

University of Massachusetts Boston ePortfolio Pilot Project 06-07–Final Report

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ePortfolio Interim Report and ePortfolio Final Summary Report:
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Faculty Course/Program ePortfolio Pilot Project Final Summary Reports:
Mary Brady, Graduate College of Education; Oscar Gutierrez, College of Management; Mark Pawlak, Academic Support Programs (General Education); Dick Cluster, University Honors Program

ITePortfolio Pilot Project Summary Report:
Christian Pulver, Mary Simone, Instructional Technology

ePortfolio Student Survey and Summary Data:
Cynthia Jahn, Christian Pulver and Mary Simone

PowerPoint Files:
Cynthia Jahn, Christian Pulver, Mary Brady, Basye Hendrix, Oscar Gutierrez

ePortfolio Project Management Report :
Cynthia Jahn, Mary Simone, Christian Pulver

ePortfolio Accessibility Report:
Charlotte Corbett

ePortfolio Pilot Program Participants:
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ePortfolio Pilot Project Final Summary Report¹

Introduction

The University of Massachusetts Boston ePortfolio Pilot Project was designed to provide faculty, staff and students participants from the Graduate College of Education, the College of Management, Faculty Council General Education Committee, and the University Honors Program with an opportunity to develop ePortfolios for the assessment of student learning through the use of Open Source Portfolio (OSP) software, with server, support and initial training from rSmart. Additional training, development and support was provided by UMass IT staff. This report will provide an overview of project goals, steps taken to address the goals, future plans, and project conclusions and recommendations.

Project Goals

The goals of the ePortfolio pilot project were to:

1. Create a working ePortfolio for the UMass Boston Campus built on features identified by members of the ePortfolio group.
2. Identify technology and academic support needs for a systematic use of ePortfolios on Campus.
3. Utilize customized features of the OSP portfolio to enable students and faculty to carry out activities that demonstrate optimal student learning.
4. Disseminate project results through campus and cross campus presentations and reports.

Steps taken to address the project goals included a) ePortfolio course/program development and faculty training (b) ePortfolio implementation, faculty and student support, and student training (c) ePortfolio and learning assessment (d) ePortfolio tools-comparative analysis and (e) dissemination of findings.

- a) ePortfolio course/program development, faculty training

The first phase of the grant, Summer 06, focused on faculty training and ePortfolio development. Working with rSmart in workshops and through individual consultation, program staff and faculty identified ePortfolio objectives and created customized ePortfolio for each program area (See Appendix A, Interim Report, for additional details).

- b) ePortfolio implementation, faculty and student “help” support, and student training (see Appendix A, Interim Report & Interim Faculty Reports, for a summary of activities that took place during fall period).

The ePortfolio implementation process continued in spring 07 with new courses, programs, and students participating from the Graduate College of Education, the College of Management and General Education. In addition, continued examination of the eportfolio tool for future use was conducted by University Honors Program and General Education Steering Committee faculty and staff. rSmart’s role during spring semester was to provide server support and technical assistance; UMass Boston provided ongoing IT support including ePortfolio development, online help, and student training (see Appendix B, ITePortfolio Pilot Project Summary Report).

c) ePortfolio assessment:

Assessment efforts were formative and focused on eportfolio tool analysis and implementation issues. The assessment of student learning through the use of ePortfolio was addressed internally by faculty or program directors within courses or programs.

1. Formative assessment strategies were employed to obtain feedback from faculty on eportfolio requirements. Data was collected from faculty and program coordinators on ePortfolio requirements for meeting their program and/or course objectives. In Fall 05, prior to the grant period, faculty were asked to respond open ended questions to help guide eportfolio selection. Prior to meeting with vendors (January 06 and Spring 07), faculty and program staff, again, provided feedback on eportfolio requirements, to ensure that specific questions about eportfolio functionality were addressed by vendors during demonstrations. This iterative method of obtaining faculty input resulted in further clarification of eportfolio requirements. Faculty made specific connections between the eportfolio tool functions and curricular requirements of the course and/or program when they had actual experience using an eportfolio tool (See Appendix H: eportfolio requirements).

2. Monthly faculty meetings provided faculty with opportunities to discuss eportfolio issues with colleagues. The meetings also served as focus groups for assessment of efforts (survey and presentation development), IT feedback and discussion of experiences.

3. Faculty provided a summary interim report mid year. Faculty responded to open ended questions to provide information about eportfolio use, issues and concerns, and plans for the spring semester. Each faculty member or Program Director who participated in the spring submitted a faculty summary final report, based on similar questions plus questions concerning ePortfolio tool comparative analysis (see Appendix A, Interim Faculty Reports and Appendix C, Faculty Course/Program ePortfolio Pilot Project Final Summary Reports).

4. The student survey, developed by faculty and staff during fall semester was administered online at the end of fall and spring semesters. The purpose of the survey was to obtain feedback from students on their use of the eportfolio. A sample of the Student Questionnaire & Student Survey summary results on features used, ease of use, and training satisfaction may be viewed in Appendix D, ePortfolio Student Survey and Summary Data.

