

Portfolio in the National-Calibre College:
Electronic Portfolio for Learner Engagement, Competency
Acquisition, and Curricular Assessment

Analysis and Recommendations

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Portfolio in the National-Calibre College: Electronic Portfolio for Learner Engagement, Competency Acquisition, and Curricular Assessment

Analysis and Recommendations

Overview: This document presents the final subject analysis and recommendations of the author, Stephen Parsons, following a four-month professional development leave funded by NSCC's Organizational Learning division and dedicated to research on ePortfolio implementation strategies. The research supporting this analysis can be found on the supporting research website currently housed at <http://24.222.53.223> and additional documentation referenced in the bibliography on that site. A full document encapsulating all of the material on the site, the bibliographies and appendices of supporting material will be published shortly.

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Methodology: The research undertaken includes a substantial literature review, interviews with stakeholders within and external to the college, and attendance at a major conference on ePortfolio at LaGuardia Community College in New York – supplementing the author's personal interest and study of ePortfolio over the past seven years.

Format: The nature of the research – involving as it has: face-to-face conversations; observations; and links to expert documentation – is best captured in a multimedia format. Therefore the website is seen as an ideal tool for development and archival of the material. For future publication, the content of the site will be collected into a paper document and e-book accompanied by a CD-ROM containing the various multimedia artifacts.

This document presents the analysis and recommendations in the form of a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats), discussion of options and consultant recommendations. Point form is used for brevity while the website, e-Book and multimedia presentation offer a more detailed analysis.

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SWOT – the following strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats are directed to *the potential for integration of ePortfolio into NSCC teaching and learning practice.*

Strengths

The strengths of NSCC relating to the potential for ePortfolio implementation include:

- portfolio – well grounded educational pedagogy at NSCC
- some pockets of excellence in portfolio practice
- brand – “*Canada’s Portfolio College*”
- portfolio is a strategic driver at the institution
- strong dedication to organizational learning in the institution
- pockets of excellence in teaching and learning (CCEDP, Great Teachers, etc.)
- some existing related initiatives
 - CCEDP Portfolio course
 - CCEDP Applying Educational Technologies course
 - Upcoming Launch’n’Learn technology “café”
 - Faculty College Learning Portfolio
 - Educational Technologies Framework Committee
 - Recognizing Prior Learning (RPL)
- technically advanced (largely Microsoft based) networks and information services
- institution is moderately innovative
- evidence of evolving competency-based systems, processes and curriculum
- quality systems and processes for technology experimentation, transition, production in development
- good technical support for Information Systems
- developing focus on quality in curriculum/ teaching and learning
- strategic focus on accountability
- strong support for ePortfolio voiced by key constituents including faculty, information services staff, partners (e.g. PLA Centre)

Weaknesses

Weaknesses of the institution relating to potential implementation of portfolio include:

- numerous high-priority items competing for resources
- lack of awareness of the features and benefits of robust ePortfolio systems
- limited practice in application of technology to learning and portfolio (beyond digitizing of artifacts)
- limited practice in using IT for decision-making support (and connection to educational technologies)
- some evidence of technophobic attitudes as applied to academic “line-of-business” functions
- lack of a “Centre” for teaching and learning, educational technology, or portfolio
- little collected/distributable evidence of good reflective practice in current portfolio learning
- few tools to support faculty and learners in applying reflective/portfolio practice
- inconsistency in practice of portfolio-based teaching and learning

Opportunities

The potential implementation of ePortfolio at NSCC offers the following opportunities:

- processes built around a system (automated communication/workflow support, built in reflection/blog, etc.) can help to get teachers/learners *beyond the artifact*
- presents a method of tracking competencies for faculty and staff
- presents a method of tracking student/program competencies
- offers support to faculty and learners in structured portfolio practice
- allows accessibility of portfolio 24x7x365 to broad and/or targeted audiences
- supports interactions between faculty and learners on their own time
- collection of a body of evidence of best practices in portfolio teaching and learning offers guidance to faculty and learners
- aggregate data can be used to help isolate good practice as well as pointing out areas requiring attention
- aggregate and individual evidence supports accountability, institutional evaluation
- provides evidence to support interactions with external stakeholders (e.g. PACs, employers, accrediting bodies)
- engaging technology encourages lifelong learning and “teaches” information literacy - by doing
- offers a better format for collecting and presenting non-paper/ multimedia artifacts
- develops consistency in portfolio assessment and teaching/ learning practice
- provides portability of data from institution to institution and beyond – into the workplace
- supports modern experiential learning methods such as problem-based learning

Threats

Several threats exist that must be addressed in implementation strategies and decisions:

- lack of institutional commitment could compromise opportunities
 - success requires dedicated staffing and effort
 - technophobic resistance
- lack of planning/ too much planning can equally challenge achievement of goals. Minimally, project planning must include
 - plan for total costs of ownership, including technical support
 - plan for faculty PD
 - plan for change management, cultural change
 - plan for communication strategy
 - plan for technology transfer/ transition
- lack of clarity on objectives can lead to poor selection and implementation of solutions
 - too narrow or broad a scope
 - too many agendas
- legislation (e.g. Bill 19 – housing of personal data) may limit use/inclusion of web 2.0 (participative) technologies like Facebook, MySpace, blogging tools
- security and confidentiality of information is a critical aspect – if users don’t feel that privacy of their information is under their control, they will be reticent

Options:

The following are four optional approaches to potential implementation of ePortfolio at NSCC (full details/ rationale available in research publication):

1. Full-scale roll-out to general student population (either optional or mandatory participation)
2. Partial roll-out to a specific learner audience (e.g. a particular school or program)
3. Pilot to selected internal audience (e.g. Faculty Learning College Portfolio, LEAP)
4. Status Quo – delay or shelve implementation/ conduct additional research

Recommendations:

As Canada's Portfolio College, NSCC is now moving to implement the vision of portfolio learning in the creation of a National-Calibre College – one that will guarantee that NSCC learners will “*blend learning, community service, and work in ways that put them at the innovative edge of the global economy, where the world places a premium on knowledge, imagination, and skill: in essence, education without boundaries*”. To continue to promote a brand like “*Canada's Portfolio College*” NSCC will have to once more show its innovation and leadership in education. The most recent Strategic Plan is infused with discussion about how portfolio will contribute to that effort. There is no doubt that leading Canada in portfolio learning in the 21st century will mean leading it with ePortfolio.

