

Fellows of the Center for Teaching and Learning
Project Report
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Project Goals -

The main objective of my project was to investigate the possibilities that existed for implementing electronic portfolios for our programs in the Middle-Secondary Education and Instructional Technology Department. More and more of our programs were requiring electronic portfolios, but it quickly became clear that we needed a larger, more organized system to implement learning portfolios across our programs and gather necessary data in order to continually improve our programs. I knew that various institutions had implemented electronic portfolios, but I had not had the time to systematically investigate the many different programs to see what might be best for our needs. The Fellows of the Center for Teaching and Learning award provided me with much needed time to research portfolios and bring information to our faculty so that we could make a collective decision about the direction of our work with portfolios.

Timeline and Resources –

To begin my investigation I interviewed the knowledgeable staff in our Instructional Technology Center (ITC lab). I knew that they would have a basic understanding about programs that existed. Staff members pointed me in the direction of a couple of portfolio programs that had been sent to them as sample copies. They also confirmed for me that this was a much needed project because each department in the College of Education was using a different portfolio program – as one staff member stated, “I’m glad you are looking into this and trying to pull this together. Having a more universal portfolio program is something we really need but no one has time to stop and focus only on portfolios right now.”

After receiving the names of a couple of portfolio programs, I called the companies and asked to speak to a sales representative, who was eager to send me sample copies of their program for a trial use. I also located a book which outlined how to use PowerPoint to create electronic portfolios (2004, Montgomery, K. & Wiley, D., *Creating E-portfolios using PowerPoint: A Guide for Educators*, Sage). After gathering these resources, I began to experiment with the different portfolio formats by building sample portfolios.

I was not impressed with the first two programs that I tried (E-folio and Foliolive). Though they were relatively easy to navigate, they lacked depth and power that I felt we needed for our work. In many ways they had a K-12 focus and feel in that the organization of the portfolio was limited and the focus for its use was centered only on the student perspective, not having any way for faculty and departments to capture necessary data. It also became clear that these programs were not equipped to handle large artifacts, such as film clips and photos. Consequently there was no room to ‘grow’ with these programs. The issue of electronic storage space was also problematic with the PowerPoint portfolios – GSU is not able to offer every student unlimited storage space, so the need for a web-based program was essential.

It became evident at this point in my investigation that the portfolios we adopted could not be focused exclusively on the needs of the student, but that the portfolios must also include powerful components that allowed faculty to review information and gather data across our programs as well as use them in courses across each program. At this point in my investigation I began to email faculty at other universities who used portfolios and became aware of LiveText. I contacted the LiveText representatives about demonstrating their product. Naturally they were eager to show us their web-based portfolio system.

The first information session involved a conference call and web-based demonstration of the main features of their program. After this initial demonstration it was clear that the LiveText program could meet many of my requirements. The representatives gave me temporary access to the web space which allowed me to ‘play’ with the program and learn more about its specific features and ease of use. At this point I also recruited one of our graduate students interested in portfolios to investigate the program and build a sample portfolio so that I could get a student perspective. We both agreed that this particular program had the necessary features for students and for faculty – students have unlimited storage space, it can be used for more than just portfolios, it can be integrated into courses across a program of study, it has the ability to capture/track data for class level, department level, and university level assessments.

The final step in this investigation was to bring this information to the faculty. I invited all faculty members in the college of education to attend an information session in which representatives from LiveText presented their program and demonstrated how it has been used at other universities across Georgia and the nation. Before the presentation had even ended, several faculty members were eager to sign up! Steve Harmon and Joyce Many then took over the negotiation of actually beginning the program with the MSIT department and securing a training session for faculty.

At this point the program has been implemented in three of our initial preparation programs – ESOL TEEMS, English Education TEEMS, and Middle Childhood Education TEEMS – as a pilot. Students in these programs are required to use LiveText for their portfolio due Spring semester 2007, but they were not required to purchase the program because Steve Harmon was able to secure technology funds to purchase these initial programs. All other programs in Language and Literacy, as well as other programs within MSIT, will require LiveText in Fall 2007. The cost of the program will rest with the students in that it is one of their required ‘texts’ in their classes. The cost of the program is approximately \$70 for students – a one time fee – that will be available to them for five years.

Impact and Contributions –

LiveText is an extremely valuable tool for our work in MSIT – and the College of Education – in that it meets several of our needs. First, it is a program which faculty can easily include in their courses. For example, in the course that I teach focused on struggling readers, my graduate students will now be able to use LiveText to construct the case study that they complete on the student with whom they work during the semester. They will be able to store audio and video information, lesson plans, student work, assessment data, and their final report and recommendations. These artifacts will then be easily available for their program portfolio.

Secondly, LiveText is a very user friendly program, reducing the stress of learning a new program for our students. Because faculty members are also knowledgeable of the program, they are able to help students in their courses and in portfolio workshops. In this way, both students and faculty are involved with the program and are able to work together (as opposed to having a program that students are involved with but faculty are not connected to). LiveText also provides online support for students and faculty.

Thirdly, LiveText is useful for faculty members who want to construct their own electronic portfolio. Faculty members have online storage space for their articles, videos, work samples, etc. that they can share with other interested faculty and students.

Finally, LiveText is essential for faculty to capture and track program assessment data. Faculty have the possibility to design forms which can capture general descriptive data, course based data, and large-scale program data as they evaluate student program portfolios. The College of Education also has the ability to capture and analyze college-wide data as well. These three elements make the program the best choice to meet the diverse needs of students, faculty, and administrators.

Suggestions for program effectiveness –

After seeing the possibilities of LiveText within our department, my recommendation would be to implement it at the college level, across all departments. A wonderful aspect of LiveText is that it can be used to whatever degree faculty are interested in including it in their courses/programs. I think the College of Education has a tremendous opportunity to use LiveText to capture and analyze basic program portfolio data across the college. Its use beyond this basic level is up to each faculty member. College administrators could determine what basic data would be needed of each program and then training would need to be provided for faculty members at the department or program level (rather than college wide training) so that LiveText templates can be tailored to specific programs. Once all faculty members are familiar with LiveText and have implemented basic data collection for their program, on-going training could be provided once a semester to update faculty on new ways to implement LiveText and share ideas about how various faculty members and departments are using LiveText.