ePortfolios an Effective Tool in Furthering Student Civic Growth

By Kristin Norris, Instructional Technology Specialist

ePortfolios, recently identified as a high-impact activity by the American Association of Colleges and Universities (AAC&U), are designed to support student reflection and - when coupled with service learning and community service--have great potential for enhancing student learning and civic growth. In addition to facilitating reflection, ePortfolios foster active learning, motivate students, provide a means for feedback, store multiple media, allow cross-referencing of student work, and are context rich (Zubizarreta 2004). ePortfolios also heighten the social elements of learning (Yancey, 2001) and incorporate assessment into the learning process (Cambridge, 2001).

The Center for Service & Learning (CSL) began piloting ePortfolios within the Service Learning Assistant program in 2009 as the result of an Integrative Department Grant (IDG). The grant allowed CSL to collaborate with University College and their ePDP (electronic Personal Development Planner) used in first-year seminars. The result of this work will be an ePortfolio experience in which students engaged in both curricular and co-curricular service learning and civic engagement will be able to document their civic knowledge, skills, and attitudes. It is our hope that documenting these experiences in this way will enable students to more effectively articulate their learning and the ways in which they are better prepared for today's global workforce.

Kathy Steinberg (left) and Kristin Norris (Right) in Boston

As the Instructional Technology Specialist within CSL, this summer I was able to travel to London, England for ePIC (ePortfolios & Identity Conference) and to Boston for AAEEBL (Association for Authentic, Experiential, and Evidence-Based Learning) to present about CSL's work with ePortfolios and civic engagement. At both conferences, I observed that the integration of ePortfolios within service learning and civic engagement is just beginning to gain traction. Colleagues in both disciplines (instructional technology and service learning/civic engagement) believe there is potential to demonstrate the powerful learning experiences that are already taking place, but few students have been able to fully articulate them until the introduction of ePortfolios. Feedback from other attendees was overwhelming including a blog post from Simon Grant .

Future plans to integrate ePortfolios into our work include expansion into the remainder of the Sam H. Jones Service Scholarship program, collaboration with faculty who teach first year seminars that incorporate a service learning component while also using the ePDP, and workshops designed to help students reflect on their learning using other forms of technology which can then be added to an ePortfolio. At the same time, CSL staff are interested in assessing student learning using these forms of authentic evidence and are scheduled to present at various upcoming conferences including IARSLCE (International Association for Research on Service Learning and Community Engagement) in Chicago, IL November 2-4 for both a pre-conference workshop and regular conference session and the Assessment Institute here in Indianapolis October 31-November 1, 2011. For more information on our work related to ePortfolios, look for an upcoming edition of the AAC&U publication *Diversity and Democracy*in which Assessment Specialist Kathy Steinberg and I have written an article titled "Assessing Civic Mindedness", scheduled to be included this fall.

References:

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