How Electronic Portfolios Add Coherence to Educational Programs

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Abstract

CSU Bakersfield has been implementing electronic portfolios into several of its programs. This poster will showcase applications in online Educational Technology Master's program and in a technology proficiency certification program for K-12 and university instructors. Master's program was begun in fall, 2001 and is being developed in partnership with Connected University. Selected classes include a digital exhibit that addresses the a program theme. A capstone class assists students in assembling the exhibits and creating a portfolio demonstrating program objectives, which is given a public presentation much like a doctoral defense. The certification program has been in place for three years using hard copy portfolios, resulting in dramatic changes in the teaching learning process in local schools. At this time more than 3000 educators have been certified. An electronic version was developed recently and will be demonstrated. Copies of the instruments used are available online

Introduction

CSU Bakersfield has found electronic portfolios (e portfolios) have enhanced its educational programs by adding coherence and addressing some issues unique to the institution. CSUB is the only comprehensive regional university in a service area that is larger than several New England states. The population is largely rural and in poverty. Electronic portfolios address such needs as:

- Serving the needs of working students who often have to take time off for financial and personal reasons
- Adding perceived coherence to programs by having a single system encompass all courses, serve as connection threads throughout the programs, and allow the program objectives to be seen as unified by the completion of all required exhibits
- Emphasizing the application of knowledge and skills on real-world problems
- Using an assessment system in which rubrics clearly demonstrate the skill levels attained
- Providing access to wide-ranging students

E Portfolios in Graduate Programs

CSUB had a Curriculum and Instruction Masters Program in Education that was a traditional face to face model. The size of the service area created a hardship for many students in rural locations. CSUB partnered with Connected University in fall, 2001 to begin an online MA program with a technology emphasis. CSUB was able to apply some of CUs class modules and instructors to its program, adding richness and versatility that was lacking because of the few CSUB instructors available. CU also makes the program available to its world-wide audience, ensuring full sections of classes. By being accessible anytime/anywhere, students in distant locations or with frenetic work schedules can be served. CSUB has developed a plan to use electronic portfolios to provide students with a sense of coherence as they move through it. Four classes will include assignments to create an electronic exhibit reflecting the objectives of the class. A capstone class will help students assemble their exhibits and add a final exhibit that synthesizes the program objectives. The portfolios will be publicly presented in this class, with students having the option of coming to a central location or participating in a video conference. The interaction among the students is expected to provide a depth of reflection that would not be attainable by traditional means.
CSUB is currently piloting the use of TaskStream (<www.taskstream.com>), an online application provider, to house e portfolios that demonstrate the standards that must be met in teacher credential programs.

**E Portfolios for Technology Proficiency Certification**

In 1997, California adopted a new technology standard for teachers. CSUB collaborated with California Technology Assistance Project Region 8 (CTAP8), a state agency that provides technology resources for teachers. The collaboration resulted in a system of technology proficiency certification based on the state standard, but going beyond it. The state listed two sets of skills, one for students entering a credential program (Level I) and one for teachers earning their credential (Level II). CTAP8 developed a rubric for each of these two levels and went on to develop skill sets for Level III, which could be earned in two areas: Mentoring and Leadership.

The system was adopted by all school districts in the county and by CSUB’s School of Education. All instructors are expected to earn Levels I and II. Coherence was added to professional development activities because training sessions could target skills at either level. In addition, skills were seen as part of a holistic continuum of skills by the portfolio assessment process. Teachers completing a portfolio had proof that they had mastered a range of skills. As the process became widely used in schools, a change in culture could be detected. Once a significant minority of teachers attained Level II, the majority were motivated to catch up. Schools offered incentives of stipends and frequent trainings to assemble the portfolios. Two federal grants (StarTEC <www.starteeproject.org/> and Project TNT <www.projecttnt.com>) provided trainings, equipment and stipends for attaining proficiencies. There are currently over 3000 certified educators in the service region and CTAP8 has plans on getting a majority of local educators to Level II within three years.

The existence of Level III provided acknowledgement of those teachers who had advanced technology skills. Other teachers could go to them for support, addressing the need for widespread and quick assistance. Level III teachers are empowered to certify those at Level I and II, thus providing the staffing capacity to make the system efficient. Further, Level III teachers could be paid to conduct workshops, write technology grants and provide other technological services.

The hardcopy portfolio system has been very successful in raising the level of technology proficiency among local educators. The development of an electronic model is bringing the system to the next level. Placing portfolios on a web site or CD makes them easily accessible from any location in the county. The contents can be easily adapted to other uses, such as demonstration of skills in job interviews or having a rich vita with many electronic examples.

A model portfolio including the html file structure is available at <http://www.csub.edu/~dgeorgi/pres_refs/ctap8georgiIIIp ortfolio/index.htm>. Examples of the CTAP8 system, including online examples of exhibits at each proficiency level, can be seen at <http://www.ctap.org/ctc/>.

CSUB is in the process of integrating e portfolios in the programs described in this paper, which can be accessed at <http://www.csub.edu/~dgeorgi/pres_refs/366geo.doc> with active links.