

White Paper
E-Portfolios as a tool for student reflection and assessment
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Introduction

Over the last few years, several of the UCIS centers have been looking for ways to more rigorously assess student performance and the learning outcomes of their certificates. At the same time, many of the centers have been considering ways to add formative assessment tools to the certificate program as a way to draw out the competencies of what can be a disjointed learning experience. In formal responses to their assessment programs, both from faculty who have been asked to assess student learning outcomes on the basis of certificate records and from Title VI external evaluation of certificate assessment, several of the centers have felt their previous form of assessment- primarily evaluation of papers designated as capstone papers but not primarily created for certificate assessment- did not adequately fulfill the need to define student learning in the certificate program. Additionally, following research on the importance of formative assessment toward critical reflection of university skills toward student self-regulation, assessment, and ultimately successful articulation of skills based learning, several of the centers have put together a plan to build an e-portfolio system that can serve as a resource for summative and formative assessment.

In this white paper, we will first discuss the current research on blending formative and summative assessment tools. In the next section we will consider current research on the utility of e-portfolios. Following this, we will discuss the plan that the Asian Studies Center, the European Studies Center, and the Global Studies Center have articulated for introducing and assessing student e-portfolios. In this section, we will provide some examples of the portfolios, and explain how student learning outcomes will be addressed. Finally, we will suggest a path for the adoption of e-portfolios alongside other metrics for assessing student learning.

Assessment: Blending formative and summative assessment through e-portfolio tools

In 2006, David Nicol and Debra Macfarlane-Dick (2006) suggested that a thorough rethinking of assessment tools was necessary in higher education, in an effort to help student build their skills as a self-regulated, referential learner. Higher education assessment, the authors argue has long been built on a system of transmission of knowledge and passive learning strategies, which allowed students to learn specific subjects, but did not ask students to reflect on skills and competencies beyond course subject matter. In recent years, however, students and institutions have been tasked with articulating stronger connections between subject competencies and transferrable skills. For this reason, the activities of assessment have shifted from the exclusive domain of faculty and administrators to include student self-assessment and reflection. With this shift in mind it is important to consider assessment tools that blur the lines between summative assessment, often considered as an external assessment of a student or program, and formative assessment, which asks a student to continue reflecting on and building competencies (Gikandi, Morrow, Davis, 2011).

The keys to building tools that both work as summative and formative assessment metrics are defining a clear and well publicized rubric for assessing student-led reflective projects and providing sufficient instruction so that students are able to use assessment tools to reflect on the learning outcomes stated in the rubric (Gikandi, Morrow, Davis, 2011; Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006; Pachler, Daly, Mor, Mellar, 2010; Black and William, 1998; Grant and Dweck, 2003). These kinds of assessment tools that include student reflection and 'post-course' engagement are increasingly necessary for programs, like the certificate, which function across disciplines, and therefore are not necessarily subject to traditional disciplinary assessment methods (Bass 2012). By publicizing a rubric and creating a guided template for students, an e-portfolio as one option for the final project for the certificate, fills the assessment needs both of the summative analytics (these portfolios can be assessed both qualitatively by faculty on the basis of the published rubric and quantitatively through coding student answers to questions and doing center-wide analysis,) and produces a product that synthesizes student learning in key skills areas such as civic engagement, authoritative presentation, reflection, and critical thinking (Bass 2012; Eynon 2009).

E-Portfolios as a tool toward reflecting student's personalized learning pathways

As an assessment tool, e-portfolios, and specifically e-portfolios of the sort we are proposing, are one of the best-regarded tools for creating an "authentic way of developing and assessing student knowledge (Gikandi, Morrow, Davis, 2011, 2343)." Education researchers have described e-portfolios as perhaps the most complete tool for student to reflect upon their learning in a holistic way (Bass 2012, Clark and Eynon, 2009). Personalized learning standards have increasingly argued for a recognition of the value and the connection between learning done in courses and learning done in co-curricular settings, singling out work, clubs, and peer to peer engagement (Donnelly and O'Keeffe, 2013, Bass 2012, Young, 2002). The trend toward understanding the way that students learn and consolidate skills has pushed the field of assessment and education to find ways for students to do structured reflection about the skills they have gained during their university education to help them present these skills in a wider world.

