

CWPA Slide Notes for “Reflecting, Sustaining, and Expanding ISUComm ePortfolios”

Slide 1: None

Slide 2: Before we begin, we’d like to encourage you to visit our eportfolio website, eportfolios.isucomm.iastate.edu. Once you get here, click on the NEWS tab and you will find an article posted for this conference: CWPA 2017. Here you can follow along with slides, enter some comments, you’ll see the twitter feed of our hashtag #ISUCommWPA, and there is a form on the page too where we’d like you to share some of your eportfolio stories. Enter your name, email, paste a link to your own platforms at your program. Or, if you are just interested to learn more, maybe you don’t have eportfolios as part of your curriculum yet, we’d like to hear from you as well.

Slide 3: During each section we want to invite you to brainstorm as a group your thoughts on each section. You can tweet as you go to our hashtag, and at the end of each section we’ll ask a couple brainstorming questions and spend a few moments engaging in small discussions and making notes on the super-post-its provided. So if you don’t use twitter, remember that writing a note here is the same as tweeting.

Slide 4: Coming up in this session you’ll hear from our WPA Dr. Barb Blakely. She’s going to talk a bit about the history of ISUComm and the eportfolio initiative. Then Dr. Kathy Rose, former Assistant WPA, will join us virtually, via pre-recording, and she’s going to talk about the reflection component of ISUComm courses and the evolution of prompts as eportfolios began being introduced. Next, Jill Grauman, Assistant WPA, will discuss the support we offer to instructors and how we try to manage varying levels of comfort with a new technology. Finally, I’ll wrap up with a look at where we are heading with our eportfolio platform, pushing beyond FYC and into the university. We’ll leave time at the end of each section for short discussions, then at the end we’ll all come together for some group brainstorming. Thank you for coming to this session. With that I’ll turn it over to Dr. Blakely.

Slide 5: These first few slides and my comments will provide you some context with which to understand the program in which we implemented our long-awaited electronic portfolios. I also have a few handouts here that contain information about scholarship our program has published (in *International Journal of ePortfolios*, in *Journal of Interactive Technology and Pedagogy*, and in the *Proceedings* from the Design of Communication conference) that will help fill in more details for you after the presentation.

Slide 6: ISUComm is a CAC program, the planning for which began in the mid-1990s and which was approved by the Faculty Senate in 2005. In addition to the broad principles you see here,

the Iowa State University Catalog states, in its “Communication Proficiency Policy,” that ISUComm is to be enacted at both the Foundation Courses (the level at which we have implemented ISUComm ePortfolios) and the Advanced levels of students’ communication instruction--that after the Foundation Courses’ level, individual departments and colleges are responsible for continuing their students’ communication instruction.

Slide 7: ISUComm Foundation Courses, just mentioned as the initial communication instruction students encounter at ISU, will be our primary focus today, although as you’ll see in our discussion and in the input we request of you, we have “next steps” we want to take to implement ISUComm ePortfolios more widely than they are currently. The program into which we have implemented ISUComm ePortfolios is a large and complex one, not unlike programs many of you work in and represent. This slide’s information is a snapshot of the size (and the growth) of the program as well as the makeup of its instructional staff. I should say that tenured and tenure-eligible faculty in the Department of English do teach ISUComm Foundation Courses, although in a very small percentage. Out of about 300 sections this past year, about 4 were taught by TTE faculty.

Slide 8: ISUComm Foundation Courses were fully implemented and have been successfully providing multimodal (WOVE) instruction to ISU undergraduates since 2005. The written, oral, visual, and electronic modes are represented in our program and course outcomes, course assignments, rubrics, and professional development provided over these years. To see full statements of the ISUComm Foundation Courses outcomes, as well as assignments, you can visit the Department of English homepage at ISU and click on “ISUComm.” I have also placed that URL on the handout sheet. So you might ask, “Why did ePortfolios not become an integral part of the program until relatively recently? Indeed, **we** had often quipped that it seemed like the E in WOVE was silent without the full implementation of ePortfolios. A series of retirements and loss of central funding presented some setbacks, but a group of undeterred graduate students and I remained committed to implementing ISUComm ePortfolios as a standard part of our curriculum and pedagogy and in a standard, relatively easy-to-learn format. I was also acutely aware that in such a large program, without an archived electronic collection of student work, my ability to conduct meaningful program assessment was limited. By coincidence, the state of Iowa imposed an assessment mandate in 2013, which introduced some of the echoes of accountability written about in Nancy Welch and Tony Scott’s book. We have responded to that mandate, but as you’ll see, in a way that is useful to our program and, importantly, also preserves our instructor agency.

