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## Using ePortfolios to Support Student Writers

Lesley E. Bartlett

*Auburn University Main Campus*

Hilary E. Wyss

*Auburn University Main Campus*

Diana Eidson

*Auburn University Main Campus*

James Truman

*Auburn University Main Campus*

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Good morning! Thank you for coming to our talk. I'm Diana Eidson, an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition in the Department of English at Auburn. I teach first-year writing, among other classes, and I serve on the Composition Committee. This morning, I will outline three ways that our composition instructors are involved in the e-portfolio initiative, as well as talk about some of the plans we have for future involvement and some of the challenges we face in this process.

First, our first-year composition program joined the e-portfolio initiative as a cohort last fall. This move formed part of a broader initiative to revise our writing curricula and reinvigorate the first year writing sequence (English 1100 and English 1120). Joining the ePortfolio cohort is a welcome development in the sense that it will potentially help us add a digital component to our curricula and support holistic learning and reflective practice that leads to the type of critical thinking and effective communication that we value as a department and as a field.

Just to give you a bit of context, our composition program is quite large, with over 200 sections of first-year writing offered per year, taught by 65+ graduate teaching assistants, 9 lecturers, 20 instructors, and several professorial faculty. We have a two-course sequence in which the first course, English 1100, introduces students to the methods of inquiry and producing academic discourse and the second course, English 1120, focuses more on research and argument. We face a few challenges because of the size of our program and the wide range of interests and levels of expertise among our composition instructors. Bringing ePortfolios into the process of curricular revision adds an even more complex dimension to our work. Indeed, with a diverse faculty in the Department of English, any change requires careful negotiation.

In order to address these challenges, we have worked through the process of joining as a cohort during our Composition Committee meetings this year. Our Co-Director of Composition, Dr. Chad Wickman, wrote a grant for funding through the Office of University Writing's e-Portfolio initiative to oversee the revision of our composition curriculum in order to include e-portfolio components. This summer, he will work with two of our full-time non-tenure track faculty who have interest and expertise in e-Portfolio pedagogy to design pilot courses in English 1100 and 1120. Most prominently, they will be working with graduate students and part-time faculty instructors—for example, through teaching circles and workshops—as we implement our curricular revisions going forward. We expect to implement these changes on a programmatic scale during fall 2015. Initially, there will be two summer courses offered in 2015. In the fall, we will then build on that foundation to design workshops for training composition teachers in the fundamentals of ePortfolio pedagogy.

The nationally-recognized Council for Writing Program Administrators advocates five learning outcomes for first-year composition. They include demonstrating proficiency in the following areas: rhetorical knowledge; knowledge of academic inquiry; process knowledge; genre knowledge; and technological knowledge. These outcomes relate directly to Auburn University's Student Learning Outcomes numbers 1 & 6 (students will be information literate, and students will be able to write effectively). Portfolio-based writing instruction tends to support outcomes-based learning, reflection, and holistic assessment of student work, and ePortfolios in particular coalesce nicely with our current programmatic objectives for first year writing. For English 1100, these include establishing a rhetorical framework for writing in a university setting with particular attention to expository writing and critical analysis of written texts and cultural artifacts; for English 1120, objectives include

crafting skills in academic research and argumentation and giving students opportunities to practice writing in increasingly complex situations.

The Composition program currently assesses student writing for English 1100 and English 1120 based on Auburn's Student Learning Outcomes. As a starting point, we will modify our current assessment procedures in a way that allows us to examine how courses that include an ePortfolio component compare with courses that do not. Beyond these general procedures, we will assess the effectiveness of the initiative in a few more grounded ways. To begin, we expect to pilot an ePortfolio component for some English 1100 courses in Fall 2015 and for some English 1120 courses in Spring 2016. Instructors involved with this process would take notes related to their experience; respond to surveys generated by members of the program; and compose a brief report that we would compare with our programmatic assessment data. Our WPA Chad Wickman will oversee this process and add to it through both formal and informal measures such as collecting course syllabi and writing assignments, creating rubrics for portfolio assessment, examining student work, and, in general, meeting with instructors who are piloting the courses. By Summer 2016, we should have gathered enough data to revisit our curricula and make changes that we hope to implement on a broader programmatic scale by Fall 2016.

