ePortfolios: Engaging Learners, Integrating Learning

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“Just a bunch of courses”

“So you get here and they start asking you, ‘What do you...want to major in? ...what courses [do] you want to take?’ and you get the impression that’s what it’s all about – courses and majors. So, you take the courses. You get your card punched. You try a little this and a little that. Then comes GRADUATION. And you wake up and you look at this bunch of courses and then it hits you: They don’t add up to anything. It’s just a bunch of courses. It doesn’t mean a thing.”
What is an ePortfolio?

➤ “Student portfolios can be succinctly defined as collections of work selected from a larger archive of work, upon which the student has reflected.” (Yancey, 2001)

➤ “A selection of purposefully organized digital artifacts that supports learning, reflection, and self-presentation, as well as documentation and assessment of student learning over time and across varied learning experiences.” (IUPUI definition)
Welcome to my page

I am David Jonathan Gonzalez: writer, traveler, and student of life.
What are ePortfolios good for?

- Teaching & Learning
- Accountability & Assessment
- Self-Representation & Identity Development
What are High-Impact Practices?

Teaching and learning practices that engage students, with demonstrated positive impact on completion and academic achievement:

- First Year Experiences
- Common Intellectual Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Writing-Intensive Courses
- Capstone Courses or Projects
- Undergraduate Research
- Service & Community-Based Learning
- Diversity & Global Learning
- Internships
- Collaborative Projects
What makes their impact high?

- High performance expectations
- Significant investment of effort over extended time
- Substantive interactions with faculty and peers
- Experience with diversity
- Frequent, timely, and constructive feedback
- Structured opportunities to reflect and integrate
- Discover relevance through application of learning
- Public demonstration of learning
Outcomes

- High degree of correlation between student participation in these practices and students’ NSSE self-reported gains of key outcomes of high-quality learning
- Extra benefit for students in groups that have often struggled in higher education
The Context of IUPUI

- Blended campus founded 1969 with a mission to raise educational attainment in city, region, and state
- Focus on innovative approaches to teaching and learning
- Urban health sciences research university
- 20+ schools; 200+ degree programs; multiple disciplinary/academic cultures and priorities
- 30,000+ students
IUPUI students today

- Largely first-generation, reflecting low educational attainment statewide
- 25 percent minority (Indianapolis)
- 40 percent Pell-eligible
- More than 90 percent commuter
- More than 50 percent work part- or full-time
IUPUI and HIPs

Early adopter of

- First-Year Experiences and learning communities (early ‘90s)
- Capstone experiences (’80s–’90s)
- Undergraduate research (early ’90s)
- Service learning (’93)
- RISE (research, international, service, experiential) Initiative (2006)
IUPUI ePortfolio Initiative

ePortfolio Initiative (2000):

- Need to be strategic about scaling up
- Program-by-program adoption and use
- Purposeful alignment with institutional priorities and strategic plans, including advocacy and support for adoption of ePortfolios in HIPs (which help us cross boundaries of programs and schools)
Who are “New Majority students”?

- For many of us, not—or not all—new; newness is in the proportion

- Term is more positive, rather than focusing attention on what the students lack, and emphasizes that they should no longer be dismissed as peripheral

- Doesn’t disallow attention to particular traditionally underserved communities
Research from AAC&U

See especially:

- Five High-Impact Practices: Research on Learning Outcomes, Completion, and Quality, Brownell and Swaner, 2010
- Assessing Underserved Students’ Engagement in High-Impact Practices, Finlay and McNair, 2013

There is evidence that a combination of HIPS may lead to even stronger outcomes among New Majority students, but fewer New Majority students take advantage of such opportunities.
Focus groups

Barriers:
- limited time and money (including opportunity cost)
- competing priorities
- inadequate social support networks
- limited understanding of why such learning experiences are important
HIPS and the new majority at IUPUI

Example: Electronic Personal Development Plan (ePDP) reinforces First Year Experience for all, but especially for our larger numbers of uncertain or uncommitted entering students (first-generation, minority, or people who have been told by schools, family, and/or friends that they aren’t “college material”)

"The questions I answered deepened my understanding of myself and helped me understand how my strengths relate to my career choice. My ePortfolio enhanced my motivation to succeed at IUPUI." -- Grant Gish, 2015
Example: Large numbers of students who cannot afford extended study abroad can participate more easily in “alternative break” programs, shorter international experiences, or other focused exposures to diverse cultures.
"I am proud not only of the portfolio itself, but of the knowledge, skills, and experience represented in its contents. I enjoy showing it to professors, coworkers, and friends and family, but I also look through it from time to time to remind myself of all the amazing things I’ve been a part of in three short years at IUPUI.” – Kamilah Walters, IUPUI student, 2015
ePortfolio pedagogy

- Constructivist approach to knowledge
- Integrative learning, “sense-making”
- Reflection/metacognition
- Social pedagogy
- Student engagement, ownership, agency
- Identity development
Making the most of HIPs

ePortfolios are frequently paired with HIPs to structure and amplify activities and behaviors that make HIPs high-impact

- Effort sustained over a period of time
- Structured opportunities to reflect, apply, and integrate
- Peer and faculty feedback
- Public demonstration of learning
Making the most of HIPs

“High Impact Practices resonate with the deeper chords of ePortfolio pedagogy and practice — the ways that ePortfolio helps students grow and change not just as students, but to become more aware of who they are as whole persons and how their curricular, co-curricular and lived experiences help shape their identity.” (Eynon and Gambino, 2016)

- Focus on both academic and personal development
- Opportunity to integrate multiple HIPs as students move through their education
ePortfolios as integrative pedagogy

“One essential quality that makes high-impact practices high impact...is that they help students find a sense of purpose in their learning.” Integrative social pedagogies help students find “new meaning in their learning by connecting and reframing.” (Randy Bass, 2013)
Engaged learner, integrated learning

"Building an ePortfolio has allowed me to go back and think about my experiences at IUPUI. This has led me to find purpose in everything I have done or am still doing. Listing these skills along with interesting thoughts and life-lessons has helped me build something that displays who I am and allows me to express myself with no word-limits."

-- Anjali Prakash, 2015
A meta-high-impact practice?

A high-impact practice that

- Makes other high-impact practices more high-impact
- Offers insight into the experience and impact of HIPs
“Islam Y107.doc exemplifies my ability to be a critical thinker because I had to put forth significant effort to separate my emotion from the facts and research. This skill was one of the first skills taught to me in college. I believe that objectivity and rationality are at the core of every serious student—this paper shows me that I can be a serious student. **Every class that I have taken in political science, English, and philosophy has emphasized the importance of looking past the surface of things.** Additionally, my education in the liberal arts has taught me that there is much more to things than what my emotions tell me there are. There is an entire world of people out there, each person possessing a uniqueness of mind and emotional experience. There are several cultures and societies that need to be taken into consideration before my own. My emotions are only central to my own experiences, and my critical thinking skills allow me to leap outside of my own experiences.”
Your turn

- How might ePortfolios help all of your students, especially New Majority students, engage more deeply in learning and integrate their learning?

- Do you have an example from your campus?

- What else could you be doing with ePortfolios and HIPs that you’re not doing yet?
Useful Resources

- Catalyst website from Connect to Learning project: [http://c2l.mcnrc.org](http://c2l.mcnrc.org) (plus forthcoming book from Stylus)


- Conferences: AAC&U, AAEEBL, Assessment Institute at IUPUI, and—increasingly—disciplinary conferences
Be in touch!

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