E-portfolios "map competencies across the curriculum (Donnelly and O'Keeffe, 2013, 2)," and make these competencies available to a broader range of shareholders including employers, family, and prospective students, and can be used as one way to reinforce university and unit claims about the skills value of an interdisciplinary or untraditional credential. Scholars have found evidence that e-portfolios, especially e-portfolios that can be found through simple internet searches, are a tool that employers actively seek out and use to help make decisions about interviews (Ward and Moser, 2008). Other scholars have argued that the reflections on skills and competencies that e-portfolios spark help students to better represent their particular strengths in interview settings (Bass and Eynon, 2009; Xuesong, Offman, and Ractham 2007; Clark and Eynon, 2009). E-portfolios have become a widely used tool, not just for US higher education, but in an internationalized system, with major universities across the world adopting an e-portfolio model (Clark and Eynon, 2009).

Asian Studies, European Studies, and Global Studies: E-portfolios for advising, assessment, and student success

Asian Studies, European Studies, and Global Studies, have each (separately at first and then working together), decided that an e-portfolio fits into their individual center's current credential curriculum. For the three centers, the e-portfolio fills two distinct roles, first it requires students to reflect and build on the meaning of their certificate by asking students to actively tie together course work, co-curricular engagement, study abroad, and work experience, and secondly it creates a document that was built specifically for the certificate and can be assessed against a rubric designed to assess the e-portfolio. For students who are not working on a capstone project designed specifically for the certificate, we have felt that having a dedicated product meant to draw the disparate thread of the certificate together is invaluable.

Students putting together their e-portfolio will have the opportunity to write and reflect on a number of areas, reflected in the structure of the templates.

Figure 1: (please see link for complete site in Appendix)

