

Using ePortfolios to Assess Program Goals, Integrative Learning, and Civic Engagement: A Case Example

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Providing opportunities to foster students' civic engagement during their undergraduate education is a goal of many universities. There are a variety of ways in which students participate in community service and in community change efforts and social change initiatives; capturing how students integrate these experiences into their broader learning goals can help both students and educators to understand better the impact of civic engagement programs on educational outcomes. ePortfolios are one method being used to assess this type of integrative learning and the transformative civic engagement experiences involved. Using a case example of an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor focused on community action and social change, this paper draws on an analysis of 51 ePortfolios completed by students in the capstone class for an Interdisciplinary Community Action and Social Change Minor to demonstrate how ePortfolios can be used to assess individual student outcomes related to civic engagement, as well as to provide input about program impact.

As a growing body of literature indicates, ePortfolios enable students to reflect critically on their learning and provide a basis for administrative and program assessment in a variety of fields (Clark & Eynon, 2009; Peet et al., 2011; Ring & Ramirez, 2012). To date, however, there are few documented case examples of how programs focused on social justice and civic engagement can use ePortfolios to evaluate and understand student outcomes. Using ePortfolios to assess themes of engagement and social justice is an especially promising practice for fields such as social work, education, public health, and other schools or disciplines that engage social justice concepts in their missions (Fitch, Peet, Glover, & Tolman, 2008). This paper adds to the growing literature and case documentation of the use of ePortfolios for critical reflection and student learning by examining their use in assessing civic engagement and integrative learning outcomes in a social justice minor within a school of social work.

Using a case example of an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor focused on community action and social change, we demonstrate how ePortfolios were used for assessing individual student change related to civic engagement as well as for providing input about program impact and outcomes. We present the themes that emerged from an analysis of 51 ePortfolios completed by students who participated in the minor and discuss how these themes contributed to understanding the impact of the minor on individual students and on the program's goals related to civic engagement. We conclude with lessons learned from incorporating ePortfolios as an assessment tool for capturing integrative learning within transformative civic engagement education.

ePortfolios for Integrative Learning and Program Assessment

Over the past few years, electronic or ePortfolios have emerged as a useful tool for assessing both individual student change over time and program impacts (Buyarski & Landis, 2014; Fitch et al., 2008). As Clark and Eynon (2009) noted, ePortfolios allow students to collect, select, reflect, and connect learning that has occurred in classroom settings and in activities outside the formal classroom (e.g., volunteer experiences, leadership experiences, civic engagement activities). Students who develop ePortfolios identify a *collection* of learnings from various domains (e.g., classroom, volunteer experiences, and work settings), they *select* particular learnings that they want to examine in more detail, and they *reflect* on the specific learning experiences to uncover the tasks and skills developed. Finally, they *connect* the learning to their future goals. Reflecting on actions is crucial to the philosophy of ePortfolios and to integrative learning (Nguyen, 2013; Ring & Ramirez, 2012).

Integrative learning involves helping students uncover how learning from one domain (e.g., the classroom) can be connected to learning in a different domain (e.g., volunteer work). Students work to capture the tasks that were involved in carrying out a particular learning experience and the skills that they demonstrated. The areas involved in the integrative learning process include: (a) values and beliefs, (b) academic and personal interests, (c) knowledge and skills, and (d) learning experiences. One of the key goals of integrative learning activities is to assist students in bringing to the forefront what they have learned and the impact of that learning on their day-to-day interactions and future goals.

One of the most popular ways to foster integrative learning is to engage students in sharing their learning with peers, who record what they have heard and provide feedback. Another is for students to develop ePortfolios and present them at ePortfolio showcases, giving them the opportunity to convey, not only through the ePortfolio itself but also through discussion with others, what they have learned from the projects presented (Fitch et al., 2008).

In addition to being key tools for integrative learning, ePortfolios can be used to capture program assessment information. Students may be asked to select the learning experiences that best demonstrate their fulfillment of a program goal or competency, and a rubric is then established to assess the achievement of such competencies or highlight outcomes related to program goals.