Slide 9: This slide shows some of the significant reasons we kept working to get ePortfolios into ISUComm Foundation Courses. While ePortfolios certainly can complement any communication program, for us as a leading multimodal program, having only spotty and

unofficial/non-standardized ePortfolios was a problematic gap in our delivery of WOVE skills and thus in our students' WOVE learning.

Slide 10: Using WPA scholarship about meaningful assessment of communication programs (for instance, Ed White, Kathy Yancey), as well as WPA advice about using assessment as an opportunity rather than an obligation (Michael Day; Peggy O'Neill, Ellen Schendel, Brian Huot), we embarked on program assessment in a way that focused on student reflections.

Slide 11: Kathy Rose and I developed and refined a reflection assessment continuum tool, for use by instructors, students, and us as program evaluators, that helps the program focus on and continually improve our students' learning via reflection. Kathy will return to the continuum a bit later. As Tarez Graban and Kathleen Ryan as well as E. Shelley Reid urge, our program revisions must be ones that are themselves the result of a reflective and informed process and which encourage student and instructor agency. Preserving and promoting instructor agency is highly important to us, and every stage of our implementation and refinement of ISUComm ePortfolios and their accompanying support and professional development is based on this.

Slide 12: To give you just a bit of our early assessment results, this slide shows how, by mapping our students' reflective work onto Engstrom and Marton and Saljo's framework of learning approaches, we discovered our needs in terms of closing the assessment feedback loop. My article "Voicing the E in WOVE" is an in-depth examination of how we came to the understanding of changes we would need to make that are more significant than simply creating more detailed reflection prompts. Kathy and Jill will both talk about how we continue to work with both these goals in mind (deep learning and student and instructor agency) in both professional development and curriculum.

Slide 13: Given this context and our wish list, we'd welcome suggestions about how to accomplish any of these next steps.

Slide 14: Hi, I'm Kathy Rose, and I'm sorry I can't be with you today. I'm joining you from afar because my daughter's wedding is this weekend. This is exciting work, though, and I'd like to share some reflections about our program's reflections.

Slide 15: EPortfolios are great places to showcase a variety of student work. But the metacognitive heavy hitter of ePortfolios is the reflection, as Barb has discussed. Unless students take advantage of opportunities to truly reflect upon their writing experiences, they may not process what they learn or even think what they learn is valuable to them in future situations. When ISUComm ePortfolios offered us access to more and more courses' end-of-semester reflections, we were excited to read them to see student growth. But as you well

know, students often consider reflection assignments to be simply something to be checked off a to-do list for a grade. And an inherent contradiction in reflections we ask students to produce is that process gets conflated with product--students often write what they think the teacher wants to hear, knowing a grade is involved, rather than thinking about their learning in a way that facilitates transfer.

Slide 16: For the ISUComm ePortfolio assignment, we ask students to showcase and reflect upon their multi-modal work, just as we did when students created paper portfolios. We want students to reflect about all four modes of communication. However, we found when we examined reflections about the electronic mode that students often wrote about their experiences with PowerPoint presentations or with email. Here they were, composing a website, and they did not reflect upon their experiences with it! The “E” was invisible to them. When we looked at how the prompt was worded, we could see why. It still included electronic opportunities students wrote about when they produced paper portfolios.

Slide 17: So we changed the prompt to more clearly address some of the issues we wanted them to critically consider. Students can choose from among these prompts.

