28 May 2005

TO: Kate Harrington
Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs

SUBJECT: AY 2004-05 Professional Development Grant in Distance Learning and Instructional Technology – Final Report

FROM: Jeannette E. Riley, Principal Investigator, UMass Dartmouth

The UMass Dartmouth *Pilot Program in Student Electronic Portfolios* began in Summer 2004 as the Pilot group, composed of Catherine Houser (ENL), Phyllis Currier (NUR), Rebecca Hutchinson (CER), Gail Berman (Career Resources), and Jen Riley (ENL/WMS; Principal Investigator) held several meetings to discuss and plan the eportfolio project.

> (Note: there are numerous practices for abbreviating the phrase "Electronic Portfolio." Our pilot group chose to follow the practice for "electronic mail," where email, lower case, is used. Thus, we use "eportfolio" and only capitalize when the word begins a sentence.)

Background Information

Eportfolios are active learning environments where students and faculty engage in a continual learning process throughout the students' undergraduate and graduate career. Eportfolios are a reflective collection of student work that are created with goals in mind and used for assessment of the students' learning in his/her discipline. Using an online database, students organize, display, and discuss their work, which is ready for review at any time. Eportfolios rest upon the following process:

> **Collect:** Students collect work from various evidence categories that include academic, extra-curricular, and personal information. Most often this work is in text format, but eportfolios also work with visual works and can include sound recordings as well.
>
> **Select:** Following the guidelines of their major department, students determine what shape their portfolios will take as they are taught to consider the portfolio's purpose and audience. Students then review their collected works and decide upon representative works that present the learning outcomes and ideas they believe are important. They also need to develop an organizational format for their portfolio, as well as set up places integrate reflective writing pieces that demonstrate the learning process.
>
> **Reflect:** Students select specific projects or assignments to analyze and interpret for their audience. This work includes explaining what a project achieves, how it might be revised

or developed further, how the work fits into the student's major/minor, and considerations for future learning development.

Publish: Students post their works and reflective pieces to their portfolio site and activate the site so that others may view it. Faculty, at this point, can review student progress and help students critique their portfolios.

Overall, eportfolios offer students a way to integrate their learning experiences from inside and outside the classroom by helping them make connections between their learning experiences. Because eportfolios combine information about family and work, education and hobbies, classrooms experiences and extracurricular experiences, they provide a picture of the student as a whole individual and, thus, have an enormous implication for their education. Eportfolios emerge as a tool for universities and colleges to engage and stimulate student learning, as well as enable students to take greater responsibility for their educations.

Why Use Eportfolios?

The literature contends that eportfolios (or web portfolios, as they are also named) will be commonplace in universities and colleges in the next 5-10 years (for example, see Gathercoal, 2002). Many universities and colleges, of varying sizes, are already using eportfolios across the country, among them California State campuses, University of Washington, Moorehead State, Connecticut College, University of Minnesota, Stanford, Penn State, and CUNY La Guardia. eportfolios provide numerous benefits for faculty and students. Eportfolios:

- engage students with goal setting and decision making experiences;
- transform teaching and learning into a fully actualized learner-centered project;
- integrate curriculums so that students and faculty recognize connections across the disciplines;
- assist with assessment of learning outcomes across the disciplines;
- work to increase student retention and generate enrollment;
- require students to take responsibility for their learning;
- teach students informational literacy; and
- provide a way to present work and credentials to future employers.

Most importantly, "most of the literature indicates that the [ePortfolio] process is so important and valuable to the student, that the process alone is reason enough to "dump" traditional assessment practices in favor of portfolios, eportfolios, and/or webfolios" (Gathercoal, 2003). ePortfolio literature suggests that eportfolios provide a tool for assessing student learning that is far more effective than "traditional, one time, objective-based test assessment" (Herman & Morrell, 1999, qtd. in Gathercoal, 2003).

Pilot Focus

It is important to identify a few key issues that guided this project. The UMass Dartmouth pilot group identified three areas of focus:

- First, the pilot group decided to focus the eportfolio pilot on programmatic assessment. The pilot group wanted to create an eportfolio system that would enable students to reflect upon their undergraduate careers and their learning experiences in their major. We realized the value eportfolios have to be a tool departments may use to assess their majors.

- Second, we wanted to create an eportfolio template that is standard across the campus.