Because portfolios offer an opportunity to look at multi-dimensional aspects of a program, including, among other measures, students' understanding, integration of concepts, and presence of stated outcomes (Rhodes, 2010), they may be especially important tools for fields such as social work that seek to understand students' outcomes and programs' impacts on a variety of measures. These measures often include outcomes that are challenging to assess using traditional quantitative tools, such as a program's ability to foster social justice and civic engagement practices and values in students. Portfolios can be a rich way to gather information about civic engagement, diversity outcomes, and social justice because they allow for nuanced and in-depth articulation of experiences. There is growing evidence that this type of assessment, when employed alongside traditional measures, provides a broader understanding of the meaning students take from experiences, as well as their ability to integrate across experiences (Ahn, 2004; Bowers, 2009; Rhodes, 2010).

The Case Example: The Interdisciplinary Community Action and Social Change Minor

The interdisciplinary Community Action and Social Change (CASC) minor was developed and funded under a 2009 university-wide initiative to enhance multidisciplinary perspectives and team teaching efforts in undergraduate education. The School of Social Work and the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts joined together to deliver an undergraduate minor built on multidisciplinary perspectives related to community action and social change. The minor's underlying conception of civic engagement emphasizes citizen involvement in activities aimed at creating a more just and equitable society. As its name suggests, CASC views civic engagement as both active and change-oriented.

The goals of CASC are to provide undergraduate students with opportunities to

- examine community action and social change concepts using a multidisciplinary framework;
- address community action and social change efforts in multilingual and multicultural communities;
- integrate, using a multidisciplinary framework, social justice values into the community action and social change processes; and
- engage in service-learning opportunities to promote community action or social change initiatives.

To accomplish these goals, the multi-disciplinary faculty team behind CASC's development designed a curriculum that incorporates best practices from service-learning and co-curricular service programs and provides students with space and guidance to articulate their own conceptions of and plans for civic engagement. The minor requires 16 credits for completion, including a foundation course in theory and practice for community action and social change; four additional courses from three clusters (context, diversity learning, and action service learning) that are selected from a list of courses in departments across the university, including American Culture, Anthropology, English, History, Political Science, Psychology, and Sociology; and a capstone course that requires students to complete an ePortfolio assignment integrating their learning across the CASC clusters.

The university—and the School of Social Work in particular—has been a national leader in the ePortfolio movement. Since the inception of ePortfolios at the University, the School of Social Work has been a leading player and innovator of practice. Faculty from the School of Social Work were members of the initial research team developing and assessing the effectiveness of ePortfolios, and the School has continued to create innovations related to ePortfolios through class, course, and school-level integration of activities (Peet et al., 2011). Thus, the development of a capstone ePortfolio for the CASC minor was part of a rich history of portfolio development within the School of Social Work and the University as a whole.

The Capstone Course

The steps involved in developing an ePortfolio for students in this case example were formalized through a one-credit capstone course taken in the last semester before graduation. The goal of the course is to provide the space for students to reflect on their experiences in the minor and in social justice activities, articulate their values and skills, build relationships with others

graduating from CASC, and help position students for the post-graduation experience.

In the capstone course, students develop a philosophy statement highlighting their beliefs and perspectives about civic engagement activities, plus three key projects that demonstrate their learning related to program competencies. While the core elements of the ePortfolio are defined by the program and the course instructors, the projects that students select to use to demonstrate their learning are determined by each individual student. They could be drawn from classroom experiences/assignments or from volunteer or work experiences that had focused on civic engagement activities.

To help students accomplish this, the class functions as a learning lab. Instructors draw on experiential activities and small and whole group activities to brainstorm ideas and process learning. Course instructors serve as facilitators, contextualizing learning and engagement within the classroom. The students and their ideas are the content.

To support student engagement and the ability to be reflexive, the course involves team building and experiential activities. These activities are often high energy and interactive, helping to set the space, deepen relationships, enable students to reflect on their experiences, and draw out ideas for discussions. The course also engages activities that prompt students to generate or brainstorm their ideas in order to be prepared to reflect on their learning. Examples of activities used include skill inventories, social justice timelines, and small and whole group discussions of images and ideas. Much of the work is done in small peer-groups that require students to listen and learn from one another, require them to reflect on and ask questions of each other's experiences, and provide the chance for students to talk about their work in public ways. Students receive feedback from the course faculty as they develop their key learning projects and philosophy statements. All students are expected to turn in their work periodically and to attend a "check-in" meeting with faculty to discuss their work along the way.

