focused upon ePortfolio thinking about the research process, targeting their personal goals, and reporting upon their progress. Students integrate their research with their major as well as their career plans.

Most of our programs however would identify as developing. They have established ePortfolio processes and are still working on extrapolating the data from the ePortfolio system. They all continue to make ongoing modifications.

Author(s)

[ePortfolio Leadership Team](#)

Overview

UD has piloted an academic program-based Teaching, Learning, and Assessment (TLA) ePortfolio, using the Sakai OSP platform. We had hoped that the matrix system developed within Sakai OSP would provide the Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning (CTAL) with assessment data for both programmatic and institutional assessment of General Education (Gen Ed) goals. While data can be pulled and student artifacts can be reviewed and rated, the data reporting demands additional programming and customization per department goals, rubrics, and research questions which in turn leads to significant resource and time and resource allocation. As departments request assessment data, they needed to better focus their research questions to assist the programmers in retrieving and presenting the data in meaningful ways. The data pulled for the Undergraduate Research Program allowed them to examine their effectiveness in assisting students in attaining General Education goals and has provided actionable data that led to concrete improvement results; for URP pilot [click here](#).



URP Assessment Reports [Summer 2010](#), [Summer 2011](#), [Summary Report 2011-2012](#), [Summer Report 2013](#)

Additional data pulled from our students' records: When we examined the average cumulative GPA for Spring 2013 of the ePortfolio projects and compared those students overall GPA to the rest of the UD undergraduate population, we saw that the students in the ePortfolio program had higher GPAs.

Our experience with the ePortfolio led us to question if there were differences in GPA in programs where the ePortfolio was implemented as compared to the average UD undergraduates' GPAs?

For the 8 programs that we were able to pull data from the Cognos warehouse, we did see higher GPAs.

Group	Average cumulative GPA	n
Overall average undergraduate GPA	2.97	12,850
Art	3.01	44
Art Conservation	3.34	32
Early Childhood Education	3.12	160
English Education	3.21	133
Fashion Merchandising and Apparel Design	3.05	352
Human Services	3.09	350
Music	3.40	181
Sport Management	2.98	155

When we examined the Fall 2007 cohort graduation rates for ePortfolio programs, again were unable to obtain a report for all of the programs. For the programs where we could examine data we observed some programs: English Education, Fashion Merchandising and Apparel Design, and the Music department programs with higher graduation rates. This however may be due in part to the competitiveness to be accepted into these majors.

Group	Graduation rate (5-year)	n
Overall	80%	3,571
Art	58% (2009 cohort)	46
Art Conservation	73%	15
English Education	86%	21
Fashion Merchandising and Apparel Design	86%	78
Music	84%	49

Setting the Stage

UD's culture of assessment is dynamic and varied; it ranges from academic programs that conduct comprehensive outcomes assessment planning, implementation, analysis, and closing the loop activities to a few academic programs with strong resistors. Programs that have external accreditation requirements, other than MSCHE, are well versed in assessment. All programs undergo Academic Program Review (APR) on a schedule set forth by the Deputy Provost and/or the external accrediting agency. The APR process encourages self-study and planning within programs and strengthens the alignment between programs' planning agendas and practices and those of their colleges and the University as a whole. APRs inform budgetary planning decisions at every level of administration. Kathleen Pusecker's charge as the Assessment Director within CTAL is to assist programs with educational assessments in all undergraduate and graduate programs and document this process for MSCHE. In addition, CTAL designs and implements assessments of General Education goals and reports results to institutional leadership, the Faculty Senate, and MSCHE.

Developmental Story

We started ePortfolios prior to our C2L membership. At the first stage of ePortfolio implementation, CTAL engaged in an ePortfolio pilot to assess students' learning gains in the First Year Seminar (FYS) in Fall 2008. The pilot experienced both technical and pedagogical challenges. For example, navigation of the platform (Sakai OSP), lack of training of faculty and peer mentors in platform operation, limited and untimely feedback to FYS students on their artifacts and reflections. The pilot was not continued after its initial phase.

The next stage of the ePortfolio implementation was focused on authentic assessment of General Education goals. Originally, the TLA ePortfolio pilot was intended to obtain students' artifacts connected to Gen Ed goals and to be able to report on the level of competency achieved. A change in the ePortfolio team leadership brought a desire to provide customization for each academic program. Such customization limited the ability to make meaningful comparisons across programs and across general education goals since many programs created their own rubrics. Few programs implemented common rubrics, such as AAC&U VALUE rubrics, resulting in reduced ability to assess students' progress on achieving certain learning goals, such as oral and written communication.

As the ePortfolio has evolved, a growing number of faculty are using common rubrics to examine their students' artifacts and to assess the level of competency achieved by students. Our polished practice of URP showcases strong examples of students' developmental reflections designed to help them enhance certain competencies (indicated by achieving higher scores on the VALUE rubrics). The faculty and program directors have also been deeply engaged in reflection, and they continue to revise the prompts, activities, and assignments. They all participate in the feedback process in order to provide feedback that is most helpful to the students.