Slide 18: Although we did still find some students reflecting about PowerPoint and email electronic experiences, we found a big improvement in the quality of many reflections about E, implying more metacognitive effort and thus deeper learning. Some students expressed appreciation for the intricacies of web creation, with evidence that they understood some of the behind-the-scenes user-oriented rhetorical moves. (Mmnehls’s site)

Slide 19: (Amaloney’s site) Here is a reflection that makes the type of connection between genres that is so crucial for transfer. Armed with these successes, we then turned our attention to the other reflections students produce for the ePortfolio.

Slide 20: But for improvement in the other reflections, we needed to do more than just change a prompt. We saw underlying issues with students not engaging with real introspection about their communication processes. They were not demonstrating deep learning in their reflections. As Peggy O’Neill says, “Capitalizing on the potential benefits attributed to reflection while minimizing possible negatives requires that writing teachers learn to see reflection within particular rhetorical contexts and to teach their students to approach it this way.”

We needed to make reflective thinking a bigger part of our pedagogy throughout the semester so that the end of semester reflections were a natural extension of a reflective mindset. So we created some suggested reflective activities instructors could use at the beginning of the semester as well as before and after each major assignment. We asked instructors to use a variety of activities, which ranged from small and large group discussions to “voting with your

feet” exercises to gallery walks where students write reflective answers to prompts posted on the classroom walls and read what everyone else posts. We asked that instructors as well as students not see reflection as checklists but as meaningful avenues for learning. Our activities include opportunities for students to become conversant with the outcomes for each course as well as for each assignment.

After a semester where we found instructors not necessarily using the suggested activities, the OLT added stop points to the Moodle template as a place for instructors to stop and engage the students in reflective activities. Another good change was when the OLT created an ePortfolio template for students to use from the beginning of the semester, which includes a reflection blog that works dynamically.

Slide 21: Based on research by Jill Jenson and also by William H. Rickards, et al., we created a simple rubric--a five part continuum that specifically looks at elements research has shown to indicate deep learning in reflections. This allows instructors to give quick feedback.

Slide 22: We also used it for CIP, our mandated assessment project which Barb described. We found that this year’s numbers did not increase compared to last year’s numbers. However, we examined three times the number of ePortfolios that we did last year, many with instructors using this platform and pedagogy for the first time.

As Barb said, we believe that instructors need to have agency in designing their own classes around our programmatic outcomes, so we walk a fine line between training instructors and allowing them to customize their instruction to fit with their personal pedagogies. As well, we thought it important for students to have freedom to customize their ePortfolios as they worked to fulfill assignment objectives.

We found a delightful variety in approaches and implementations. In most cases we could still pick out elements of effective reflection as defined by the research.

Our numbers may not have increased due to our increased expectations as well as inexperienced instructors. However, we did see qualitative differences in the reflections.

Slide 23: One difference I noticed was the number of reflections where students quoted directly from their own work. In TA training and in instructor workshops I specifically encouraged instructors to tell the students they could exhibit their learning with good detail by quoting from their own work, especially their reflections. Most students who quoted their own work were quoting a paper, but a few quoted reflections they had produced throughout the semester, “mining” them, in the words of Bonnie Riedlinger. We would like to see more of that, but this encouraging trend shows that instructors are incorporating our suggestions.

You can see evidence of meaningful reflection here. The student is clearly making her own choices: “This I also didn’t have to change,” while also being aware of rhetorical choices, as evidenced by phrases like: “Retain the audience’s attention.”

Slide 24: Another objective of asking instructors to address reflections in a variety of ways and with a variety of activities is that we want students to become more comfortable with being authentic and not just write what they think the teacher wants to hear. Kathie Yancey encourages instructors to create an ongoing dialogue with students by offering feedback on their reflections and allowing students to support their own decisions and answer their instructors' questions.

Not all, but some students felt comfortable enough with their instructor to express vulnerability by making choices different than their instructors or peers suggested.

Slide 25: So we have achieved some successes in identifying areas where we could improve, in changing prompts, and in implementing practices to encourage more effective reflection throughout the semester. But we would like to ask for your suggestions for ways to encourage more authentic reflecting.

I'm now going to pass things along to one of my colleagues to lead us all in brainstorming ways to handle this challenge.

Slide 26: None

Slide 27: As Kathy and Barb both mentioned, one of our challenges was supporting our instructors in learning more about reflection, and this support process is what I'll be talking about for the next section of this presentation.