- Third, we wanted the eportfolio to encourage student involvement on campus; thus, we brought in a member of Career Resources to consult on the project, and we included areas for experiential learning, extracurricular activities, and the first year experience.

The Pilot group met during the summer and held subsequent discussions in the Fall 2004 semester. These results from these meetings included:

- Choosing a platform for the eportfolio. We decided to use Omni Update, a web publishing tool that UMass Dartmouth already owned. Omni provided us with a program that is user friendly and adaptable to our needs.

- Setting up password security for eportfolio sites. We realized that Omni Update would need to be adapted to have password security since student portfolios cannot be open to the public.

- Designing a standard login page. The login page includes an overview of the eportfolio objectives for our campus. We will also be building in eportfolio resource links during the Spring 2005 semester. (go to: http://dev.www.umassd.edu/portfolio to view the login page)

- Designing a template for the eportfolios that focused on programmatic assessment with a career component. We decided that eportfolios would be most useful for departments if we centered them upon the learning outcomes of each major. The template includes seven categories: First Year Experience; Academic Program; Experiential learning; Extracurricular Activities; Career Path, Career Planning; and Resources (go to: http://dev.www.umassd.edu/portfolio/home.cfm to view the template and categories. Descriptions are included there to explain each category's purpose.). Through this template, eportfolios become a tool for students to reflect upon their undergraduate learning experiences, including extracurricular and experiential learning, as well as a tool for departments to use

in order to assess how effectively their majors are reaching the major curriculum objectives.

- Building in a career resources component. We realized that eportfolios could meet other needs on campus, especially the needs of the Career Resources Center. We designed, as part of the eportfolio template, a section for career plans where students may include their resume and work experiences. We chose to include a career component since we wanted to help students connect their learning experiences to professional development and how they may transfer their skills from the classroom environment to the professional environment. Links are also included the Career Planning section of the eportfolio site.

- Developing a timeline for the Fall 2004 semester. We developed a schedule for teaching the students to use Omni Update and for Gail Berman to meet with each class about the Career Resources links.

The security issue held up our project considerably as we waited the entire fall semester for Omni to create the script for password protection and then for our own CITS group to ensure that the script worked with our existing campus systems. Ultimately, the script was found to be too difficult to work with, and the existing eportfolio examples discussed below are currently open to the public on the UMass Dartmouth website. However, the examples do not show up in a web search, and we do have student permission to leave the sites open to the UMass public.

Furthermore, as a result of this delay, no student examples were created until late in the Spring 2005 semester. The delay and clear technical issues that arose with Omni Update meant that the graduate student examples that were to be developed in Prof. Houser's and Prof. Hutchinson's classes were cancelled. These classes only ran during the fall semester; in addition, it was decided since Omni Update was not going to be the future eportfolio platform for UMass Dartmouth that it was an ineffective use of resources (technical support, web server space, etc.) to develop more than a few eportfolio examples. Our focus turned to developing some eportfolio examples in order to see how students would engage with the development process, how technical support would work, and what an eportfolio, based upon the designed template, would look like when completed.

Eportfolio Examples

Working under the direction of Prof. Jen Riley, three multidisciplinary undergraduate majors in Women's Studies developed electronic portfolios, using the Omni platform, as part of their major capstone projects. The students have give permission for these sites to be shared with the UMass Dartmouth community and UMass system.

Sarah J. Briggs (Multidisciplinary major in Women's Studies & Sociology):
http://www.umassd.edu/eportfolio/wms/u_s1briggs/

> Sarah's eportfolio demonstrates her achievement of the WMS major learning outcomes. At the same time, Sarah's design and technical abilities enabled her to reconfigure the template and to create an introductory page with her picture, as well as a self-portrait video she created for a class.

Sarah commented to Prof. Riley that the eportfolio development process helped her step back and see her undergraduate course work and what she had learned more clearly. Sarah's multidisciplinary major led to a job offer working in domestic violence prevention in Boston, and she showed her eportfolio to the administrator who offered her the position; however, Sarah turned the job offer down in order to continue her police work and study for the LSATS, since her ultimate goal is to attend law school.

Caitlin Hawes (Multidisciplinary major in Women's Studies & English):
http://www.umassd.edu/eportfolio/wms/u_chawes/

Caitlin's eportfolio demonstrates her broad range of study as she pursued a multidisciplinary degree in Women's Studies and English. Caitlin's eportfolio also demonstrates a higher level of technical proficiency since she had successfully completed a course in web development and design. Caitlin understood how to hyperlink from example to example, thus creating a visual picture of how her course work interconnected. This hyperlinking creates a matrix of Caitlin's learning. Caitlin achieved her goal of going to graduate school and will be attending Ohio University in the fall to pursue a M.A. in English with a certificate in Women's Studies.

