

Proposal: Electronic Portfolios as Means of Student Reflection and Assessment (GER 236 and GER 201, Fall 2018)

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Description of the project and pedagogical goals

For this project, I want to introduce electronic portfolios as a key learning tool in my course, GER 236 (“Memory, Identity, and Nation in German Short Stories”). I have previously used traditional portfolios in an intermediate language course, and found them interesting as a learning tool, but limited in several ways by their format.

My aim in using portfolios is to give students primary responsibility for their learning and allow them the space to reflect in a productive way. At the same time, I see the portfolios as a potentially more effective way of assessing their learning, both within a given class and, ideally, over the course of their study of German.

The portfolios would include representative work from the course of the semester: examples of their analytical writing, blog posts, oral presentation preparation, etc. I would also ask students to include a pre-assessment that we would do (noting previous work, what they would like to learn about, what they most need to improve, etc.). During the last two weeks of the semester, I would ask students to reorganize and reflect on their portfolios: tracing their own improvements, pointing towards shortcomings, and effectively assessing their own work.

In this level of course, students generally submit multiple short written exercises, each of which they revise, two oral presentations, and regular blog posts. One challenge at this level is that, given our small department, we have students with a range of preparation in a single course; GER 236, in other words, might have students who have only had four semesters of German previously and others who have had six. Because of this, a key component of assessment involves tracking an individual student’s progress.

What I hope is that we will be able to more clearly trace a student’s progress over the course of the semester through the use of the electronic portfolio. The process of curating the portfolio over the course of the semester and of reflecting on their work at the end of the semester should move students towards a learning mode that centers their own responsibility and empowerment. I would hope that they could then both see more clearly their own strengths and begin to formulate a longer-term learning plan.

I am hopeful that the creation of the electronic portfolios – as a lasting repository of their work – would lead students to reflect more carefully on their work.

If this project is successful, I would like, in the longer term, to see whether we might implement it on the departmental level, so that students in our program build a single electronic portfolio, made up of work created in all of their German courses, over the course of their time at Wellesley. This would both allow for a sort of capstone experience simply by virtue of reflecting on their progress

over the longer term and give us as a department a clear picture of a student's work and thus a tangible way to assess the effectiveness of our learning outcomes.

What is the research evidence supporting this teaching innovation?

(N.B.: Sarah Pociask drew together some relevant research to help me form a framework supporting this application.)

There has been quite a bit of research on the effectiveness of electronic portfolios. This research suggests that there are key ways in which electronic portfolios do indeed enhance student learning. One finding that I see as especially promising is that portfolios, when used with regular surveys and in-class discussion, have a positive impact on the reflective work that is a key component of electronic portfolios. Students seem to demonstrate deeper and more critical thinking when these components are built into a course.¹ Another study suggests similarly positive results: electronic portfolios, because they ask students to curate their work and reflect on it, “make learning visible to students themselves.”² That study noted the power of electronic portfolios to give students a stronger understanding of themselves as learners³ and emphasized a potential of electronic portfolios to “facilitate collaboration and exchange, learning-centered connection with faculty, students, and other viewers outside the campus.”⁴ The research thus supports my aims in using electronic portfolios: to see whether they, and particularly the students' work curating, reflecting on, and potentially interacting with each others' portfolios, shape them into more active learners and thus strengthen the outcomes of the course.

Sources for further review are:

Blackburn, J. L., & Hakel, M. D. (2006). Enhancing self-regulation and goal orientation with ePortfolios. *Handbook of research on eportfolios*, 83-89.

Eynon, B., Gambino, L. M., & Török, J. (2014). What Difference Can ePortfolio Make? A Field Report from the Connect to Learning Project. *International Journal of ePortfolio*, 4(1), 95-114.

Ford, J. K., Smith, E. M., Weissbein, D. A., Gully, S. M., & Salas, E. (1998). Relationships of goal orientation, metacognitive activity, and practice strategies with learning outcomes and transfer. *Journal of applied psychology*, 83(2), 218.

Huang, J. J., Yang, S. J., Chiang, P. Y., & Tzeng, L. S. (2012). Building an e-portfolio learning model: Goal orientation and metacognitive strategies. *Knowledge Management & E-Learning*, 4(1), 16-36.

