

**PROGRAM REVIEW AND ASSESSMENT COMMITTEE (PRAC)**  
**Grant Application**  
**Spring 2012**

Project Directors

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Project Title

Assessing First-Year Outcomes through Authentic Evidence: Content Analysis of the Electronic Personal Development Plan

Project Dates

April 2012 – December 2012

**Abstract** (100 words)

The purpose of this project is to use the authentic evidence provided by the electronic Personal Development Plan (ePDP) -- an application of ePortfolio -- to assess the direct student learning outcomes associated with the first-year seminar course. Approximately 92% of first-time, full-time students enroll in a seminar course and the major and moderate PULs are Core Communication and Critical Thinking, respectively. The proposed project involves the development of a rubric by a sub-group of the faculty and advisors, pilot testing, assessment of student learning outcomes through content analysis using the rubric, and professional development of faculty/advisors in assessing direct evidence of student learning.

## Purpose of Project

The purpose of this project is to use the authentic evidence provided by the electronic Personal Development Plan ([ePDP](#)) -- an application of ePortfolio -- to assess the outcomes associated with the first-year seminar course. In fall 2011, the first full year of implementation of the ePDP, approximately 1,000 first semester students completed an ePortfolio as part of the curriculum in the first-year seminar course. Student portfolios were evaluated by course instructors through the use of a [rubric](#) which provides standards for each of the seven sections of the ePDP (About Me, Educational Goals and Plans, Career Goals, Academic Showcase, Campus and Community Connections, College Achievements, and Resume). To date, assessment of the overall implementation of the ePDP as well as experiences in First-Year Seminars has been conducted through student surveys as well as student success indicators including grade point average and retention rates. This project will allow us to develop the capacity to use authentic evidence to assess student learning directly in a meaningful way that goes beyond compliance to external mandates or the employment of expensive standardized tests that are not aligned with the curriculum or intended student learning outcomes.

This project will tap into the real power of portfolios for assessment – the use of authentic evidence. Student reflections and writings will be evaluated using rubrics created for the overarching goals of the ePDP and aligned with the Principles of Undergraduate Learning (PULs) (rather than each individual section) thereby tapping into the metacognitive processes associated with “folio thinking” (Chen & Mazow, 2002). We will specifically look for evidence of the stated learning outcomes for the ePDP across each portfolio as a whole. The articulated learning outcomes of the ePDP implemented in seminars are:

- Self-Awareness: Students will identify success-related competencies
- Exploration: Students research and identify realistic and informed academic and career goals

- Evaluation: Students analyze their academic progress in terms of progress toward academic and career goals
- Goal Setting: Students connect personal values and life purpose to the motivation and inspiration behind their goals
- Planning: Students locate programs, information, people, and opportunities to support and reality test their goals.

It is important to note that Self-awareness, Exploration, and Evaluation are all aligned with the Critical Thinking PUL for first-year students in seminars and Core Communication can be directly assessed by evaluating students' written and oral reflections as part of the ePDP process. In addition, current rubrics for each section include items measuring both critical thinking and communication through the adaptation of Paul and Elder's model of Critical Thinking (2006).

#### Intended Outcomes

This project will result in three primary outcomes. First, rubrics will be developed for each of the ePDP outcomes. The rubrics will be developed by a sub-group of the faculty and advisors who have implemented the ePDP in their first year seminar. The rubric will be pilot tested through review of sample portfolios. Second, we will collect baseline evidence of student achievement of the stated learning outcomes through content analysis of the entire portfolio using the rubrics for each of the stated learning outcomes. Finally, faculty and advisors from first-year seminar courses will be targeted to serve as reviewers for this project. As such, through their participation in this assessment project, faculty will be actively engaged in their own professional development. Specifically, they will be challenged to think, share, and reconstruct their approach to using an electronic portfolio to foster student learning. The evidence gathered through this project will be used to help all faculty implementing the ePDP to effectively evaluate authentic evidence of learning.

## Assessment Methods

It is noteworthy that the primary purpose of this project is the develop an effective method for using authentic evidence provided by the ePDP to improve understanding of direct student learning outcomes (or outcomes beyond GPA, retention rates, student self-report). In doing so, the project has the potential to improve student learning (by increasing faculty understanding of student learning and by providing better feedback on student learning using rubrics) and allowing for faculty professional development (they will be learning about how to develop rubrics, use them to assess authentic evidence, and provide clear and useful feedback to students). The first step in the assessment process will be to develop rubrics for each of the stated learning outcomes. Once developed, the rubrics will be pilot tested with a sample of ePDPs. The formal content analysis will be conducted using 100 student portfolios randomly selected from those students who submitted IRB permission (IRB approval to use ePDPs for assessment and research purposes has already been sought and obtained). Ten reviewers will rate 20 portfolios with each portfolio being looked at by at least two reviewers. In addition to scoring each ePDP using the rubrics, reviewers will be asked to highlight the evidence supporting their ratings on a print out of each portfolio. This will provide for quantitative rubric scores as well as supporting qualitative evidence from each portfolio.