Angela Todisco (Multidisciplinary major in Women's Studies & Psychology):
http://www.umassd.edu/eportfolio/wms/u_atodisco/

Angela's eportfolio demonstrates her successful completion of her multidisciplinary degree in Women's Studies and Psychology. Angela's eportfolio shows a more linear, basic approach to the design process; however, this approach aptly illustrates her learning process and accomplishments. In addition, Angela chose to scan and upload some of her graded assignments that include instructor comments. She felt that using examples that included both formative and summative feedback more accurately demonstrated her growth as a critical thinker and writer. Angela's eportfolio also includes information under the **experiential learning** link and the **extracurricular activities** link.

Additional Information on Eportfolio Examples:

- These representative student examples focus solely on the academic portion of the eportfolio template.
- Each student was asked to demonstrate her accomplishment of the Women's Studies curriculum goals.
- Students were trained during a one hour training session by a CITS web developer, Stephen Splinter. Steven then provided email and face to face help as issues and needs arose.
- Student technological skills are different. The ability to hyperlink creates an interconnected, web-like eportfolio that illustrates the interconnectedness the learning process. As explained above, the varying levels of student technical expertise creates varying levels of eportfolios in terms of sophistication and interconnections about the learning process.
- All three student examples illustrate how eportfolios create an active learning environment enabled by the students' self-reflection on their learning experiences.

The strength of the eportfolio is that it is not simply a repository for student work; rather, eportfolios provide students with a place to actively engage in the examining their learning processes. Thus, eportfolios, which require reflection upon the learning process itself, provide students with an opportunity to recognize their strengths and weaknesses and how they made improvements, a skill which will help them improve as learners and meaning makers in their adult lives long after they leave the university.

These eportfolios were presented by the students to a representative group of Women's Studies faculty on May 11, 2005. Following the presentation, Dr. Magali Carrera (Instructional Development Team Leader, UMass Dartmouth), asked the students, along with Jen Riley, to present their eportfolios to Brian Douglas (UMassonline), Barbara Macauly (UMassonline), Dr. Richard Panofsky (UMass Dartmouth). This presentation took place on May 17th.

More Student Examples

In addition to the multidisciplinary student examples, under the direction of Prof. Phyllis Currier (Nursing, UMass Dartmouth), several students developed eportfolios following the template established for assessment in the College of Nursing. This template is based up College of Nursing accreditation needs and thus required examples of student work that indicated that skills were met. Thus, the eportfolios for nursing students exist more as repositories of information that demonstrate skills attained, rather than a demonstration of the learning process in action as the WMS multidisciplinary student eportfolio reveal. Please see http://dev.www.umassd.edu/eportfolio/programs.cfm for the College of Nursing template.

For an example of a College of Nursing student eportfolio, please see: http://dev.www.umassd.edu/eportfolio/nursing/ginahill/academicprogram/professionalgoals.cfm **Note:** student identifying materials are not in the eportfolio due to privacy issues for the nursing profession.

Future Eportfolio Issues and Plans

The eportfolio pilot team, in reviewing our progress, determined the following issues and plans:

- Omni Update will not work for a large scale eportfolio project. The program turned out to be difficult to adapt. Students also found the program to be time consuming and difficult to work with when uploading their content.

- A long term goal is for each department to have its own academic program template that includes the department's mission statement and curriculum objectives for students. The academic program link will also include an area for students pursuing minors.

- The template needs to develop a transfer student option for the First Year Experience category. When students transfer to UMass Dartmouth, they should be able to document their first year experiences from their previous

university/college. The pilot group also discussed the need for an option for non-traditional students who may be returning to college after a lengthy absence to be allowed to document their life/work experiences and explain why they have chosen to return to the university.

- The eportfolio project also has to be configured to include students from the Professional and Continuing Education program. Discussion need to be held about how we might best fit PCE students into the eportfolio system.

- The pilot group has also discussed whether or not the Extracurricular Activities and Experiential Learning categories should be directed toward skills building. For example, we asked ourselves if we wanted students to focus on the skills they gained from their extracurricular and experiential learning experiences. Should students be asked to write a reflective statement that identifies how their experiences have developed important life skills such as leadership, team work, social responsibility, communication, and interpersonal skills?