Second, in teaching the Honors Writing Seminar II, which is the honors college version of English 1120, I work with students on achieving several goals: 1) understanding and practicing primary research methods; 2) designing a research project based on an area of intense interest; 3) articulating findings and research significance engagingly and professionally; 4) addressing rhetorical situations beyond the classroom.

My students design a semester-long research project based on a set of research questions that they revise a number of times. Formative and summative composition projects include a research

proposal and site visit report; analysis of and leading of discussion on a scholarly article regarding primary method; a theory and methodology paper; site-based instruments such as surveys; field notes, or interview questions; a curated and catalogued archive of primary materials; a research presentation; and a research paper. This fall, in coordination with the Auburn University Special Collections and Archives, we launch a website of Auburn History. This digital archive will grow from semester to semester, including student projects based on materials in the collection. The site will house a range of articles and documentary records (annotated artifacts) covering topics such as Auburn's programs, people, events, organizations, and other aspects of life at Auburn from 1856 to the present day. Although this website in and of itself is not an e-portfolio, the work students produce for the website can be part of their e-portfolio, no matter their major.

Finally, Auburn's English Department has adopted e-Portfolios for our Master of Arts in Literature, in Rhetoric and Composition, and Creative Writing as well as our Master's degree in Technical and Professional Communication. So, instead of writing a thesis, our Master's students create an e-Portfolio that highlights their process of emerging as scholars and professionals in their chosen fields. These portfolios center on a theme that has emerged from the student's work, and just as you have heard from my fellow presenters, they focus on process and reflection.

As an example, the required components of the Master's level portfolio in Rhetoric and Composition are as follows:

- 1) An introductory memo to the committee. This memo must address three questions: (a) Based on coursework, what student sees as major issues in rhetorical and composition studies as a discipline? (b) How does the work student has presented in portfolio address those issues? (c) How is the work in the portfolio relevant to student's career goals? (response must be situated using pertinent sources from current disciplinary conversations.

Following response to these questions, there is a brief overview of the documents in the portfolio.

- 2) An updated résumé or curriculum vitae.
- 3) A teaching portfolio. The teaching portfolio needs to contain the following: (a) a title page that includes your name, a suitable title for your portfolio, and the date submitted, (b) a table of contents, (c) a statement of teaching philosophy of no more than 500 words, (d) materials from the courses you've taught. At minimum, for each course you'll need to provide:
  - a. a brief introductory statement that describes the course and its key learning goals and your approach for meeting those goals
  - b. documents that outline key policies and information about the course and the course schedule
  - c. sample projects or major assignments
  - d. sample in-class activities and other instructional materials
  - e. sample student papers with your comments and a grade
- 4) One revised sample—print or online—of a writing project from one of the major area courses: ENGL 7050: Studies in Composition or ENGL 7300: Rhetorical Theory and Practice. The project needs to showcase your best work from the course you select and can be either individually or collaboratively produced.
- 5) A minimum of one writing project—print or online—relevant to a specialization in rhetorical and composition studies. This project might be one of the following, or an equivalent project approved by the advisory committee and the graduate coordinator:
  - a. a designed document
  - b. a website
  - c. a grant or project proposal

- d. a conference proposal or presentation
- e. materials relevant to future employment or graduate work

In order to show you what these portfolios look like, I am sharing a few samples from my graduate students this semester who just successfully defended their work.

Siobhan Gehrs:

<http://auburn.edu/~skg0006/SiobhanKGehrs/Website2/Index.html>

Kristina Chesaniuk: [kristinachesaniuk.wix.com/ma-portfolio](http://kristinachesaniuk.wix.com/ma-portfolio)

Joseph Cook: [josephncook.com](http://josephncook.com)