Letter of Intent to Create an Academic ePortfolio Working Group

AN ACADEMIC RECORD THAT GOES BEYOND THE TRADITIONAL TRANSCRIPT

ePortfolios

ePortfolios today are being used for enhancing teaching and learning, for counseling and advising students, for building individual learning plans, for career development purposes, for Faculty RTP reviews and for institutions to collect certain data about student learning that can often be utilized for accreditation, management and promotional purposes.

This document will focus on the use of ePortfolios in colleges and universities for academic purposes. There are many definitions and uses for ePortfolios. At its basic core, ePortfolio software allows users to simply build an electronic collection of content elements - often including rich media - that are typically referred to as artifacts. ePortfolio software also allows its users to reflect on and share their artifacts with friends, colleagues, teachers and prospective employers, with the administrative controls for sharing artifacts given to the creator of his or her Portfolio.

Sophisticated ePortfolio software is being utilized today for integrating course assignments with learning outcomes and academic standards. The assignments are scored using well-designed rubrics, and the data from these scores are then aggregated and disaggregated into reports showing how individuals, courses, programs and departments are performing on a wide variety of student learning outcomes. In addition to helping to manage accreditation systems, these reports help to drive positive change in the way teachers teach and students learn.

Taking ePortfolios one step further is the notion of "Folio Thinking," a concept proposed by Helen Chen at Stanford. It is a unique teaching approach that is based on supporting students who are creating their own ePortfolios with opportunities to reflect on the experience through coaching and other techniques. This process both enhances and authentically displays distinct levels of student achievement, knowledge and skills that ultimately will help learner's transition into meaningful work and career development after they graduate.

Universities today depend on transcripts (in most cases) that identify courses and grades as the record of a students' academic achievement.

This working group is proposing that the term <u>Academic ePortfolio</u> be adopted to represent an ePortfolio that incorporates "Folio Thinking" and that reveals the knowledge and skills attained by a student throughout his or her academic career. It essentially becomes a person's "eTranscript" that reveals a much more detailed level of what a student actually knows and can accomplish.

There is a strong belief on the part of many universities that an Academic ePortfolio would provide a great deal more useful information to registrars and those that make the decisions for student admittance to other undergraduate programs, graduate programs and potential employers (as well as to organizations charged with institutional accreditation).

Some of the challenges that come with the future development and efficacy of Academic ePortfolios as "eTranscripts" include the establishment of interoperability standards and data sharing capabilities that would allow today's typically mobile learners – including the growing segment of online learners across the country with more options than ever – to easily take their Academic ePortfolio with them wherever they happen to enroll and learn. The Academic ePortfolio essentially becomes an authentic transcript that grows with the student no matter where he or she happens to learn.

So, to summarize, defining the contents of an Academic ePortfolio to meet PESC (Postsecondary Electronic Standards Council) and international standards, will be one of the charges to this working group.

A starting point for defining the contents of an Academic ePortfolio include:
- a record of artifacts that the owner has produced over a period of time, and may be directly tied to learner outcomes or rubrics.
- personal reflection or "folio Thinking" on the content and what it means for the owner's development.
- Reflections and comments by faculty and other involved academics.

This is the very least that an Academic ePortfolio might contain.

Some of the questions that will face the working group include:

- Can interoperability standards for Academic ePortfolios be developed?
- How will those who produce Academic ePortfolio software be involved in the process?
- What will participating producers of Academic ePortfolio software need to agree to in order to participate in this pilot project?
- Can information collected by specific units of the institution, for example Admissions, be used to begin the population of the Academic ePortfolio? For example, all data relating to financial need could be screened out, but other useful information identifying the student as well as essays prepared as part of the admissions process could be used to begin to populate the Academic ePortfolio.
- How can this working group develop guidelines that will be compatible with those that are being developed by the Electronic Admissions Transcript Service?
- Can standards be developed that allow the owner to delineate what subset of the complete Academic ePortfolio is shown?
- Are there different guidelines when the Academic ePortfolio is forwarded to another institution for purposes of evaluation for admissions rather than to a potential employer?
- Can the owner choose to highlight some achievements and delete other information when using the Academic ePortfolio to seek employment?

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