The students present their ePortfolios in process to other students throughout the course as well as in a showcase presentation at the end of the course. Students are also asked to share and get feedback from outside faculty mentors of their own choosing. The goal of the sharing is to help students to express and articulate their learning in ways that support deeper reflection.

The Sample

The sample for this review consisted of ePortfolios created by 51 CASC undergraduate students who graduated in 2011 and 2012. As noted earlier,

completing an ePortfolio was a required component of their capstone course for the minor. The CASC students in this sample were from a range of liberal arts and science majors as well as from professional schools such as engineering and business. Core curricular elements of the capstone course that supported the ePortfolio development included:

- leadership and team building activities developed to create community, open up space for reflection, and find common connections between students;
- activities to prompt individual reflection on experiences (e.g., inventory activity, mapping experiences on timelines);
- small-group sharing to draw out additional ideas (e.g., generative interviewing, small group activities);
- assignments that encouraged the articulation of values about themselves and their work (e.g., philosophy statements, "what are you for?"); and
- creation of artifacts that helped students to demonstrate specific learning experiences and "unpack" experiences, skills, and lessons learned.

How We Used ePortfolios to Assess Change

Drawing on items from the National Survey of Student Engagement (2013) instrument and the Association of American Colleges and Universities' (2014) VALUE (Valid Assessment of Learning in Undergraduate Education) rubrics for civic engagement, intercultural knowledge and competence, and integrative learning, we developed our own rubric to be used for an assessment of students' civic engagement development and achievement of program goals (see Appendix). Our first step in analyzing CASC students' ePortfolios was for each of five colleagues to read through a portion of the 51 ePortfolios, noting the presence and depth of portfolios in relation to the rubric. If a given ePortfolio included a statement representing a particular element of the rubric, that student was assessed as having achieved the outcome in question. While many students had multiple examples of statements that fell into the main categories in our rubric, only one example for each category was necessary to meet the program assessment goals. The vast majority of the ePortfolios reviewed addressed all elements in our rubric, with only a few exceptions ($n = 3$).

As a second step, we wanted to develop a richer and more nuanced understanding of how students experienced and expressed their learning within their ePortfolios. To do so, we created a broader set of

categories—in keeping with but more open-ended than our original rubric elements—through which to explore the 48 portfolios that met the original rubric criteria for civic engagement. The three major categories included students': (a) personal experiences of transformative civic engagement; (b) integration of learning from the classroom and from various civic activities; and (c) clarification of personal values and beliefs through lifelong learning statements. These three categories correlate with the goals of the minor, which focuses on developing life-long social change agents through engagement in transformative experiences; integration of theory, multi-disciplinary frameworks, and practice; and articulation and understanding of social justice, critical social identity, and recognition of competencies needed for working in and across diverse settings.

After developing our three broad categories, team members revisited students' ePortfolios to document evidence and examples of statements related to each category. In the first category (see Table 1), we included statements related to how students were transformed by their experiences in civic engagement and community work. These included statements that used terms such as “the moment I truly understood” and “ready to learn” to capture the transformation that each student experienced.

The second category (see Table 2) noted examples of students' descriptions of integrating theories they learned in the classroom with experiences they had working with others in the community. The examples in Table 2 highlight how students “engaged in critical thinking” and took their “passion and desire to help others and turned it into a set of skills and strategies that can help make a difference.”

Finally, the third category (see Table 3) identified statements that provided greater clarity and awareness of how students' personal values and beliefs influence the work they do when they engage others in change processes. Our examples illustrate how students experienced paradigm shifts, increased their understanding of the challenges of change work, and built their confidence.

Discussion

As the examples presented in Tables 1, 2, and 3 demonstrate, the richness of the experiences captured by students using the ePortfolio process provided opportunities for the CASC minor to assess program impact based on student reflections of specific projects/learnings. Beyond static examples of activities that might have been captured using a more traditional survey instrument, the ePortfolios provide a view into the depth and breadth of student experiences in our program, echoing Nguyen's (2013) articulation that the “ePortfolio serves as a ‘living portal’ through which

students may continually re-articulate their ideas of self to others, bringing about new understandings and ethical intentions” (p. 135).