For some of our teachers, using ePortfolios was no problem; this was a change they were generally open and amenable to. For some of our other teachers, though, this change was overwhelming and even a bit scary.

Slide 28: Our challenge was providing support to our different groups of teachers: TAs and instructors with varying levels of experience with the Foundation Courses curriculum and teachers who were more or less comfortable with the change to ePortfolios. As you would likely expect, we found that some TAs were not very comfortable with the idea of teaching ePortfolios, some instructors were very comfortable with it, and vice versa.

Slide 29: We worked to support all of our teachers in several different ways: our teaching proseminar, English 500, several different workshops focused on different issues and spaced out over the course of the semester, the Online Learning Team visiting classes, and updated online support documentation. I'll spend a few minutes talking about each of these methods of support, discuss where we're at with this process now, and then turn the time over to you for brainstorming and conversation.

Slide 30: In recent years, the proseminar (English 500) has explicitly included instruction for new TAs about how to use ePortfolios and teach ePortfolios in their classes. New TAs are now also creating a teaching portfolio as an eProfile, which is similar to ePortfolios. Our TAs are in a variety of MA and Ph.D. programs, including creative writing, rhetoric and professional communication, TESOL, and so on, and we can expect our TAs to stay with us for 2-5 years. In addition, many of our instructors are former TAs, so this class enables us to instill pedagogical

techniques and strategies that we hope they will use in their classes for years to come.

Slide 31: While we hope that the support TAs receive in the proseminar will inform their teaching in future years, the proseminar only helps out the new TAs, not TAs who completed the class before we introduced ePortfolios or our instructors. To help support these Foundation Courses teachers, we have taken a couple different approaches. As we were pilot-testing ePortfolios, the OLT held a weekly co-workshop where people could drop by with questions and work on any issue they had. These were, however, poorly attended, in part because people in the pilot increasingly felt comfortable using ePortfolios on their own. As we've moved out of the pilot stage over the past year, we have instead offered workshops periodically during the semester. These workshops were open to both TAs and instructors, optional, offered a free lunch of pizza, and focused on fairly specific topics, including how to get started with ePortfolios, how to assess ePortfolios, and an overview of more advanced features. These workshops are better attended, and attendance dropped off as the school year began. This could be because the semester got busy, or because one workshop, combined with the other support, was enough for teachers to get more comfortable with ePortfolios.

Challenge: Depending on who came to the workshops, the topics sometimes veered off the scheduled topics, more toward basics, indicating that so far, the people who were coming to the workshops were those who were interested in getting started, rather than people looking to learn more about advanced features. We are working on the challenge of making sure that these workshops reach those who would benefit from them and getting people to come.

Slide 32: In addition to the workshops, a giant project that the OLT took on this past year was visiting over 65 classes to help teachers get their students started with ePortfolios. In many ways, these class visits helped the teachers to get started with ePortfolios as much as it helped the students get started. Teachers responded very positively to these visits and found them incredibly helpful, but an obvious challenge here is how much time this takes for the OLT. Over the next year, we are working on phasing out this form of support and instead directing teachers to workshops, which I've already talked about, and the updated support documentation. We are encouraging any instructors who need more support to email the OLT with questions and set up individual conversations.

Slide 33: The final type of support that I'm going to discuss today is our support documentation. Based on feedback from teachers and students, the OLT has been hard at work, revising and updating the support documentation that helps both teachers and students figure out how to best use their ePortfolios. Now that ePortfolios are a standard part of our curriculum, our goal is to make this documentation as usable as possible, which we hope will free the OLT to work on other projects and help both instructors and teachers become more self-sufficient in their learning.

Some of the challenges that we are currently facing with the support documentation includes managing multiple user audiences (Students and instructors); updating screenshots and tasks as WordPress releases new versions; having enough time to create a lot of documentation; not sure how helpful or used the documentation is; and deciding whether to do written articles or

videos.