- The resources category for the template needs to be developed. The pilot group believes that links need to be included that direct students to the following areas: Web Student, departmental home pages, the library, Professional and Continuing Education, services on campus, examples of student eportfolios, and more.

Overall Conclusions and Assessment

1. The student examples provide evidence that eportfolios can be the tool for holistic assessment by departments. It's very clear that the eportfolio can provide a viable way to assess a student's achievements in a major and minor.

2. The UMass Dartmouth pilot team created a template that has real possibilities as the student examples demonstrated. However, there are several logistics that will need to be worked out for campus wide use of an eportfolio system. For example: Where/when do you teach students to use the eportfolio?; Who teaches the students the technical skills to use the eportfolio system?; Will we need to require a certain level of computer at the university that students buy when they enter the university?

3. There are also larger technical issues. What eportfolio platform communicates with PeopleSoft and WebCT Vista? Eportfolios will need to be able to "speak" to PeopleSoft and ideally will merge somehow with WebCT Vista. It's not feasible to create different programs with different ids and passwords for a campus. We will need PeopleSoft to communicate with the eportfolio platform so that students may be enrolled in the correct eportfolio template according to their majors and minors. Other questions arise as well here: What happens when a student changes a major in his/her third year? How will the student's work be transferred into the new major's template? How will eportfolios be used for transfer students?

4. Faculty training needs to be addressed. How do you train faculty to incorporate eportfolios into their classes? How do you teach departments how eportfolios can be a useful assessment

tool? How should the eportfolios be assessed and when? In what ways does student technical expertise, which creates varying levels of eportfolios as illustrated by the student examples, affect assessment?

5. Technical support is key. There will be a need for technical support for students. The experience of the pilot students showed that technical support was a necessity. The university will need to consider the cost commitment of funding technical support to service a campus undergraduate population. At the same time, there will be a need for technical support for faculty.

6. In addition to technical support staff, where the eportfolios will be housed needs to be determined. Should each campus have a server devoted solely to eportfolios? Also, research shows that eportfolios and the use of electronic texts is a rapidly expanding field with changes happening daily. Campuses might want to consider having an eportfolio designer and developer to oversee the ongoing eportfolio process.

In conclusion, the next practical step is to fund a larger pilot study and to locate an eportfolio management system that is more effective than Omni Update. To do so, an effective eportfolio management system needs to be purchased for UMass use.

Works Cited

Gathercoal, Paul; Love, Douglas; & McKean, Gerry. "ProfPort Webfolio System: Implementation, Curriculum and Assessment." Paper presented at the 2003 Educause Annual Conference: *Balancing Opportunities, Expectations and Resources.* Accessed 21 February 2004. <http://www.dock.net/gathercoal/profport>

Gathercoal, Paul; Love, Douglas; Bryde, Beverly; & McKean, Gerry. "On Implementing Web-Based Electronic Portfolios." *Educause Quarterly*. 2 (2002): 29-37. Also available online at: <http://www.educause.edu/ir/library/pdf/EQM0224.pdf>

Suggested Online Resources

Batson, Trent. "The Electronic Portfolio Boom: What's it All About?" Available online at: http://www.campus-technology.com/article.asp?id=6984

AAHE's resource site for Electronic Portfolios -- provides useful information if you have time to go look at the research and conversation surrounding this initiative that is taking place nationwide: http://webcenter1.aahe.org/electronicportfolios/index.html

Educause Learning Initiative—a comprehensive site on eportfolios with links to examples: http://www.educause.edu/content.asp?page_id=5524&bhcp=1

Regis College site on eportfolio basics: http://academic.regis.edu/LAAP/eportfolio/basics.htm

Penn State's Eportfolio site -- a gallery with student examples and the site explains the eportfolio concept and value to students. Available online at: http://www.portfolio.psu.edu/

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Budget Expenditure

Stipends (SAT Grant)

Jeannette E. Riley (PI)	$1,500
Phyllis Currier	1,500
Cathy Houser	1,500
Rebecca Hutchinson	1,500
Total:	$6000

Web and Technical Development (Provided by UMass Dartmouth LSIRT)
Steven Splinter $7800

Total Budget $**13,800**

cc: Louis Esposito, Provost, Academic Affairs, UMass Dartmouth
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