Conceptual Framework

Evidence

We evaluated our ePortfolio initiative using formal qualitative methods, faculty survey data, student survey data, student outcomes data (such as pass rates, retention, etc.), and informal or anecdotal information. During those assessments, faculty in academic programs participating in the ePortfolio project reported several positive outcomes:

1. Faculty reported increased pedagogical engagement with their colleagues as the ePortfolio project asked them to connect courses with program outcomes. This is an expected benefit from curriculum mapping but the ePortfolio also provided transparency about the nature of the teaching, learning, and assessment activities across courses. This transparency strengthened the curricular connectivity and sequencing of program outcomes.
2. Faculty observed that they gained new insights into the way students interpreted and completed assignments. They also reported being able to more comprehensively gauge students' knowledge acquisition based upon reading students' reflections in addition to reviewing the students' work and they used this information to adjust their curricula accordingly.
3. The ePortfolio design process helped faculty connect Gen Ed competencies to program goals by reviewing the AAC&U rubrics and adapting them to their respective program outcomes.
4. Faculty in programs with external accreditation perceived that systematically collecting students' artifacts for external accreditation reviews fostered better assessment practices and documentation.
5. Faculty reported that the students gained an enhanced awareness of program curricula and expectations. Students were able to see a comprehensive picture of their program, goals, curriculum and path through the major.
6. Preliminary analysis seems to indicate persistence rates within the major were higher for those students who used programmatic ePortfolios.



Connections to Other Sectors of the Catalyst

Pedagogy

Curriculum mapping is an essential component of the outcomes assessment process. The TLA ePortfolio concentrated on programmatic outcomes connected to General Education goals embedded throughout the curriculum. As faculty gained awareness of the learning activities occurring in other courses, they more carefully scaffolded learning experiences for their students.

Scaling Up

The network of partners who ensured that the ePortfolio would be implemented was carefully structured to include the Academic Technology Services, the Director of Educational Assessment, and Director of the Center for Teaching & Assessment of Learning. This coordinated partnership provided “one stop shopping” for ePortfolio inquiry, reflection, and integration into the curriculum. Recruitment of faculty and programs was accomplished via a competitive request for proposal process that had to focus upon assessment of student learning in a program and General Education goals.

Professional Development

Professional development was customized to generate inquiry and reflection from our faculty. In a survey given to the first cohort of faculty they responded to the following prompt.

Provide any comments about the value or potential of the ePortfolio to promote faculty conversations about aligning learning goals, sound pedagogical practices, and assessments.

“This has stirred conversation among faculty—both pro and con. Of course it is new and change is hard for many folks. I suspect that more conversation about how to demonstrate student achievement in relationship to pedagogy and assessment will be ongoing and turn more positive as the initiative is furthered.”

“It was very successful in this aspect. Our faculty met on several occasions to discuss and develop learning goals and assessment techniques. This may have been the most important component of the project to date.”

“Adopting ePortfolios, and thinking through the Portfolio about where and how each Programmatic Learning Goal is being addressed, has more than revived departmental conversations about these goals.”

Technology

ePortfolio technology needs to integrate with a learning management system and other systems such as a student information system. When ePortfolios don’t seamlessly integrate, it impedes the faculty and the institution’s ability to assess student learning. Reporting on student outcomes connected to institutional, programmatic, and course goals in an integrated manner would be the holy grail of systems.

Attachments and Supporting Documents

[Assessing Student Learning in Undergraduate Research](#)

Conclusion

UD stated in the MSCHE Self-Study of 2011 the intent to use the ePortfolio as a means to assess General Education goals. CTAL envisions the following: All first-year students would be required to start an ePortfolio during their FYS; they would upload artifacts that document their learning at strategic points in their campus tenure such as during their enrollment in a multi-cultural course, their participation in a discovery learning experience, and their capstone experience. Currently, plans are pending based on changes in administrative leadership.

If such an ePortfolio process were implemented, it would enable the institution to collect authentic Gen Ed outcomes assessment data. The data would inform multiple constituents about how well UD students are attaining the Gen Ed goals. In addition, such data could be included as part of the College Portrait data set.

Future Plans

The URP intends to continue to implement the ePortfolio yet has switched to another platform, Canvas Learning Management System. It appears that Canvas's data reporting tool might need less customization to ensure the clarity of the data.

All eight remaining programs, will continue to use the ePortfolio as a means to assess their program goals but many have decided to implement a showcase portfolio so as to increase student and faculty buy in. Plans to pursue the ePortfolio as a General Education assessment strategy are on hold as the faculty have started discussions to purposefully revise the General Education goals. These activities will be connected to a revision of the UD strategic planning process.