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What the Students Say...ePortfolio Learning Overview

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University Studies

Assessment Brief—Inquiry, Information, Action

SPRING 2011

Assessment Brief

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UNST assessment:
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SOURCE OF DATA

- Freshman Inquiry
- End-of-Year Survey: On-line survey administered during the last two weeks of the academic year.
 - Spring 2009 (N=841)
 - Spring 2010 (N=1,031)

THEMES DISCOVERED

What was Learned?

- Connections to
 - UNST Goals
 - World
 - Course
- About self
- Skills
 - Technological
 - Academic
- Confidence/Affirmation
- About UNST's 4 goals

What Would Help?

- Site improvement
 - Design
 - Non-design
- Program
- Technological help
- Tools
- Experience
- Guidance
- Timeline
- Negative experience
- No answer
- No needs

What the Students Say... ePortfolio Learning Overview

The ePortfolio has been an embedded part of Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) courses in University Studies (UNST) since 2000. Since then, the ePortfolio has been used as pedagogy which supports students' reflection on and understanding of their learning, and as a tool to assess student learning. As the UNST program has grown and the practice of teaching the ePortfolio has changed, the program wanted to know whether students experience the ePortfolio in the ways we intend. We were interested in the following questions:

1. How does constructing an ePortfolio affect students understanding of their learning;
2. How do different approaches to implementing the ePortfolio relate to the student learning experience; and
3. What kinds of support do students think they need to create richer ePortfolios?

Over the 2010-2011 school year, UNST's Coordinator of Assessment, Rowanna Carpenter and undergraduate Krys Roth reviewed and classified student written responses to one of the following sets of questions randomly assigned to students:

Set One:

1. Please tell us three specific things you learned during the process of constructing your portfolio.
2. What would have helped you create a better portfolio?

Set Two:

1. Please name something specific you learned about yourself as a student or learner through the process of constructing your portfolio.
2. Please name something specific you learned about this course through the process of constructing your portfolio.
3. Please name something specific you learned about the University Studies goals through the process of constructing your portfolio.
4. What would have helped you create a better portfolio?

Based on the above questions, responses were organized in accordance to the themes students were asked to respond to: *What Was Learned?* and *What Would Help?* These were then broken down into the following sub-categories to code students' qualitative responses, (see *Themes Discovered* on the right). In these responses students reported learning something about themselves, including but not limited to their ability to procrastinate, write papers, or other personal illuminations. They also reported making connections between UNST's four goals and themselves or the class, describing a broadening of their perspectives and an appreciation of diversity. Students also said they learned to use technology better, or create websites, particularly Google Sites™, a platform recommended by UNST.

“I learned more about myself as a researcher and learner. I learned how to better connect the goals to my overall learning. I learned how to create a website.”

“I learned that I was being taught an array of ideas from completing my portfolio.”



Under the second theme, *What Would Help?*, students said they needed more time to work on their assignment and guidance through the process to understand not only how to do the assignment and what to include, but also why they need to perform the activity in the first place. They also reported “non-design” elements. These include students who desired better assignments to place in their ePortfolios and those who cited their own lack of confidence in the project, which stemmed from personal reasons and not the assignment or the UNST program.

Overview

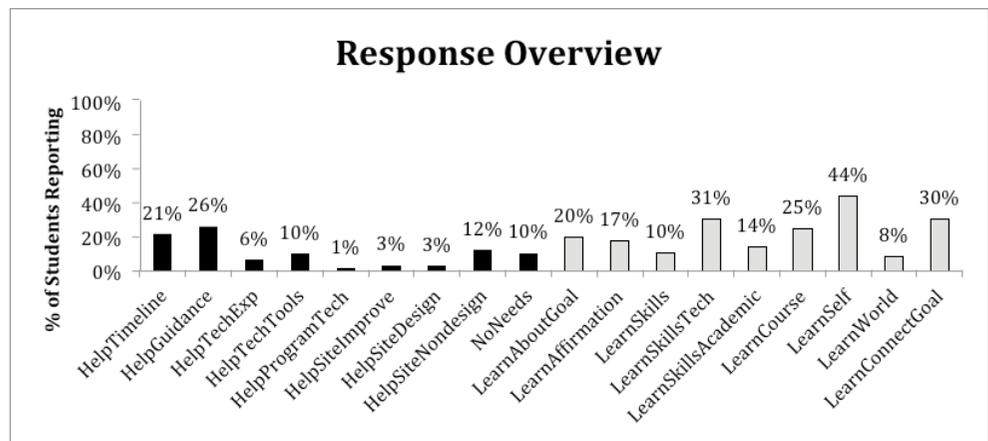
(See Figure 1)

Learning Reported

Student responses fell into multiple areas, and they often reported more than one area of learning. The most prominent themes were learning about themselves and technological skills, and connecting to UNST Program’s four goals. Over 30% of students reported learning in each of these areas. The second highest reported learning areas received approximately 20% of students’ responses. These include learning about the course, learning about the goals, and affirming their own abilities.

