

A Proposal for a Course-level General Education ePortfolio Requirement
Draft Date: August 31, 2009

This Proposal can be Summarized in the Following Points:

1. Students use free web-tools to create a Gen Ed ePortfolio that follows an SLCC-defined outline. Students are told that use of the ePortfolio is a requirement in all Gen Ed courses.
2. The College provides live and online help for students creating ePortfolios. This help consists of drop-in assistance at a variety of sites, a module in Computer Literacy courses, and an online help site for each supported platform.
3. Students put the URL for their ePortfolio welcome page into MyPage, and thus into Banner.
4. Faculty identify signature assignments in all Gen Ed courses, and require students to put one assignment artifact (plus associated reflective writing) into their Gen Ed ePortfolio.
5. Faculty grade the signature assignment as they normally would, but also devise a method for checking that students have placed the artifact and reflective writing into their Gen Ed ePortfolio.
6. The Gen Ed ePortfolio is thus a common required experience for students in all Gen Ed courses, but is not a graduation requirement.
7. We're envisioning a time when students finish their time at SLCC possessing a web-based showcase that contains:
 - a. evidence of the kinds of things they know and can do as a result of General Education,
 - b. a collection of reflective writing about their educational experiences and aspirations,
 - c. documentation of their extra-curricular learning, and
 - d. their resume.

This ePortfolio belongs to the student, and s/he can continue to use it in other educational settings, show it to family and friends, use it to apply for scholarships, and possibly use it to apply for a job.

8. By asking that all SLCC students create a Gen Ed ePortfolio, the College will be in a much better position to move forward with program-specific ePortfolios, should faculty in those programs decide to do so. Students could simply create a program-specific ePortfolio using another supported platform, because they are all quite similar in interface and functionality.

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- *In order to help students become intentional learners “who focus, across ascending levels of study and diverse academic programs, on achieving. . . essential learning outcomes;” (AAC&U, 2007)*
- *In order to create a more purposeful and integrated General Education experience;*
- *In order to promote student engagement in the learning process and foster a student-centered approach to education;*
- *In order to assess General Education, the General Studies AS program, and the College learning outcomes using actual work as presented by students;*
- *In order to use our research, institutional experience, and best practices to determine our course of action, rather than having a one-size-fits-all approach imposed on SLCC from above;*

We endorse this proposal for an ePortfolio requirement in all General Education courses. The proposal is detailed in the pages that follow.

Endorsements

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Dan Hutchings, Faculty in Telecommunications

The Distance Learning and Instructional Technology Committee

Proposal Details

- **Require all students taking Gen Ed courses to develop a web-based ePortfolio of their learning, and encourage its use in selected Dev Ed courses as well.** This provision would begin in the summer of 2010. Students would own their ePortfolios and would be free to develop them using whatever software platform they choose. The College would make students aware of a variety of free website development and hosting solutions without endorsing any particular one. The College would let students know that if they choose one of these free solutions, it will provide help and advice via online tutorials and in-person workshops and drop-in sessions. This assistance will supplement the help features and tutorials that these sites provide. Examples of such ePortfolios include:
 - <http://dhubert.weebly.com>
 - <http://davidhubert.wordpress.com/welcome>
 - <http://davidhubert.yolasite.com>
- **Require all Gen Ed courses to have at least one *signature assignment* that will be graded after the student puts the assignment in his/her ePortfolio and reflects on it.**¹ The student would provide the link to the ePortfolio to the instructor, who would then go into the ePortfolio to ensure that the assignment and reflection are there before grading them. If a course has more than one signature assignment, a student would be free to choose which assignment to put in his/her ePortfolio. Rather than requiring all Gen Ed courses to go through the curriculum process, we propose that that this change be made by vote of the Faculty Senate. Then, as courses come up for their normal review in the Gen Ed committee, they can add language to this effect in the CCO.
- **Connect student ePortfolio URLs with their S numbers in Banner.** The easiest way to do this would be to add a field to Banner for students' Gen Ed ePortfolio address, and create an input window in MyPage to collect that information. Class rolls could list student ePortfolio URLs next to student names.
- **Create several annual awards for ePortfolios.** The awards would be prestigious and might include tuition waivers, cash award, or prize. Categories could include Best Overall EPortfolio, Best Use of Multi-Media in an EPortfolio, Best Reflection in an EPortfolio, and so forth. In addition, students seeking tuition waivers should be encouraged to supply their ePortfolio URL as part of their application.