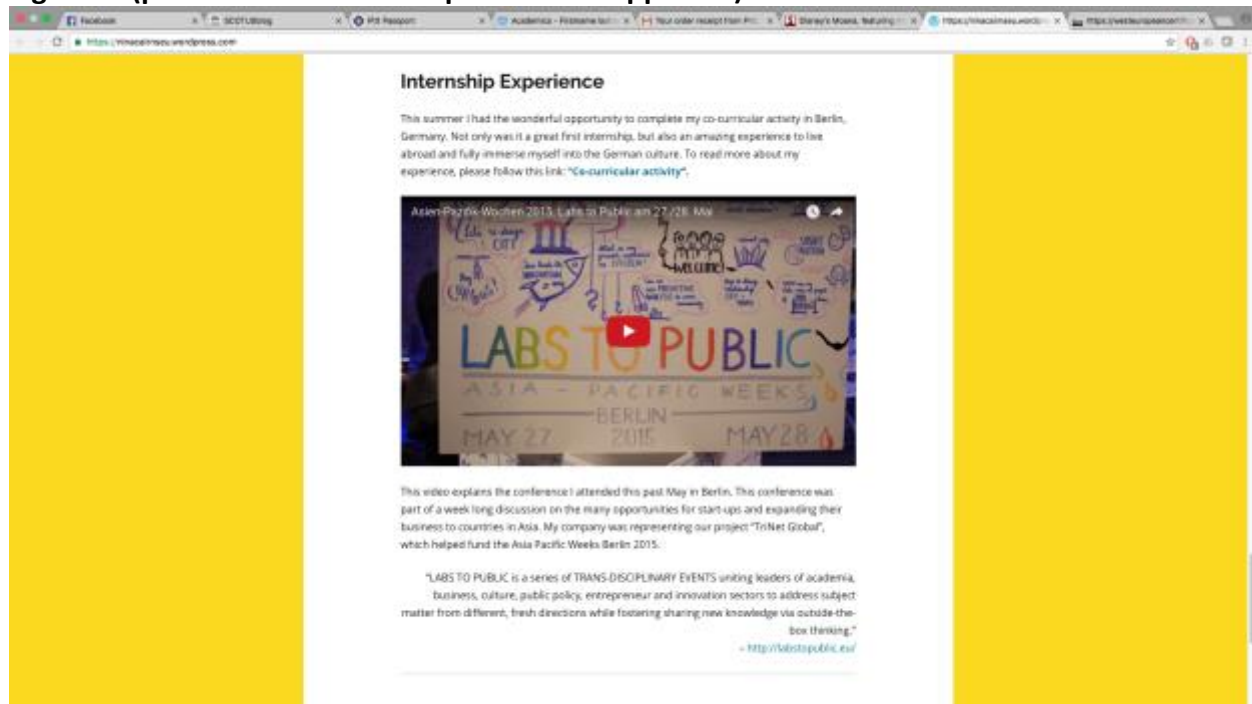


As we were developing the e-portfolio project in Asian studies, we decided that we needed a specific and directed template for students to log in to, to guide a student to reflect carefully about the certificate and co-curricular achievements. The guided template would also allow an advisor to highlight specific rubric points for qualitative assessment of the e-portfolio separately and holistically. As you can see from figure 1, students are guided from a home page, which we use as an introduction to the student, to reflections on academics, engagement, study abroad, resume and contact pages. After doing some research on the available platforms,

Asian studies, working with CIDDE, decided to build a multi-site that would allow students to log-in to a wordpress like platform but with limited template choices. Students would choose the template for their certificate, and follow directions to reflect on their certificate. Students will own their sites and be able to continue to develop them even after they leave Pitt. The guided template will allow students to personalize the e-portfolio as desired. This kind of guided reflection will push students to speak to skills and competencies that we are concerned about with a template that allows us to make the base template uniform among the population.

As with any student-guided document, the kind of work that students put in to the e-portfolio will determine how useful the object is for student-regulated learning.

Figure 2: (please see link for complete site in Appendix)



In the above screen shot from the global studies e-portfolio, we can see how the student used video to define their internship within their co-curricular experience. The Global Studies e-portfolio example focuses on how building reflections on internships, social engagement, and work can be both in terms of written essays and visual and multimedia cues. Clark and Eynon (2009) have argued that the addition of multimedia and visual cues can help student to draw what they see as 'fun' experiences to more formal education as sites where skills were consolidated. By reflecting about a variety of experiences in a variety of ways, students better reflect their skills, and we can better assess the holistic importance of certificates in our students' lives.

The e-portfolios can also be an ongoing project begun at the time the student begins their certificate work, or built and completed as a student is finishing their certificate. For student's who build and revise their portfolio over time, the continual reflection helps to define places in

their academic path that have been underdeveloped, and for those putting together the portfolio after the fact, writing the narrative can help remind them of the work they put in. Indeed, the student who put together the second European Studies e-portfolio (figure 4), mentioned that “I didn’t realize everything I had done,” until he completed reflecting on it. Below, you will see two examples from the e-portfolios that European studies has built to show how a student could build an e-portfolio over time to reflect their changes in interests and ideas (Figure 3). The longitudinal nature of this e-portfolio method would encourage a student to reflect on their personal academic and co-curricular path when they complete the project (Figure 4).

Figure 3: (please see link for complete site in Appendix)

Coursework



So far in the EU Studies Certificate, I have completed two non-language courses. In the fall term of my freshman year, as part of the Europe and the Modern World Academic Community, I completed **HIST 0101: Western Civilizations 2**. I thoroughly enjoyed the course, as professor Seymour Drescher made each lecture interesting and entertaining. From the Scientific Revolution to the Cold War, his lectures instilled a new and deeper understanding of each topic in my mind. Readings from Hobbes, Nietzsche, Darwin, Locke, Tocqueville, Marx, Adam Smith, Thomas Paine, Mill, Conrad and Kennan gave me a different perspective on various different events and how they affected the people of Western Europe from the middle of the 18th century until the middle of the 20th century.

As part of the course, I wrote an essay juxtaposing the German concentration camps and the Soviet gulags. In this, I described how these camps “were a betrayal of western civilization as a whole”; and how “these time periods were a complete dismissal of liberalism itself”.