From a program assessment perspective, through the ePortfolios students captured projects that highlighted core program goals. Some students involved in the CASC minor begin the program having had multiple opportunities to be involved in civic engagement activities, while other students enter the minor with limited experiences. Rather than expecting all students to have similar outcomes, the ePortfolio process allows students, wherever they are in their own development, to reflect on their current learning and goals related to civic engagement.

As a capstone activity, the ePortfolio provides students with an opportunity to reflect on and process their learning creatively and to capture that learning through projects that have emerged in all areas of their life experiences (e.g., course work, co-curricular activities, clubs). We intentionally created an open structure for students to develop their ePortfolios. Although students were asked to create key learning projects that reflected the major components of the minor (frameworks and context, diversity learning, and action/community engagement), they were given leeway to select experiences (curricular or co-curricular) and make connections between their experiences and the major components.

This flexibility is critical to ePortfolios. As many university, academic, and student service programs begin to utilize ePortfolios, there is a need to balance structure with flexibility to ensure that students are not having duplicative experiences. One of the tensions we recognized early on with our minor was that some students were coming to the capstone having already done an ePortfolio, while others were engaging in this process for the first time. Allowing students to draw on a range of learning and create their own ways of capturing their experiences was essential. Had the ePortfolio included a required set of experiences, it would have potentially led to students' duplicating and repeating tasks rather than thinking more openly and deeply about their learning.

Having developed our own rubric and categories for assessing this learning, CASC faculty will be able to provide ongoing feedback to future students concerning their progress in demonstrating program outcomes. As we can see from this case example, determining a program's core goals and collecting evidence to support the demonstration of these goals using ePortfolios facilitates ongoing program assessment.

Next Steps

While ePortfolios helped us to capture whether students were successfully achieving program goals,

Table 1
Representative Examples of Quotes from the ePortfolios and Link to Core Theme: Personal Experiences of Transformative Civic Engagement

Quotations from Students' ePortfolios	
1	As a person, I have watched myself grow tremendously from this wonderful experience. I find myself putting others before myself more . . . I am not always consumed with my own needs and wants, but I am concerned with giving back to others who may be less fortunate than I am. I am also more grateful for everything that I have.
2	I myself never questioned [the fundamental pillar, "treat others the way you want to be treated"] until recently, when an 11-year old product of the City Public Schools provided me with a new perspective. "Instead of treating people how you would want to be treated, you should treat people how THEY want to be treated," she told me. I'll always remember this as the moment I truly understood the definition of empathy. It's moments like these--the moments that challenge the very fiber of your being, from the most unlikely of sources--in which the most learning can occur.
3	There is action/activism happening everywhere. I do not need to come in to a place trying to fix it. I need to come in ready to learn and join in.
4	Having challenged my own perspectives and beliefs during my time at school, I have truly learned to keep an open mind about every person, situation, and issue. I feel an intrinsic responsibility to promote educational equity, cross social boundaries, and advocate social justice, all while spreading these values to create positive change one person at a time.
5	Participating in the Community Action and Social Change (CASC) minor has helped me learn about social issues I wasn't previously aware of as well as the opportunity to take action and work towards change. Throughout my experience I have been able to take classes in many different disciplines including: sociology, history, social work, psychology and education. These classes have helped me consider social issues from various perspectives and have helped guide me in the process of finding the social issues that I feel most passionate about. My passion for helping children succeed in school has undoubtedly been influenced by these courses and my experiences through CASC.

Table 2
Core Theme: Integration of Learning from the Classroom and Civic Engagement Activities

Quotations from Students' ePortfolios	
1	The context, diversity, and action clusters within the minor have allowed me to take my education to the next level and engage in critical thinking about community action and social change.
2	My time in CASC has helped me become involved in social justice both in classes and in extracurricular activities. It has allowed me to explore different ways in which I can personally promote change and work for causes that I am passionate about in my own community. My experiences working on a crisis hotline, with English language learners, and as a reading tutor in the City Public Schools have all helped me connect what I have learned in class to experiences that are related to my interest in working with young people in a school setting. CASC has taken my passion and desire to help others and turned it into a set of skills and strategies that can help me make a difference.
3	Combining the formal classroom instruction from diversity learning and the context cluster provided me with tools to understand how community action and social change works, as well as the dynamics of social identity and power. This instruction provided me with a solid foundation of knowledge, but the action service learning cluster took my learning to a new level. What was so important in the action service learning cluster was that the knowledge I had gained through formal instruction was now being applied to situations outside of the classroom. Service learning put me in a position responsible for social action that required me to be a compassionate ally, supportive and aware of diversity and how to handle it.
4	As I reflect on my time in college, I realize that many of the most important things that I most remember were not learned in any academic context. While the classroom concepts of calculus or supply and demand will probably always be vaguely remembered, I will never forget what I have learned about people and our society from my time in college. Much of this was learned through extensions of the classroom, none more because of my minor in community action social change.

