

Concurrent Session H
Tuesday 1 September
2.25pm – 3.15pm



Session 6
Student Early Experience of Using ePortfolios
Christine Slade
University of the Sunshine Coast

Christine is currently Academic Developer (ePortfolios) at the University of the Sunshine Coast and is responsible for the university-wide implementation of ePortfolios using the PebblePad software platform. She is also project coordinator of the OLT-funded Extension Grant, Advancing Academic Professionalisation led by QUT (2014-15) and was project manager of the OLT-funded Innovation & Development Grant, Experiential Learning in Planning Education research project (2012-2014). As a tertiary educator and researcher Christine is interested in innovative pedagogies, application of assessment principles, experiential learning, digital literacy and academic practice.

A major objective of the *ePortfolio Implementation Research Project* at the University of the Sunshine Coast is to explore the in-situ expectations and experience of students as they start using ePortfolios in their program curriculum. This two-year implementation process follows an *ePortfolio Early Adopters Phase* in 2013 in which two programs embedded ePortfolios into their curriculum and the initial ePortfolio Feasibility Study which found strong support for ePortfolio introduction particularly in 'professional' degree programs. The pedagogical value of ePortfolios includes reflective practice, assessment and feedback opportunities, evidence of competencies, experiential and work-integrated learning, and evidence for graduate attributes. Professional reasons include enhanced employability, evidence of competencies and as a tool for graduates to provide evidence for ongoing accreditation. Research areas of interest in the project include:

- The lived experience of using an ePortfolio
- Potential enhancement of student learning and engagement through use of an ePortfolio;
- Staff and student perceptions
- Barriers and enablers of ePortfolio implementation
- The lived experience of using an ePortfolio
- The impact of ePortfolio activities
- Understanding the role of ePortfolios in graduate employability

This presentation and paper provides insights into the early perceptions of students in using ePortfolios as part of their learning journey and supports greater understanding for the ongoing implementation process. Using a pre-use and post-use survey was a suitable data collection tool due to the size of the sample, resources available and timeframe constraints. The surveys included a mix of quantitative and qualitative questions that allowed for increased insight into individual respondents' experience. As new programs began implementation, the ePortfolio staff from the Learning & Teaching unit surveyed the students. Students from twelve programs, ranging from tertiary preparation courses to postgraduate programs, were surveyed from 2013-2014. The dominant cohort was first year undergraduate students, followed by final year undergraduates. At the beginning the survey was only in hardcopy with ePortfolio staff administering the survey during class time, however, in 2014 the survey template was transferred online using Survey Monkey with an announcement (and corresponding email) containing the url link to the survey for students placed within Blackboard, the university's Learning Management System. Then, where possible the ePortfolio staff still administered the survey within class time with the majority of students using

their mobile devices to access the link. The Survey Monkey tool provided initial quantitative analysis and NVivo software used for the analysis of qualitative responses.

There were 592 pre-use survey responses. The survey initially asked students demographic questions i.e. age group, gender and program level and delivery mode. The majority of respondents were first year undergraduate students aged 18-22yrs. Female students predominated across all responses. Most programs are delivered face-to-face or with a mixture of face-to-face and online. The students considered themselves as early adopters and active computer users followed by late adopters but still willing users. Very few participants were reluctant users. Generally, students were 'positive' about the prospect of using an ePortfolio, followed by 'neutral' and then 'enthusiastic' anticipating frequency of use as once a week or twice a week. The highest ranked responses to the survey question about participants' understanding of an ePortfolio were: 'It is an electronic tool for self-assessment, a place I can record my experiences during my course' and 'It is a place for me to reflect upon my learning journey – where I have come from and where I'm going – it's about the process of learning'. Expected purposes included reflective practice, followed by assessment. Continuing professional development ranked highly in some of the professional degree programs. Students in capstone and postgraduate courses tended to choose multiple answers beside assessment. Five qualitative questions completed the survey focused on barriers and enablers to ePortfolio use, the role of ePortfolios in achieving course learning outcomes, accreditation, continuing professional development and employability, and finally the envisaged need for support.

These pre-use surveys will be matched where possible with the post-use surveys from the same student cohorts. Matching with a code at the beginning of both survey types, enables students to repeat the same details without identification, but with a minimal chance of duplication with another student. Although the number of post-use surveys will be less than the pre-use due to a number of external factors, this matching process allows the researchers to gain a deeper understanding of student ePortfolio experience over time and whether early perceptions are met.