[Gulag Archipelago and German Forced Labor Camps](#)

Figure 4: (please see link for complete site in Appendix)

Facebook | SEARCH | My Passport | Academic - Personal | Your other recent files | Myri's Menu, Settings | FRCS/FRCSRESOURCES | FRCS/FRCSRESOURCES

https://www.europeancertificate2019/ryankearney@fresno.com

Ryan Kearney's portfolio for the West European Studies Certificate

When I began my studies at the University of Pittsburgh, I knew I wanted to pursue a degree in history and anthropology. Specifically, I was fascinated by European history and the tragedy of the Holocaust. However, I wasn't sure exactly how to structure my studies or what my focus.


Thankfully, after discussing the possibilities with my freshman adviser and looking into my options, I became acquainted with the University Center for International Studies (UCIS). In particular, I learned about their certificate programs and how they helped students to organize their studies around their interests.

With the goal of working in the Holocaust Museum or a comparable cultural organization, I decided that the West European Studies Certificate would be the perfect program to strengthen and compliment my majors. Not only was there clear overlap with my interest in European history, but the West European Certificate also required students to craft their own theme. Given my interest in the Holocaust, I decided to pursue a German Studies theme. This led me to take courses from a wide breadth of disciplines, including German, Political Science, History, History of Art and Architecture, and Literature.

Coursework

My first course for the West European Studies Certificate was HIST 1131: Modern Germany 1808 – 1948. This course was important, as it offered a political and cultural overview of German history.


Modern Germany (1808 – 1948) was a lecture course on German history from the foundation of the North German Federation to the end of the Second World War. Throughout the course, many aspects of German history were discussed, such as the continuing political changes, the evolution of society through time and the changing cultural and intellectual dynamics. Notably, we examined the history of the five Germanies in this period and their international context: Imperial Germany (1871-1918), Weimar Republic (1919-1933), Nazi Germany (1933-1945), German Democratic Republic (1949-1990) and the Federal Republic of Germany (1949) to present. Throughout the course, we worked with primary sources that served as a key component of the course. These ranged from political speeches, treaties, secret reports, letters and diaries to representations of the past and present in paintings, novels, movies and documentaries.



We were required to compose four short essays that focused on four different time periods of German history. One such essay was a review essay which critically reviewed a particular state session through the engagement with reading assignments, the class lecture and in class discussion.

The first essay examined the class lecture of A Society of Lackeys. This particular class focused on Wilhelminian Germany, with discussions on the constitution of the newly unified Germany in 1871, the power of the Chancellor and the extent of democratic power, as well as Wilhelminian society.

HIST 1131 – A Society of Lackeys



Developing an e-portfolio as one option for UCIS assessment

The three center's different approaches to the project of creating e-portfolios reflect just three ways to do the work of student reflection as part of the UCIS certificates. We all want to stress that we believe that effective reflection and assessment tools are myriad as long as expectations for such documents are well publicized and advising clear about expectations for students. Indeed, we see the e-portfolio as a leveling object for center wide assessment. Because our three centers do not have a capstone course (or have a capstone course in a limited way in the case of the European Union center), we felt that an e-portfolio would allow our students to produce a document defining the meaning of their certificate specifically tailored to the certificate in question.

We understand the need for generalized assessment, but by comparing each center to its own benchmark and using a similar rubric for assessing each center's product, we believe that each center could be aggregated into general UCIS data. Indeed because of the different requirements, populations, funding sources, and sizes of the certificate programs having the same set of objects assessed for each certificate could be ineffectual in adequately assessing the certificate program's status in regard to student learning outcomes.

In each of our three programs, we believe that the e-portfolio represents the best and most useful way for our students to synthesize and reflect on their certificate experience holistically and for us to do a blended formative and summative assessment. We view the e-portfolio as a tool for advising, assessment, recruitment, and professional development. We look forward to developing a rubric that suits each center's student learning objectives well, and to revisiting the e-portfolio template and directions in the light of the completed assessment rubric.

Appendix:

Asian Studies Center template site: <http://rookkoepsel.weebly.com/>

Global Studies Center template site: <http://gscpitt.weebly.com/>

European Studies Center template site (incomplete): <https://ninacairnseu.wordpress.com/>

European Studies Center template site (complete):

<https://westeuropeancertificate2015rkearney.wordpress.com/>

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