Jenson, J. D. (2011). Promoting Self-Regulation and Critical Reflection through Writing Students' Use of Electronic Portfolio. *International Journal of ePortfolio*, 1(1), 49-60.

¹ Jenson, J. D. (2011). Promoting Self-Regulation and Critical Reflection through Writing Students' Use of Electronic Portfolio. *International Journal of ePortfolio*, 1(1), 49-60.

² Eynon, B., Gambino, L. M., & Török, J. 98.

³ Eynon, B., Gambino, L. M., & Török, J. 100.

⁴ Eynon, B., Gambino, L. M., & Török, J. 101.

How will I know if students have achieved the key learning outcomes/objectives?

I would assess the students' achievement on the basis of both individual assignments included in the portfolio and on the improvement and growth demonstrated by the assignments as a whole. The reflective work done by students would be an integral part of this assessment.

I would also draw on pre- and post-surveys, in which I ask the students to reflect specifically on the use of electronic portfolios. In these surveys, I would want the students' to consider their roles as active learners, their goal-orientation and motivation, and their outlook on learning overall, including how/whether it has changed over the semester.

My colleague, Mark Roemisch, would be implementing the electronic portfolios in his intermediate German course; there, he would be able to compare end-of-the-year reflections to those produced by students in previous intermediate German courses who did not use electronic portfolios, enabling us to gather more data on the efficacy of electronic portfolios specifically.

Basic information about the project

The project would focus on my course (GER 326). This is a course that I have previously taught, but will be revising for teaching in fall 2018. The number of students in the course varies (generally 8-15, depending on our current program size). It is one of a group of courses that we offer regularly and would generally be the first course beyond the basic language requirement that a student of German would take.

My colleague, Mark Roemisch, hopes to implement a parallel electronic portfolio system in his two sections of GER 201 (intermediate German), which he will be teaching in fall 2018. This would enable us not only to have a larger number of students participating in the program, but also would give us the opportunity of seeing how we might, in the future, develop the program as a component of our department-wide student assessment.

In terms of the latter (the potential as a broader assessment tool), I would be interested, if these two pilot projects are successful, in looking at whether having students build longer-term electronic portfolios, which span multiple courses, could be useful both as a learning tool for students and as an assessment tool for us as faculty. In the cases of majors and minors, this type of electronic portfolio could culminate in a sort of capstone project that involves revisiting and reflecting on these electronic portfolios, which would provide a wide overview of their work in the German Department and a chance to trace their progress. For faculty, having such a tool would allow us to assess more completely a student's progress, as well as to evaluate whether our program and learning goals are being met.

Availability to develop the project: I will be doing some work on planning the course over the summer, while overseas, but would primarily work on it during the semester, as it is being implemented.

Funding Request

Funding for the project would cover stipends for the two faculty members implementing the project in two separate courses: Anjeana Hans in German 236 and Mark Roemisch in 201. The funded activities would include:

Managing portfolios: setting up the structure in collaboration with LTS, instructing students on their responsibilities, troubleshooting technical issues

Assignment redesign: We would each need to consider how to fit our respective student work into the context of the portfolio. We would likely need to adjust our submission and evaluation processes in order to allow them to be compatible both with the new format and with the larger pedagogical aim.

Surveys: We would each need to design and assess surveys for our respective classes.

Reflective components: We would each need to structure the details of the reflective component and implement them, integrating them with work over the course of the semester and instructing students on the process and aim. We would then need to assess these components as part of the respective course's final grade and evaluation.

Work division: The aim of the project would, in the long-term, be to extend this type of assessment on a department-wide level. I could imagine students building up a single e-portfolio, comprising work done throughout their German-related courses at Wellesley (and perhaps integrating as well exemplars of work done while abroad, to give us as faculty a sense as well of how the study abroad programs are assessing our students). If this were to prove possible, the e-portfolios could become a central tool for assessment in particular of our majors and minors, offering a true and broad view of students' growth in the program.

In the shorter term and, thus, in this coming year, I would anticipate the project being run as primarily two separate ones, with both of the faculty members designing their own surveys, integrating the portfolios as it is most fitting to the course, and implementing the reflective components and assessment as part of the single course's larger structure. Where we would come together would be to design joint survey components – pre-assessments pertaining more broadly to learning (as opposed to the material and structure of the specific class) – and to check in over the course of the term as to progress, potential questions/problems, and our sense, as we implement the approach, as to how it would work in practice.