1. **Pilot Implementation:** All of those interviewed who offered opinions on an approach to implementation agreed that a pilot should be struck with a selected internal audience – preferably faculty – whose support will be among the most critical factors in making ePortfolio work on a broader basis to the learner population. This group could be supplemented by a small invitational volunteer group of students who are comfortable with technology and digital portfolio artifact production (such as Applied Arts and IT students). Recommended strategies include:
 - a. Commitment to a pilot within the next 6-12 months
 - b. Connected to an ongoing faculty PD initiative such as FLCP
 - c. Invited student group to get better metrics and qualitative results
 - d. Dedicated PMO – probably centered in Organizational Learning
 - e. Standards based application that minimizes technical implementation support (Windows-based, SharePoint or PeopleSoft friendly)
 - f. Adequate budget to handle initial server hardware, software, storage, technical support
2. **Sponsorship:** This is an academic project, but one with broad reach. The most likely sponsorship scenario is a joint sponsorship of Organizational Learning and a School (Applied Arts & New Media, most natural fit). Research funding opportunities exist from a number of sources. In particular the following list presents some funding and support opportunities:

- a. **CANARIE** – Canada's advanced Internet development organization (CANARIE Inc.) maintains a focus on advanced network operations that might be attracted to some of the more challenging aspects of ePortfolio, including standards, storage, and digital validation.
 - b. **ALKC/CCL** – The Canadian Council on Learning and its Atlantic centre for excellence “The Adult Learning Knowledge Centre” has a current call for projects that would be a very good fit with the goals of the recommended project.
 - c. **NSERC** – The College and Community Innovation fund of NSERC will have three competitions in 2008 and may offer an opportunity to partner with a vendor or developer of PLA and skills mobility technologies and processes.
 - d. **ITAC** – The Information Technology Association of Canada has just announced a new research funding program that could be a strong fit with the potential of ePortfolio to address IT worker mobility
 - e. **Microsoft** – Microsoft has recently offered pilot funding for development towards its new Educational Gateway – including ePortfolio. They also have a number of programs focused on the educational marketplace. Regional centres may have specific target funding.
 - f. **GERN** – The Government Education Research Network, a division of the Canadian Council of Ministers of Education supports research on education at all levels.
 - g. **OLT** – Service Canada’s Office of Learning Technologies office receives and approves grants on educational research supporting a number of key strategies. In particular current focus is on academic mobility and there are three current programs focusing on: International Mobility; North American Mobility; and Special Initiatives. The call for proposals for 2008 is closed, but a 2009 call is anticipated by the Fall of 2008.
 - h. **ACCC/AUCC** – Both the ACCC and AUCC can be called on for guidance, collaborative partnerships and research support. Several grant and support programs exist aimed at collaboration between institutions
3. **Steering Committee:** All of the evidence collected from successful implementations in other colleges suggested a broad steering committee composed of Academic and Student Services; learners; faculty; academic chairs; technical and information services staff.
- a. Connect activity to existing processes and frameworks such as Academic Technologies framework
 - b. Focus on continuous learning and research
 - c. Establish clear objectives and metrics at the outset
4. **Objectives** of the pilot are the goals of the project and may not be the ultimate objectives of ePortfolio. The objective of a pilot is a *proof of concept* and should deliver:
- a. Needs assessment
 - b. Learning and promotion of ePortfolio
 - c. Usage and implementation metrics
 - d. Support for informed decision-making

Summary

ePortfolio technologies offer systems and processes that can bring heightened engagement and versatility to learning, to learners and to their portfolios, valuable time-saving portfolio tools for faculty, and measures of accountability for the institution.

It is no longer a matter of *whether* NSCC will implement ePortfolio – just a question of *when* and *how*. If NSCC does not anticipate and prepare for the wave of ePortfolio coming from Europe and America (and selected Canadian Institutions), it will be foundering in its wake as it is overtaken. These concerns are drawn from the words and voices of many folks interviewed during this research – folks like Dave White (NSCC faculty) and Doug Myers (PLA Centre Director), Mark Cameron (NSCC faculty) and Darren Cambridge (Researcher/ Professor, George Mason University) – voices one can hear in the multimedia presentation on the research website. This research brings them together to help tell a story and to make a case for implementing ePortfolio at NSCC.

The recommendations presented here require a strong institutional commitment to create a project office for an ePortfolio pilot, commit dedicated learning management to it, and cement relationships between learners, faculty, schools, academic and student services and technical support staff. Citing numerous possible supporting partners, it suggests an ambitious next step in what has already been an ambitious pedagogical direction for the past decade at NSCC.

Ray Ivany suggested in a recent presentation to a group of technology neophytes “*When confronted with a ten-foot chasm, two five-foot leaps won’t do*”. The college’s strong focus on portfolio learning, its appetite for strengthening teaching and learning, and its evolving directions toward accountability and quality of learning will certainly overcome conservatism and inexperience in applying technology to line-of-business functions. Such strengths and conviction will allow Canada’s Portfolio College to make the “ten-foot” leap to adopting ePortfolio for 21st Century learning and teaching.