Slide 34: Begin brainstorming session

Slide 35: As stated in the ISU Communication Proficiency Policy Barb referred to, students' communication education is supposed to be continued in an intentional way past the two Foundation Courses, in Advanced Courses and in discipline-specific contexts across the university. Wider adoption of ISUComm ePortfolios is thus important to meeting integrative learning goals for students. With ISUComm ePortfolios created in their Foundation Courses, students arrive in their subsequent courses ready to add to their work and continue their learning.

Slide 36: The digital tools that ISUComm provides has really been a grassroots effort. Barb talked about some of the history at the beginning of this presentation, but I think it's helpful to see some of this growth from sort of a different view. Back in 2005, Quinn Warnick, a graduate student at the time and now Director of Academic Innovation and User Experience for ("Technology-enhanced Learning and Online Strategies"), Virginia Tech's learning technologies group, started the first Moodle LMS installation in the English department. Word quickly spread that somebody was using an LMS that was way better than the WEB CT offered by ISU at the time, one thing led to another and boom! you have the Moodle Team. Which was one person at the time, Quinn offering full technical support for several instructors in the department. What's important is that there was no directive. Instructors maintained their agency and right to choose. All ISUComm did was show the benefits and make a decision on their own.. So that's the beginning. I'm leaving out some of the horror stories here to really highlight what's great. No need to scare anybody off. Now to show you quickly how far a one-person show has come.

Slide 37: Moodle expanded and added more members to the "Moodle Team" as it became known. The support site was added to the network, offering tailored documentation for using moodle effectively. DRAW, the digital repository for academic writing, was developed by two graduate students to be a collaborative place for instructors to share resources. From here we almost arrive to where ISUComm is today.

Slide 38: The Sites project began, going through several iterations of testing and implementation, the whole eportfolio project essentially sprouting from a small closet in Ross Hall to where we are today.

Slide 39: Seeing the growth of eportfolio users, and a successful implementation into FYC courses, we sort of saw an opportunity to plan for growth. This led us to rebranding Sites. Where we stand now, is we have a multisite network that includes eportfolios, profiles, and projects. This is what I'd like to focus on here now, thinking about pushing ISUComm beyond FYC, what we've tried, where it's succeeding, and what might be the best bet moving forward.

Slide 40: Here's a snapshot of just how much eportfolios (originally sites) has grown. When we saw these numbers, knowing that these users are represented by a wide variety of majors, this

was our jumping off point that we needed to offer something that could be more unique or tailored to other departments in the university.

Slide 41: We introduced profiles and projects to be our kind of marketing strategy. While eportfolios are the ideal purpose for FYC, not every department is in a similar pedagogical situation. But we want to encourage the initiative to increase opportunities for students to develop communication skills in classes beyond the foundational courses. Many disciplines have a desire to communicate with the public, especially the sciences; and ISU is a school for science and technology. This requires us to have flexibility and present a digital tool that can really help. Rather than trying to provide one platform with a focused concept, the flexibility of wordpress (our CMS everything is built on) needed to be shown as a proof of concept to other disciplines. Profiles and projects can be more focused, tailored specifically to the learning objective and outcomes of other courses. The added bonus is that because of a custom security plugin, either platform can be private to share only with instructors or be made public, so students can showcase their work and practice web publishing with authentic audiences, which is important for some disciplines.

Slide 42: Landscape architecture uses eprojects to form a collaborative blog. The instructor is the admin and all of the students are contributors. They will be going into their 5th semester (I believe?). Another course using projects is meteorology. They started with eportfolios, but just this past couple weeks the instructor of that course wants to transition to profiles or projects as it fits better with the goals of the course. With this success we wanted to present our platform to the university through a CELT workshop...and....

Slide 43: It was a bit rocky to say the least. With the encouragement of our dean and the approval of the director of the CELT program, we conducted a workshop for instructors across the university. What we found was that each department has such different needs for an ePortfolio that a one-size fits all approach does not work. [Some programs do not have a final project ... Some teachers do not do x, y, z.... some programs have very large classes, etc.] Because of all these differences, the attendees did not fully understand what capabilities the ePortfolios offered their individual programs from our workshop. We are encouraging Learning Community instructors to adopt eportfolios, and several are, but the focus on those courses are still in the boundaries of ISUComm FYC course goals and assignments more or less. Some were excited about learning more, but others found it more difficult to envision the benefit. Unfortunately we just didn't have many examples to share that could be relevant to a variety of disciplines. It can be hard to not know what you want sometimes until you see it. So...