5. ePortfolio Accessibility study was conducted by Charlotte Corbett and a report was submitted in January 07 (See Appendix E, ePortfolio Accessibility Report)

6. Institution-Administrative requirements—Assessment of IT and faculty/IT coordination.

Throughout the project, a detailed list of activities, including start and end dates, were recorded and incorporated into a Microsoft Project Management Report, Appendix F. This report may be used to inform staff and resource requirements for continued eportfolio or other instructional technology initiatives.

d) ePortfolio tools: Comparative Analysis

In January, Blackboard Vista 4 eportfolio became available for testing and members of the ePortfolio group were invited by Brian Douglas, UMass Online, and Apurva Mehta, UMB IT, to participate in this process. Testing was done and comparisons made between OSP ePortfolio and Blackboard Vista 4 ePortfolio. As participating faculty and program administrators were familiar with actual ePortfolio use and application to the programs/courses, this was an excellent opportunity to explore eportfolio tool options for future use. However, it did require additional IT and administrative support. (For a description of activities and participant involvement, see Appendix B, the ITePortfolio Pilot Project Summary Report, and Appendix F, the ePortfolio Project Management Report.)

e) Dissemination of Findings

Dissemination of findings and experiences took place at three conferences: the UMB CIT conference, Jan 07, the SAT IT Conference, April 07 and the UMB Educational Technology Conference, May, 07. (See Appendix G, Conference PowerPoint Files and Snapshots)

Conclusions and Recommendations²:

Results of the UMB ePortfolio pilot suggest that ePortfolio tool selection and implementation may not be easily defined by a single purpose. A comparison of ePortfolio efforts in the UMB pilot clearly shows a wide range of objectives for student, course, and program based ePortfolio use and efforts must continue to address these objectives. Continued ePortfolio work should focus on the following areas: the effective use of eportfolios in student learning, a systematic analysis and assessment of eportfolio tools, and the development of a supporting infrastructure.

Specific recommendations:

1. Examine the impact of ePortfolio functions on student learning and student self assessment, as well as faculty/program assessment and evaluation of students work and curriculum. While ePortfolio use may not be tool dependent (i.e., faculty can do workarounds with tools), tool functions may impact learning processes and outcomes. A number of questions may be asked related to the effects of tool function on assessment issues. For example, if the reflection piece is not integrated with artifacts, will students have more difficulty developing reflection capabilities or incorporating reflection into ePortfolio work? Also, will the location of feedback features within the ePortfolio tool impact student, faculty and program options for assessment and evaluation? If an external feedback function is not integrated into the reflection process, will submission at the completion of a portfolio be the most common choice, rather than submission of materials during development? Conversely, if the external feedback function is included within the reflection process, will it prompt the student to take an opportunity to submit work for review (external formative assessment) prior to final submission? Also, consider student metacognitive capabilities that may be influenced by the design of tool functions. What impact does ongoing reflection have on the development of self assessment capabilities? Will faculty/programs have a system that will encourage iterative assessment and feedback? Finally, if reflection is not encouraged, does the ePortfolio become an organized repository with summative assessment features?

2. Work towards implementation of an ePortfolio platform that promotes student learning assessment throughout a student's university career - Unlike the current course based LMS, the ePortfolio will need to be designed to provide students, faculty, programs and university administration with the opportunity for ongoing learning assessment related to course, program, curricular requirements, and co-curricular activities. As such, the eportfolio must provide a student with the ability to use the ePortfolio within a course or program, or multiple programs over, minimally, the duration of their university experience, with eportfolio portability and migration functionality for continued use. The challenges inherent in this process must be addressed. IT administration of a campus wide program will require that access will not be based solely on course participation (as is the standard for the LMS) but will be available to all registered or active students. Providing a single login username and password for online academic and co-curricular programs will simplify and encourage student use. In addition, student eportfolios will need to be maintained during semesters students are not enrolled but are participating in internship, semester abroad experiences, or other programs.
3. Provide a series of opportunities for ePortfolio tool review and assessment by faculty, students and program administrators As faculty and students continue to work with ePortfolios and develop course and or program specific functions, they will be in a position to provide IT with more detailed information relating tool use to curricular needs. This process will promote optimal tool selection and development.
4. Select a tool that meets the requirements of different student populations (e.g., graduate undergraduate), diverse programs (e.g., College of Management, Graduate College of Education) and different levels of participation (student, course, program, and institution). The optimal ePortfolio tool must be robust, offering extensive functionality and flexibility. This functionality will best meet needs if a variety of templates can be developed. In the ePortfolio pilot, ePortfolio template designs were restrictive, as we were relying on consultants for development and contractual limitations. While Internal IT staff participation in development was available for the small group of participants in this study, an ePortfolio program on a larger scale would require additional resources.
5. Identify and provide ongoing IT and Instructional Support Student, faculty and program ePortfolio support by both IT and administrative and professional staff support will need to be ongoing and requirements periodically reassessed. In addition to IT training, faculty and students will require assistance in identifying ways to utilize ePortfolios effectively; i.e., identify ePortfolio functions and features that will facilitate the development of specific objectives and require support in identifying and using functions and features of other software tools that best meet additional objectives.

6. Provide ongoing development of an infrastructure to support ePortfolios
Institutional assessment and identification of essential resources for successfully integrating ePortfolios into academic and co-curricular programs in the university is a challenging process and will continue to be so beyond the pilot. Building an infrastructure to support ePortfolios is essential in terms of administrative, IT, program, faculty and student support and commitment. An example of a call for administrative commitment to ePortfolio implementation at UMB was included in the 07 final report of the Academics Sub-Committee for the UMB Strategic Plan. This report cites ePortfolio projects as a way to “serve both as an efficient means of students outcomes assessment (one tied more directly to the General Education curriculum) and a means of providing data for course or program assessment. “ (Report of the Academics SubCommittee, http://www.umb.edu/strategic_plan/documents/Academics_Sub-Committee_Final_Report.pdf, p. 14)

¹ This summary report is based on information from the UMB IT and faculty reports, survey analyses, faculty meetings, IT Meetings, Presentations, and the project management report. Documents noted within the text may be viewed in the attached appendices.

² See Appendix C, Faculty Course/Program ePortfolio Pilot Project Summary Reports, for individual faculty and program conclusions and recommendations.