¹ A signature assignment is one that addresses two or more of the College-wide student learning outcomes and constitutes a real-world application of knowledge. Courses already have signature assignments, but faculty may not be familiar with this particular terminology. Examples of signature assignments include final projects that incorporate course concepts; service-learning or field study experiences; writing assignments that tap not only discipline knowledge but also another learning outcome such as effective communication or critical thinking; or a realistic problem that students need to solve using the established knowledge or skills in a particular field.

- Establish a standard set of categories that a student ePortfolio must have, such as:

Portfolio Headings				
Welcome	My Goals	Gen Ed	Learning Outside the Classroom	Resume
Welcome About Me SLCC's Learning Outcomes		Composition (EN) Quantitative Literacy (QL) American Institutions (AI) Lifelong Wellness (LW) Computer Literacy (CL) Student Choice Biological Sciences (BS) Fine Arts (FA) Humanities (HU) Physical Sciences (PS) Social Sciences (SS) Interdisciplinary (ID) Diversity (DV) Foreign Language(AA only) Electives <i>Note that students seeking an AAS have a more restricted set of Gen Ed requirements.</i>		Resume

- In the **Welcome** section, students should have a Welcome subheading, an About Me subheading, and a subheading in which they list SLCC's College-wide Learning Outcomes.
- In the **My Goals** section, students would be free to express themselves as they wish about why they are in college, what they want to learn, what kind of career they are looking for, etc.
- In the **Gen Ed** section, students would need to archive artifacts from their Gen Ed distribution courses and reflect on how those assignments helped them attain the College's learning outcomes.
- In the **Learning Outside the Classroom** section, students could document and reflect on their co-curricular activities, their work experience as it relates to their education, study abroad trips, service-learning experiences, field studies, and so forth.
- In the **Resume** section, students would start and continually update their resume.

- **Assess the attainment of student learning outcomes using artifacts² in ePortfolios.** Select a random sample of ePortfolios and apply rubrics to the artifacts students have put in them as evidence of having met each particular learning outcome. Gather groups of faculty to assess the evidence for different learning outcomes—one group for critical thinking, one group for written communication, one group for quantitative literacy, and so forth. Separate groups would assess the Gen Ed distribution areas. Do the assessment in June and pay faculty a stipend to be a reviewer. Institutional Research and Assessment, Accreditation and Planning would be charged with gathering the results and writing assessment reports in time for the beginning of Fall term in August.
- **Help students start and complete their ePortfolios.** Possibilities include:
 - Adding an ePortfolio component to all CL-designated courses.
 - Having Distance Learning and Educational Technology personnel create a set of online tutorials that would step students through the process. Here’s an example of how this might look: <http://slcceportfolio.jimdo.com>.
 - Having Student Services and the Faculty Teaching and Learning Center (FTLC) work together to create some “Start your ePortfolio” workshops.
 - Adding ePortfolio guidance to Learning Center, Learning Resources, and/or Writing Center services. (See pages 10 & 11 for more info)
 - Ensuring that sufficient open computer labs are equipped to be of use to students in creating ePortfolios. This may entail updating browsers, providing the ability to make audio recordings and upload images, providing scanners, digital cameras to check out, and so forth.
 - Making a big push in Developmental Education Writing and Learning Essentials courses to start students off with ePortfolios. For example, faculty could assign students to write about their learning goals and write their biographies, thus helping students get grounded as they transition into higher education.

Frequently Asked Questions

Why Should We Adopt This Proposal?

Although this proposal would institute ePortfolios College-wide with as little disruption to our existing General Education system as possible, it is clearly a big step to take. Why should we adopt this proposal?

² An artifact is essentially the product of a signature assignment.