Slide 44: We went back to a grassroots approach. What was successful for Moodle before might be what is successful for ISUComm ePortfolios now. Create a proof of concept, show that it works, and build a solid network of advocates through word of mouth. One of our OLT members, Lauren Malone, has worked really hard to create some sample scenarios for eprojects. This is our kind of one-and-done platform that can be for a single or semester-long project with easy scalability; it can be as big or small or long or short as you like. Lauren's created some education sites that focus on different curriculum designs. A couple game-based learning sites and one with an emphasis on anti-bullying. These were actually classes she took

in the education department, so our hope is the instructors were impressed enough by it that they consider the possibilities for other semesters. The site pictured in the upper left here is a Women and Gender studies class. This is an example of where we found our more grassroots approach to work. Lauren was actually approached by an instructor to build an eproject site as a sample for her class. Students were to create a PSA, and the instructor had heard what we were doing with eprojects and thought, hey, this might be the perfect fit for my class. Make the PSA, post it on a website, and include other pages on the site, such as a bibliography, team profile, glossary of terms, and more. The class could move their whole project, which happened to be a group project, to a digital platform. After our workshop, we sort of regained our confidence that this is a great idea and can be valuable to other disciplines.

Slide 45: Another instructor in our department, from Applied Linguistics, found me in the hallway one day and asked about our platform. He was going to be teaching a course on Teaching Second Language Learning with Technology. In the past the final assignment was an iBook project that taught second language learners a particular concept. I took the class, actually, and made a book about woodworking, with quizzes and all kinds of fun stuff. The instructor was taking over the course and thought, hey, I wonder if my students can just create a website that they work on all semester to showcase all of their projects about teaching with technology, including their iBook. Would your eportfolio platform work for me? ABSOLUTELY! Profiles ended up being the best solution. It was like creating a teaching portfolio with a technology focus. Students could develop it beyond the course if they wanted to. Here is an example of one student, Jordan Smith, who took the course. His eProfile has stuff from the class but also his personal CV and teaching philosophy. This is what we envisioned. Pretty much a best case use or scenario. But, this was still in our own department. And then...it happened...

Slide 46: To infinity and beyond! The instructor leading the Journalism orientation courses was in the middle of designing their summer course with ELO (Engineering LAS Online Learning) team, who are partnered with us (our OLT supervisor works in ELO), and learned of our work and wanted to learn more. This is one of those disciplines that appears to be that perfect fit. Not like the square peg. The orientation course requires ALL journalism students to begin their own portfolio. In the past it has been open to whatever the student chooses: wordpress, wix, squarespace, etc. There's a lot involved in that process, you have to deal with third party entities, advertising and limited functionality is an issue. ISUComm's platforms eliminate all of that. We sat down with the instructor as a team and spent some time really listening to her needs. We tried understand her goals and objectives, what she would like to see, and then we tried to show how what we offer can do all the things she wants. Rather than jumping in head first, she decided to dip her toes in the water a bit. The summer course she is teaching right now is an eportfolio site she created as the LMS. Students access all information for the course: Syllabus, assignments, everything. She wanted to try the platform out before opening it up to her students, because in the fall she'll see about 200. But, even in the middle of her trying it out, she asked to add our profiles platform to her list of portfolio options for students. So, small steps. We're seeing progress.

Slide 47: So, as ISUComm continues to invest in strengthening communication across the curriculum, we believe one way we can invest in that is through our eportfolio platforms. What

we've learned this past year or so is that a more focused, grassroots approach to introducing our platform to other disciplines seems to be the best strategy. Trying to present what we can offer to a large, diverse group of faculty can be difficult. However, that might be the best exposure we could have at one given moment. It just seems that taking the time to meet with individuals, listening to their pedagogical needs, and showing the benefits and capabilities of eportfolios, profiles, or projects as the next evolution in communication, we might be able to gain more advocates for what we're doing. Then, they can go into their departments and share our vision with others.

Slide 48: Brainstorming time