Table 3
Core Theme: Clarification of Personal Values and Beliefs and/or Lifelong Learning

Quotations from Students' ePortfolios	
1	Growing Allies is an organization on campus that works to promote social justice and create a socially aware community on campus. Being a part of this community has taught me a lot about myself as well as how to communicate and understand others. I have learned how to be an ally and support others who may or may not be different than me in a number of ways. We all share this world and I think that working to understand each other and support one another can only lead to a more harmonious society.
2	I experienced an amazing paradigm shift on my view of homelessness and what it means to love those who are homeless. Though I've always had a heart for the homeless, many times I find it easy to get annoyed with beggars and lump them all into a category of people who are using what little money they get for alcohol or other drugs instead of helping their situation. Because of my experience with the Delonis Center, I now see that my view of the homeless community is based solely on stereotypes that do not accurately depict the majority of those who are homeless.
3	Being able to understand what I was capable of and be confident in that was something I always thought I had, but had never truly been challenged until this experience. I now feel confident in my ability to make and maintain successful working relationships based on mutual respect and trust.
4	Usually race is talked about in context of minorities, but through this dialogue I have come to understand that white people have a race, too. I was taught to ignore racial conflict because it is not "involve" me directly and used to believe I did not have a position on these issues. On the contrary, I realize now that this privilege and ignorance of it has kept me from being a social change agent.
5	Because of my experience in IGR, my privileges of being white and being a man have become very salient to me, and I have begun to learn how to name my privileges and am gaining the tools and ideas of what it takes to be an ally. These points of self-discovery have been vital to my conceptualization of social justice. I am a double major involved in many organizations and communities around campus yet, my involvement with my CASC community is the one I leave undergrad most proud of. As I will be a student at the University of Michigan School of Social Work this fall, I will most definitely carry with me the lessons and values that CASC has instilled in me.
6	I have set a goal for myself to one day be a part of a non-profit organization that utilizes both youth and sport to combat social issues. Through several diverse experiences I have come to realize my own potential as a single individual that is capable of improving the lives of others.
7	The minor has had a profound effect on my value system and has pushed me to be more conscious of social justice in other aspects of my life. All three of my artifacts in this portfolio embody just a portion of what Community Action & Social Change has to offer. As I finish up my undergraduate education at the University of Michigan, I am excited to examine how other aspects of the minor play into whatever career awaits me.

they are just one tool that we can use in assessing program outcomes. In the future, we hope to refine our process by incorporating a means of capturing students' understanding of and skills for civic engagement when they enter the minor in order to establish a point of comparison when we re-assess such understanding and skills through the capstone ePortfolio. It will also be important to follow students after they graduate to assess how their learning related to civic engagement continues as they enter the workforce. Aligning minor goals and measuring achievement of these goals over time is a critical next step, and the use of ePortfolios will facilitate this ongoing process.

We are also considering viewing the portfolio through an additional lens to provide a more objective assessment of student learning. Using new technology platforms that enable students to "tag" competencies and learning to specific experiences would allow for more objective assessments of student learning and

enable us to identify gaps or weaknesses across portfolios. We also plan to engage faculty readers to assess presence and level of student learning as an additional source of evidence for the minor.

Other plans for future work include: examining how students use ePortfolios over time to determine whether this way of capturing learning is something students in new jobs and situations continue to use or simply a one-time project; moving to the development of a web-based course that encourages students to begin the ePortfolio process when they enter the minor rather than waiting until their final semester; and examining the integrative learning components of ePortfolios in order to support the use of ePortfolios for program assessment and student growth.