SLCC should move toward greater adoption of ePortfolios for a number of reasons, the least of which is that as the popularity of ePortfolios grows—and they are becoming quite popular in higher education across the board—students are coming to expect them just as five years ago they began to expect to be able to take classes online. A quick Google search reveals that ePortfolios in one form or another are being used in public schools, colleges, and universities throughout the United States. From 1999 to 2007, the number of presentations about ePortfolios more than tripled at the annual meeting of the Society for Information Technology & Teacher Education (Ring, Weaver, and Jones, Jr, 2008). Fifty-seven percent of institutions in the Association of American Colleges and Universities use ePortfolios, although few institutions at this time require all students to complete one (Hart Research Associates, 2009: 12). Students at all levels are being exposed to the advantages of creating ePortfolios, especially in their search for employment after they finish with formal education (Rowh, 2008). As Melissa Peet (Eynon 2009b: 4), a researcher at the University of Michigan, put it in a roundtable discussion of ePortfolios, “To me, asking questions about e-portfolios is synonymous with asking questions about the future of learning. And the future is here, now.”

A more concrete reason to support this proposal is that it has great potential to improve student learning. The process of selectively archiving and reflecting on their work to show how they are meeting learning outcomes, is a learner-centered pedagogy that has positive results for students. As one review summarized, “ePortfolios are helping students become critical thinkers and aiding in the development of their writing and multimedia communication skills. EPortfolios can help students learn information and technology literacy skills and how to use digital media” (Lorenzo and Ittleson, 2005: 3). A study at Bowling Green State University (Knight, Hakel, and Gromko, 2008: 1), concluded that, “after controlling for background factors, undergraduate students with ePortfolio artifacts had significantly higher grade-point averages, credit hours earned, and retention rates than a matched set of students without ePortfolio artifacts.” A study at the University of Michigan School of Social Work (Fitch, 2008) suggested that “ePortfolios can be invaluable tools in helping our students acquire the process knowledge and skills necessary for clarifying underlying values and goals within specific professional contexts...and developing effective evidence-based practices to meet those goals throughout their professional careers via the competencies acquired in coursework (assuming they are evidence-based).”

Additional research supports the use of ePortfolios in higher education:

- LaGuardia Community College probably has as much experience with ePortfolios as any other two-year institution. In a summary report on ePortfolios and learning at LaGuardia, one scholar used qualitative feedback from students and quantitative CSSE data to demonstrate the positive impact of ePortfolios. For instance, “This data suggests that the ePortfolio experience is helping students engage in higher order thinking, the kind of thinking nearly all faculty hope to cultivate in students.” EPortfolios positively affected students’ retention, their perceptions of collaboration and writing, their general engagement, as well as their effort focused on learning.

Moreover, “the data shows that, in every semester that has been examined, ePortfolio students are significantly more likely to pass their courses than non-e-Portfolio students.” (Eynon, 2009a)

- Eight years ago, the American Association of Higher Education concluded that “reflection is central to learning,” and that ePortfolios incorporating reflection help students make the move from accumulating “information” to acquiring meaningful “knowledge.” (Cambridge,)
- In a report on an ePortfolio consortium among a number of two and four-year institutions in Connecticut, the author noted the following: “For students, compiling a portfolio provides the opportunity to connect their work in individual courses to the institutional outcomes. Students describe their ability to understand these connections as well as the connections between their own lives and their academic work.” (Goldsmith, 2007: 37)
- Researchers at Bowling Green State University argue that “ePortfolios can foster self-regulated learning and also can serve as a framework for inducing a more effective goal orientation.” (Blackburn and Hakel, 2006: 83-84)
- After an ePortfolio pilot at the University of Dundee in the UK, faculty there reported that “students can gain enormously from sharing thoughts and ideas about their learning with others, and the ePortfolio facilitates such exchanges. Students can share their portfolios with peers or tutors, and the experience of this type of collaborative learning at Dundee suggests that students welcome such interaction and dialogue.” (Doig, et al., 2006: 164)
- In an interesting article on student and faculty experiences using ePortfolios, Miller and Morgaine (2009: 9) write, “While course syllabi and college catalogs may declare what learning is supposed to take place, the structured reflection required for an e-portfolio can push students to ‘own’ learning outcomes when they describe their progress and cite specific evidence of learning within their collections of work.”

