



Catalyst for Learning: ePortfolio-Based Outcomes Assessment

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Higher education's use of ePortfolio in outcomes assessment is exploding, growing by 300% between 2009 and 2013 (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry & Kinzie, 2014). But challenges and questions remain: What does effective use of ePortfolio for outcomes assessment actually look like? What ePortfolio-related strategies do successful campuses use to facilitate “closing the loop?” How does one implement changes to practice and policy to improve student learning and success? What difference can ePortfolio-based outcomes assessment make for an institution with regard to increased success and persistence rates, and improving the student learning experience? There is a need for organized collections of proven practice including models and frameworks. The Making Connections National Resource Center at LaGuardia Community College has created a new website that addresses this need — [Catalyst for Learning: ePortfolio Resources and Research](#).

ePortfolio's expanding role in outcomes assessment comes at a critical moment. A recent report (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry & Kinzie, 2014) suggests that while accountability pressures remain a concern, on-campus interest in assessment is growing. Key steps for sustaining the momentum of assessment include increased faculty engagement and attention to closing the loop – moving from assessment to changes that improve student learning. The *Catalyst* site suggests that ePortfolio can help institutions further advance these efforts.

Catalyst was created by Connect to Learning (C2L), a FIPSE-funded project coordinated by the Making Connections National Resource Center of LaGuardia Community College (CUNY). C2L assembled 24 institutions with established ePortfolio projects into a national community of practice. Partner campuses represent a cross-section of higher education—from Boston University to San Francisco State University and Salt Lake Community College. Campus projects combine a range of purposes and settings, such as integrative reflection in First Year Experience programs and capstone experiences, as well as institutional assessment. *Catalyst* showcases the work of each of our C2L partners and our broader research findings.

Based on C2L campus reports, *Catalyst* suggests that using ePortfolios to support holistic assessment of programs and General Education may be challenging, but has significant benefits. Conducting outcomes assessment through ePortfolios grounds assessment in the authentic work of students and faculty; this makes it easier to engage faculty and use assessment results to guide meaningful change in curriculum and pedagogy. More broadly, ePortfolio-based outcomes assessment can encourage systemic, institutional thinking about student learning, connecting across courses and majors, linking to co-curricular learning. In other words, ePortfolio creates opportunities to move beyond assessment OF learning towards assessment FOR learning.

Viewpoint

www.learningoutcomesassessment.org

Reviewing campus outcomes assessment stories, C2L leaders found that successful teams engaged stakeholders in processes guided by three design principles: inquiry, reflection, and integration.

Inquiry: *Effective initiatives employ a structured inquiry process, focused on student learning and improvement.* At IUPUI (2014), for example, assessment of student learning outcomes is conceptualized as “a faculty-led inquiry into student learning.” ePortfolios “support nuanced understandings of strengths and areas for improvement.” Similarly, in the assessment process at LaGuardia (2014), faculty ask, “What do we want students to learn, why, and how can we measure that learning?” The outcomes assessment philosophy is one of “appreciative inquiry that asks the questions: What do you do well? What can you do better?”

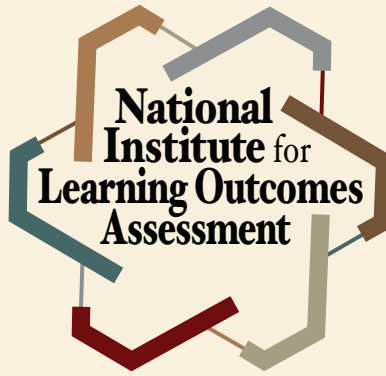
Reflection: *Using ePortfolios to put student work at the center of outcomes assessment helps faculty reflect on inquiry findings and identify meaningful recommendations for curricular and pedagogical change.* Northeastern University Education faculty hold an all-day retreat to assess ePortfolios and reflect on the implications. LaGuardia engages faculty in annual college-wide benchmark readings for General Education. Faculty “examine artifacts of learning, reflect on the teaching and learning process and consider changes in pedagogy and curriculum needed to close the gap between what students already know and what they need to learn.” Leaders from Stella and Charles Guttman Community College, where assessment days are built into their academic calendar, tell us “this organic process of reflection has generated more focused conversations about curricular change.”

Integration: *The integration and application of insights emerging from inquiry and reflection facilitates “closing the loop.”* Northeastern faculty moved from examining portfolios and reflecting on the implications to integrative action. They engaged in comprehensive curriculum redesign and “transformed the program from a collection of courses into an intentionally designed learning experience.” LaGuardia follows a parallel process college-wide, using ePortfolio-based artifacts to guide pedagogical and curricular change linked to both General Education and programmatic competencies. At LaGuardia and, increasingly, at Guttman, Northeastern and other C2L campuses, these closing the loop activities produce positive change in student learning.

Catalyst for Learning: ePortfolio Resources and Research documents the ways the Inquiry, Reflection, and Integration design principles are manifested in campus ePortfolio practice—not only in regards to assessment, but also in pedagogy and professional development. Demonstrating these principles in action, *Catalyst* aims to guide campuses in developing effective ePortfolio projects, offering sound evidence, best-practices, and pedagogical strategies that can enrich student learning.

Catalyst findings suggest that an ePortfolio-based cycle of inquiry, reflection, and integration helps faculty and institutions “close the loop” by implementing changes that improve student learning. To learn more about these findings, visit the *Evidence* section of the *Catalyst* site. Engaging faculty and other stakeholders in sustained inquiry into student learning can help institutions develop as “learning colleges” where everyone is focused on learning and change, where the college itself becomes a learner, exploring how to deepen student learning in every aspect of its practice.

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