Overall, these additional plans will enable the CASC faculty and staff to use ePortfolio content in new and on-going ways. We hope that the learning from student's reflections and experiences can support

innovations in curriculum, including the addition of new content or the creation of new courses to support student needs. Additionally, we hope that the ePortfolio content and learning can be used to develop new co-curricular programming opportunities by drawing on high-impact experiences and/or supporting gaps as articulated by students. We can also imagine the potential for ePortfolios as a tool for peer-to-peer learning within the minor and peer-to-peer mentoring and support between current students and alumni.

Conclusion

As we have learned in the CASC minor, the ePortfolio provides an innovative platform for assessment, and we look forward to continuing to explore the various ways in which ePortfolios can be used to support pedagogical and curricular developments, assess program outcomes, and facilitate changes in the minor to enhance students' overall civic engagement education.

In addition, ePortfolios provide an opportunity to capture civic engagement and social change outcomes in more depth than do traditional assessment tools. Although this study was not of a sufficient scale to be generalizable, our observation is that the ePortfolio process has enabled us to capture elements of what we know are high-impact practices for civic engagement, service learning, and social action education (Buyarski & Landis, 2014). Through our preliminary efforts, we believe that ePortfolios make high-impact practices visible, allowing students to reflect on experiences and communicate them in new ways and to articulate and share the value of these types of experiences with external audiences, such as family members, employers, or academic advisors.

While this case example focused on an interdisciplinary undergraduate minor, the development of a rubric and subsequent categories to capture core goals and assist programs in assessing outcomes related to civic engagement can be used by other programs. The ePortfolio, when student-driven with links to program goals, allows for diverse perspectives to emerge, helping students to organize their learning and enhance their abilities to tell their own story of change.

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Appendix
Initial Portfolio Assessment Rubric

Student's Name		Key: C = capstone (highest rating); M = milestone
CATEGORY	RATING	COMMENTS/QUOTES
Cultural self-awareness	Articulates insights into own cultural rules and biases (e.g. aware of how his/her experiences have been shaped by these rules and how to respond to cultural biases, resulting in a shift in self-description). C	
	Recognizes new perspectives about own cultural rules and biases (i.e. comfortable with the complexities that new perspectives offer). M	
	Identifies own cultural rules and biases but with a strong preference for those rules shared with own cultural group. M	
Diversity of communities and cultures	Demonstrates evidence of adjustment in own attitudes and beliefs because of working within and learning from diversity of communities and cultures. Promotes others' engagement with diversity. C	
	Reflects on how own attitudes and beliefs are different from those of other communities and cultures. Exhibits curiosity about what can be learned from diversity. M	
Civic identity and commitment	Provides evidence of experience in civic engagement activities and describes what s/he has learned about her/himself as it relates to <i>reinforced and clarified</i> sense of civic identity and <i>continued</i> commitment to public action. C	
	Provides evidence of experience in civic engagement activities and describes what s/he has learned about her/himself as it relates to <i>growing</i> sense of civic identity and commitment to public action. M	
	Evidence suggests involvement in civic engagement activities is generated from expectations or course requirements rather than sense of civic identity. M	
CATEGORY	RATING	COMMENTS/QUOTES
Civic leadership	Demonstrates independent experience and shows initiative in team leadership of complex or multiple civic engagement activities, accompanied by reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of one's actions. C	
	Demonstrates independent experience and team leadership of civic action, with reflective insights or analysis about the aims and accomplishments of one's actions. M	
	Has clearly participated in civically focused actions and begins to reflect or describe how these actions may affect individuals or communities. M	
Connections to experience	Meaningfully synthesizes connections among experiences outside of the formal classroom to deepen understanding and broaden own points of view. C	
	Effectively selects and develops examples of life experiences to illuminate concepts, theories, and frameworks. M	
Reflection and self-assessment	Reviews prior learning in depth to reveal significantly changed perspectives. Envisions a future self and possibly makes plans that build on past experiences in multiple and diverse contexts. C	
	Reviews prior learning in depth to reveal clarified meanings or broader perspectives. Evaluates changes in own learning, recognizing complex contextual factors. M	
	Reviews prior learning with some depth. Articulates strengths and challenges within specific experiences to increase effectiveness in particular contexts. M	
Total Categories Fulfilled:		