EPortfolios also have the potential to integrate students’ curricular and co-curricular activities into a more unified learning experience. Students will be asked to archive not only specific assignments from across General Education, but will also be given the opportunity to reflect on their learning in activities outside of the classroom. This opens intriguing possibilities to bridge the Student Services/Instructional Services divide at SLCC. As Johnson and Rayman (2007: 21) noted, “Far and away one of the most promising opportunities for collaboration between academic programs and student affairs is the electronic portfolio.”

Why institute an ePortfolio requirement across all General Education courses at the same time?

The signatories of this proposal support programs that would like to institute ePortfolios as a graduation requirement for their students, and this initiative would actually assist those efforts. This proposal will build robust ePortfolio support mechanisms for all students, which will make it easier for particular programs to require ePortfolios if faculty so choose.

A partial implementation of ePortfolios is likely to stall with only a few departments, leaving a cultural divide that undercuts our General Education mission. Moreover, previous attempts at implementing ePortfolios (e.g., Ring, Weaver and Jones, Jr., 2008) have concluded that from the students' point of view it is essential to integrate ePortfolios into the curriculum. Early and recent ePortfolio practitioners have concluded that ePortfolios work best when they are mandatory (Chappell and Schermerhorn, 1999; and Meyer and Latham, 2008).

Will the implementation of ePortfolios be extra work for faculty and students?

The ePortfolio is the student's responsibility and s/he will have to do the following:

- Complete an important class assignment that the instructor has designated as a signature assignment. This is not extra work for the student, but is instead *work the student would have done anyway*.
- Put the assignment "artifact" into the ePortfolio, which basically involves uploading it from their computer, thumb drive, or lab computer into the ePortfolio—a process that should take less than a minute for a typical essay, a bit longer for a gallery of artwork.
- Write a few paragraphs of reflection to accompany the artifact. How much "extra" work this constitutes depends on how faculty structure it. We would strongly recommend that faculty make the reflective writing a part of the assignment.

Faculty will need to identify signature assignments for their courses, which shouldn't be too much work, because *these are the kinds of assignments instructors in Gen Ed courses already assign*. Faculty will need to grade these assignments as they normally would. If the instructor incorporates the reflective writing into the assignment, it shouldn't add much time to the grading process. Faculty would also need to ensure the students' work is included in the ePortfolio. This last step may take a bit more time, perhaps on Reading Day, but shouldn't be onerous. Besides, we're confident that faculty will think of creative ways to handle this; one possibility is to pair up students (tech savvy with tech neophytes) near the end of the term for peer review of the assignment and to help each other post their assignments and certify that their partner has done so. What's the bottom line? One study based on the experience with early ePortfolios concluded that "a thoughtful, strategically designed portfolio is minimally intrusive on the time of students and faculty." (Rogers and Williams, 2009: 59)

If we implemented a Gen Ed ePortfolio, what kind of training would faculty and students need? Who would pay for it?

The FTLC and Distance Learning would be responsible for training faculty. Their existing resources would be devoted to a training blitz all this coming year. Existing departmental professional development efforts for adjunct faculty could focus this year on ePortfolio training. EPortfolio platforms vary slightly in their user interface, and one of our important criteria in choosing free platforms will be ease of use. No knowledge of webpage design or html code will be needed.

Students will be given web-based and hard-copy instructions on ePortfolios, in addition to having access to support in various venues outside of class, as described above. In addition, the CIS faculty will incorporate into CIS 1020 some training on ePortfolios. Most ePortfolio sites have start-up guides and online demonstrations. We do not want faculty to devote class time to training students on the ePortfolio.

Is there evidence that significant numbers of SLCC students are being consulted or are showing interest in the development of ePortfolios?

We have been piloting ePortfolios in courses for over a year now, with several hundred students participating. We surveyed students in our pilot of ePortfolios in English 2010. Seventy-one percent of the students agreed with the statement, “the ePortfolio was a positive learning experience.” And, despite the fact that the pilot did not have training on ePortfolios for students outside of class, 59% of the students recommended that ePortfolios be used in other Gen Ed courses. Clearly, some students in the pilot had difficulties using ePortfolios, but this proposal will include training and drop-in support for students as they build their Gen Ed ePortfolio. As one student in the pilot put it, “Make it a tad easier for others to be more comfortable in creating [an ePortfolio].” (Topp, 2009: 17) We plan to do just that.