Using a mixed-method evaluation design, we will obtain qualitative and quantitative evidence that demonstrates if the proposed project has been effective (i.e., have the intended goals been achieved) and to determine what improvements can be implemented in future interventions to better meet student and faculty participants' expressed needs (formative evaluation). Both quantitative and qualitative data will be collected to determine if the project has improved faculty members' and advisors' ability to 1) develop rubrics, 2) use them the assess authentic evidence and 3) use rubrics to provide students with feedback about their performance. The following methods and approaches will be employed:

- An inventory of the quantity and quality of rubrics used in first year seminars to assess authentic learning via the ePDP before and after project
- Focus groups and interviews with advisors and faculty members to determine if they are thinking, sharing, and reconstructing their approaches to using an electronic portfolio to foster student learning.
- Focus groups, interviews, and questionnaires with students to assess if the ePDP process and rubrics were used to provide them with useful and clear feedback about their learning.

Ultimately this project will allow us to determine the relationship between participation in First-Year Seminars and the PULs of Core Communication and Critical Thinking in a systematic manner. The overriding goal for this project is to facilitate the following action steps so we can assess course-embedded authentic evidence of student learning: 1) rubrics will be carefully developed as part of this project, 2) faculty will use the ePDP process to help students better understand their strengths, areas in need of improvement, and learning gains, 3) rubrics will be used to assess the authentic evidence generated by the ePDP process, 4) the common rubrics will be piloted and validated by faculty teaching first-year seminars, 5) mean and frequencies will be reported and used to determine level of competence in the areas of Critical Thinking and Core Communication among students in first-year seminars, and 6) faculty will engage in meaningful discussions about scaffolding, student reflection, and how to use direct evidence of student learning to improve teaching.

#### Data Analysis

A series of quantitative and qualitative analyses procedures will be used to assess the outcomes of this project. A series of independent samples t-test will be employed to determine if there are significant differences in the quantity and types of rubrics used in first year seminars to assess student learning before and after project. Procedures such as regressions and ANOVAs will be employed to analyze student and faculty questionnaire results. All focus group and

interview data will be uploaded into Atlas.Ti (a qualitative software tool) and content analyzed for major themes and categories.

The quantitative rubric ratings will be analyzed through establishment of mean, median, and modal scores. The rubric scores will also be analyzed by type of first year seminar experience: students participating in the summer bridge program and a first-year seminar, students participating in the summer bridge program and a themed learning community, and students enrolled in a first-year seminar only. The qualitative comments that support each rubric rating will be compiled and analyzed through the use of Atlas.Ti to establish themes. Themes will be identified within each of the five learning outcomes for the ePDP.

#### Evaluation and Dissemination of Results

All published articles or conference papers will be submitted to the Program Review and Assessment Committee. Additionally, results will be disseminated both on and off-campus. At IUPUI, the results will be presented to first-year seminar faculty and at the annual ePortfolio symposium. Off-campus conference presentation proposals will be submitted to relevant conferences such as the National Conference for the First-Year Experience and the Association of Authentic, Experiential and Evidence-Based Learning. The results will also be included in articles submitted to publications such as the International Journal of ePortfolio and the Journal of the First-Year Experience and Students in Transition.

#### Intended Use of Findings for Program Improvement

Given the intended outcomes of this project, the findings will be used for three primary purposes. Feedback from the reviewers on the clarity, effectiveness, and usefulness of the rubrics will be used to strengthen the rubric for future assessment. The results of the content analysis will inform modifications to be made to the reflection prompts in the ePDP as well as to assist faculty in developing pedagogical strategies that will result in stronger achievement of the stated learning outcomes.

### Budget

Stipend for reviewers	\$50 gift cards for x 10 reviewers	\$500
Qualitative Data Analysis	\$2000 for graduate assistant	<u>\$2,000</u>
Total Budget		\$2,500

### References

Chen, H.L., & Mazow, C. (June 16, 2002). Electronic Learning Portfolios in Student Affairs, *Net Results*. Retrieved from <http://www.naspa.org/netresults/article.cfm?ID=825>

Paul, R. & Elder, L. (2006). *The miniature guide to critical thinking: Concepts and Tool*.

Retrieved from [http://www.criticalthinking.org/files/Concepts\\_Tools.pdf](http://www.criticalthinking.org/files/Concepts_Tools.pdf)