What Would Help? Reported

Most students reported needing more help with the ePortfolio. When asked what would help them create a better portfolio over 20% responded that they would benefit from more time and guidance. Another 12% reported that Non-design elements would help them feel more confident about their portfolio. Only 10% of the students said that “everything was fine,” or that they had no needs.



(Figure 1 | 1655/1655 reporting Overview from 2009 and 2010)

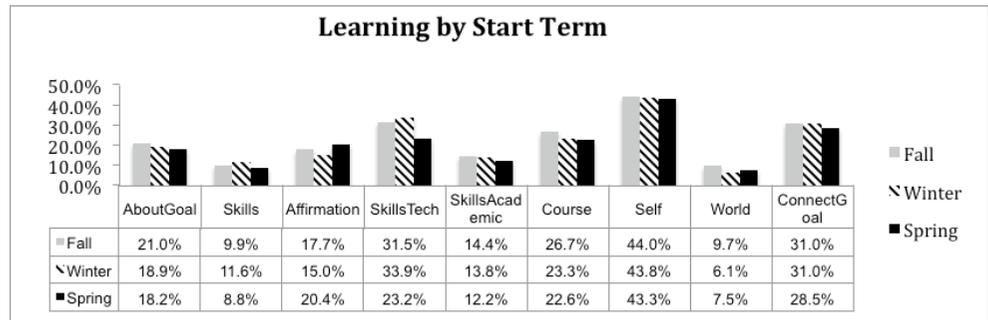
Learning by ePortfolio Start Term

(See Figure 2)

FRINQ classes begin the ePortfolio at different points during the year. We wanted to know how this affected student learning. The data illustrates that students who began their ePortfolios in the Fall term (gray) reported higher learning rates (> 2.0%) about the Self, Technological Skills and Connections to Program Goals. Between 40% and 43% reported that the electronic portfolio helped them learn more about themselves. This is the highest reported learning, bypassing Tech Skills by 7%. Another significant finding includes students reporting higher instances of Learning Affirmation when the ePortfolio was started in the in the third or spring term.

“More guidance on what it takes to make an excellent website, and maybe a more versatile website creation tool.”

“I finally understand why we have to take University Studies and I understand that it gets us to think outside of our majors and become a more well rounded student.”

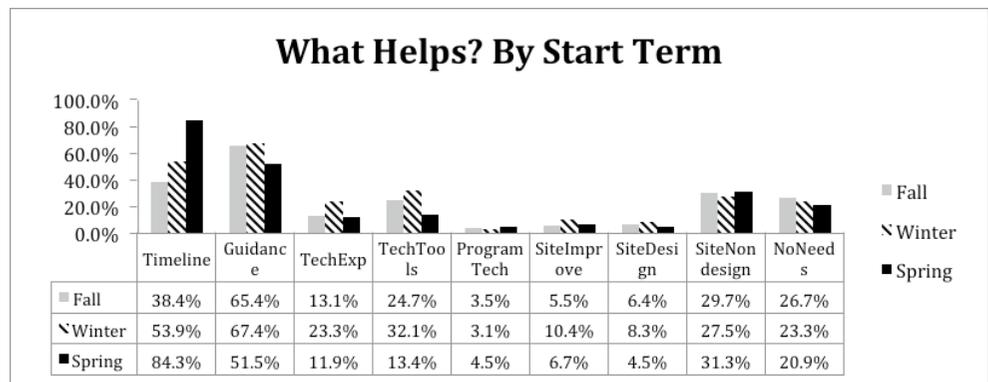


(Figure 2 | 1655/1655 reporting *Learning by Start Term* from 2009 and 2010)

What Would Help? by ePortfolio Start Term

(See Figure 2)

Predictably, students starting their ePortfolio in the Spring (black) reported needing more time to work with their portfolios (84.3%). They reported less of a need to have more guidance than students who began their ePortfolios in the Fall term (gray) and Winter Term (striped). However, those students starting earlier were more likely to express needing help with the technology or software.



(Figure 3 | 1539/1655 reporting *What Helps? by Start Term* from 2009 and 2010)

Final Thoughts

The process of creating an ePortfolio in Freshman Inquiry classes helps students learn more about themselves, the university’s goals, and the use of technology. The sooner they start the creation process, the more opportunities there are for them to learn. This is reflected in their responses to the question “What would have helped you create a better portfolio?” Over half of the students who started their ePortfolio in the winter and spring terms asked for more time, compared to less than 40% who began the assignment in the fall. Those who started in the fall and winter term however, desired more guidance during the process. Students also expressed a need for better course assignments to add to their portfolio, while others reported needing a sense of personal motivation to complete the assignment. More guidance during the creation process may help in this regard. However, given more time to work through the process (such as starting in the fall term), students will have the opportunity to discover more in their reflections and increase their learning and skill proficiency.

Recommendations/Implications

- Start the ePortfolio process early in the year
- Allow enough class time for the student to engage fully with the ePortfolio
- Plan for more faculty and mentor engagement with the students
- Have discussions on why students should do the ePortfolio