In a survey of 131 random students conducted by Janet Felker and her group in the Presidential Leadership Institute, 72% of the respondents thought that introducing ePortfolios for all students was a “very good” or a “good” idea. Only 2% thought it a “bad” or “very bad” idea. In a survey of CS students conducted by David Moss, 58% of respondents thought ePortfolios a “good” or “very good” idea, with 32% neutral and only 9% thinking it a “bad” or “very bad” idea.

Aside from their impact on student learning, what other benefits might we expect of ePortfolios?

Basically, ePortfolios can help students:

- See Gen Ed as a program rather than a set of unrelated courses.
- Be more intentional about their approach to SLCC’s learning outcomes.
- Understand that faculty are engaged in a collective effort to help students achieve common learning outcomes.
- Apply for scholarships and jobs.
- Show their work to family and friends.

How will ePortfolios help students see Gen Ed as a program rather than a set of unrelated courses?

In building their ePortfolio, students will map out their Gen Ed pathway so they are more likely to see it as an educational journey than a series of boxes to check off. As students take courses in Gen Ed, they will be asked to represent each course with a signature assignment and reflection. Some of that reflective writing should encourage students to link the assignments in different classes...e.g., How did students use what they learned in English Composition to help them write their paper for History class? Did they use their understanding of Math in their Chemistry signature assignment? And so on. By adding to their ePortfolios in each of their courses, students will be building a visual representation of their specific path through the Gen Ed program. Isn't that a tremendous step forward for Gen Ed and for students?

How will ePortfolios help students be more intentional about SLCC's learning outcomes and understand that faculty are engaged in a collective effort to help students achieve common learning outcomes?

In the last few years we have created course, program, and college-level learning outcomes that all relate to each other. The ePortfolio outline that each student builds will list the college-level learning outcomes. In the reflective writing accompanying their signature assignments, students will be asked to tell us how they think their performance on the assignment demonstrates their progress toward (or attainment of) a particular learning outcome. For example, if a student in a Political Science course writes an analysis paper about campaign finance in recent elections, that student could write about how that paper exemplifies their ability to communicate effectively in writing (LO #2), their understanding of discipline-specific concepts (LO #1), and how the paper is further evidence of their quantitative literacy (LO #3). I assert that by doing this kind of work in each of their Gen Ed courses, students will understand and appreciate that all Gen Ed faculty—regardless of discipline—are helping students achieve the learning outcomes we have said are important for college-educated persons to attain.

Is the ePortfolio focused primarily on student learning or assessment?

The primary focus should be on student learning. The secondary focus should be on assessment. Assessment would occur through the analysis of random samples of the work in student ePortfolios, with results aggregated and reported without student names. Classroom faculty would not be responsible for assessing Gen Ed ePortfolios unless they participated in paid review teams during the Summer.

Are the proponents of ePortfolios over-optimistic? What happens when utopian visions are combined with actual policy—when the policymakers are at the national or international level?

We hope we are not being too optimistic, and we certainly don't expect miracles. As with any technology, many students and faculty will find it empowering, while others will see it as a relatively minor change in classroom procedure. Some student ePortfolios will be stunning, many will be solid, and others will be disappointing.

Will ePortfolios adequately support existing practice at SLCC?

They will be organized around the Gen Ed core and distribution areas, and reflection will be geared to SLCC's learning outcomes. Moreover, the proposal envisions integrating ePortfolios into the curriculum at the course level, rather than being grafted on at the end of a student's experience.

Doesn't this infringe upon faculty academic freedom?

It interferes with academic freedom to the same extent that requiring faculty to give grades based on assignments interferes with academic freedom—in other words, not at all. In passing this proposal, we are simply changing the modality of the assignments that faculty already assign and grade by asking that faculty require students to put the signature assignment and the reflective writing into their ePortfolios. Faculty who are unfamiliar with reflective writing will certainly be provided with guidelines on the kinds of reflection that would help students, but ultimately faculty will be free to give specific instructions to students regarding reflection. Faculty would also have complete freedom—individually, or within departments—to determine the signature assignments they would like to make, so long as the assignment can somehow be represented in the eportfolio in the form of text, presentation, spreadsheet, audio, images, video, website link, etc.

How much is this going to cost? How will it be financed?

Students will create their portfolios using free services such as Weebly, Wordpress, Webs, Yola, and Jimdo, so there will be no cost to the Institution. These are web-based systems that can be accessed and edited from any computer, with no special software required. The College will need to direct existing professional development resources for faculty training in ePortfolios, so faculty will understand what students are being asked to do and how assignments are translated into an online portfolio.

The IT Department will need to spend some time ensuring that we have a place in MyPage to collect Gen Ed ePortfolio URLs for Banner, and perhaps some sort of automated email system to send a message to students who have not entered that information in Mypage.

We also need \$40,000 in hourly non-teaching money to support three part-time Specialist positions. These people—most likely tech-savvy students—would reside at the Taylorsville Redwood, South, and Jordan Campuses, covering the hours from 8am to 7pm. They would handle drop-in support for ePortfolios. These employees would need computers, network connections, etc. A fifty-cents per Gen Ed course fee should be a little more than sufficient to cover these needs. For instance, a fifty-cent course fee in Spring of 2009 would have raised \$20,274.50; that figure would be higher in Fall and lower in the Summer.³ In addition, we'll try to leverage existing resources to provide support for ePortfolios. In fact, Vice President Joe Peterson has pledged to fund the support mechanisms for the first three years, so the Gen Ed course fee might not even be needed. In addition, Dean David Hubert is pursuing grant funding opportunities for Gen Ed ePortfolios.

³ According to calculations from Institutional Research.

We would need several thousand dollars to pay small teams of faculty to assess randomly selected ePortfolio artifacts. This would be funded out of the Gen Ed course fee just mentioned, and we would make sure not to exceed the available funds.

Finally, we would seek corporate sponsorship of ePortfolio awards. Barring that, we'll use the remainder of the funds generated by the Gen Ed course fee for the awards.

Have procedures been developed to deal with apathetic students who refuse to use ePortfolios, for whatever reasons?

The proposal changes Gen Ed courses so that a signature assignment is not completed until it is in the ePortfolio. Faculty would deal with such situations as they currently do with uncompleted work. Remember, faculty grade the signature assignment and reflection, but NOT the ePortfolio itself. So faculty need not worry if students do a poor job of constructing their ePortfolio—some will certainly do that, while others will really get into it and create stunning ePortfolios. All faculty need to do is check to see that the assignment and reflection have been placed into students' ePortfolios, and then grade the assignments as they normally would.

So this proposal only affects Gen Ed courses?

Yes. Building an ePortfolio essentially becomes a common course-level requirement in all Gen Ed courses, but each individual faculty member will be grading only the part s/he assigned to students.

What are these free ePortfolio tools you're talking about? What are their advantages and disadvantages?

Students would be free to use whatever tool they would like, as long as it results in a web-based ePortfolio. Common free tools on the web include wordpress.com, weebly.com, webs.com, jimdo.com, foliospaces.com, wetpaint.com and yola.com. These typically offer a free service that should be sufficient for a Gen Ed ePortfolio, and additional fee-based levels of service if a student wants to create a more elaborate ePortfolio.

Advantages	Disadvantages
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free. • No html skills needed. • Many sites have built-in help features. • Allows maximum creativity for students. • Portable—students can take the site with them. • We're taking the technology and functionality of social networking sites and using them for educational purposes. • If USHE comes along later and 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SLCC cannot set up templates for students, so they'll have to create the headings and subheadings of the ePortfolio according to the outline on page 4 of this proposal. Of course, doing so is a good way to learn how to use these sites. • No assessment back-end. We get around this by associating ePortfolio URLs with S numbers and pulling randomly selected ePortfolios for assessment. • No way to brand student ePortfolios.

<p>mandates a particular ePortfolio system statewide, SLCC will not have wasted money on a commercial vender, and we can retool our support mechanisms to support the new platform.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “Messy”—SLCC doesn’t own the one platform students use, but maybe it’s time to dip our toe into cloud computing.
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