IUPUI Research Findings
National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research
October 13, 2006
Submitted by Susan Kahn and Sharon Hamilton

At IUPUI, we set out to discover 1) the impact our student electronic portfolio (ePort) is having on student learning and retention; 2) methods for gaining widespread faculty buy-in; and 3) ways of exploiting potential interactions between ePort and our electronic *institutional* portfolio (iPort) to represent authentic student learning to stakeholders. In brief, we learned that: our question about impact was too simple; we began to find some methods for engaging faculty; and we needed more mature portfolio technology than we had to address any of the questions in a truly meaningful way. To elaborate:

ePort Impact on Student Learning and Retention

During Years 1 and 2 of our research, ePort was piloted in some of our freshman Themed Learning Communities (TLCs). Faculty members teaching these TLCs were asked to volunteer to pilot ePort, so the pilot group was self-selected, while the "non-volunteer" TLCs served as the control group. Our best evidence for ePort's impact came from an end-of-semester survey that found that ePort students rated themselves as more proficient in several of our six Principles of Undergraduate Learning (PULs) and also perceived the PULs as more important to their undergraduate learning than did non-ePort students. In addition, in response to a series of questions borrowed from the National Survey of Student Engagement, ePort students reported higher involvement in "engaging" learning activities, including writing, synthesizing ideas, and amount of time spent studying. On the other hand, analysis of gradepoint averages and retention to the next semester showed no significant differences between the experimental and control groups. We did not track ePort students beyond the next semester, because most of these students had no further exposure to ePort following their TLC experience. Moreover, problems with the still-developing ePort technology led some volunteer faculty to minimize classwork involving ePort, blurring the distinction between our experimental and control groups.

More anecdotal findings emerged from our experience piloting ePort in our own team-taught senior capstone seminar in English. Although we did no formal surveys or comparisons, our analysis of our students' reflections on their learning over the course of their college careers emphasized—dramatically, in some cases—the value of metacognition for learning; we could see our students reaching new insights as they looked back over their past work and gaining confidence in their abilities as they compared early work to more recent work. From short essays we asked the class to write about the value of developing their ePorts, we learned that these senior English majors saw great value in their portfolios. In fact, all of them recommended that IUPUI students begin developing portfolios as freshmen.

This experience, along with the discussions taking place in our NCEPR cohort, led us to focus more intensely on the value of reflection and metacognition. At the same time, we were learning from faculty focus groups that TLC freshmen had difficulty understanding the purpose and value of an electronic portfolio; we needed a more thoughtfully constructed, intentional "introduction" to ePort. As a result, we have re-

focused the TLC work on ePort this year to emphasize development of a "learner profile," which guides students through several activities intended to introduce them to the PULs, portfolios, and the value of reflecting on one's learning. The Learner Profile includes links to our Career Center and to online instruments that help students to identify their learning styles and potential career interests. The main "pre-portfolio" activity is a "preflection," in which students are asked to think about their learning needs in the context of their career and personal aspirations. We hope this will set the stage for later portfolio work; so far, TLC faculty, as well as advisors, have responded with enthusiasm to the Learner Profile, but we haven't yet had the opportunity to gauge student responses or to analyze student preflections.

Methods for Gaining Faculty Buy-In

We confronted several obstacles to faculty buy-in at the outset of this project: some faculty perceived ePort as a top-down administrative mandate (although the idea, in fact, initially came from faculty); and efforts to introduce ePort before the technology was fully ready alienated a number of potentially receptive faculty. These were certainly important lessons about what *not* to do to gain faculty buy-in.

We believe that we are now on a path that will lead us to spreading acceptance and use of ePort. We are using several key strategies as we navigate this path:

1. The revision of the TLC student experience with ePort, described above, has been well-received by faculty. All of the TLCs are now using ePort, and TLC syllabi this semester reflect good integration of introductory ePort activities into the ongoing work of these classes. One problem in the early ePort pilots was that ePort work was included as an add-on to syllabi and assignments, rather than smoothly integrated into the work and learning taking place in these courses.
2. Last year, we began giving small grants to departments to support them in integrating ePort into their programs. We (re)discovered that funding, even in modest amounts, can be a strong incentive! Recipients of these two-year grants spend the first year planning and are expected to implement use of ePort in the second year. Our first two departments, Secondary Education in the School of Education, and Computer and Information Technology in the School of Engineering and Technology, have done exemplary work so far. Secondary Education, in particular, used the first year of the grant to map the curriculum, identifying which courses and key assignments address which of the school's "Principles of Teacher Education." This year, three more departments, including Biology in the School of Science, Visual Communication in the Herron School of Art and Design, and Education at our branch campus in Columbus, Indiana are beginning grant projects. We plan to continue with this strategy, using presentations by grantee departments to key faculty committees as a way of generating enthusiasm.
3. ePort is integrated into our new Sakai-powered course management system, Oncourse CL. The new system is not yet in widespread use, but we hope that making ePort part of the electronic learning environment available to all will encourage additional faculty and students to begin exploring at least some of ePort's capabilities.

Interaction Between ePort and iPort

In this portion of our project, we have no real progress to report. Our ePort technology is not nearly mature enough, nor is the use of ePort widespread enough, for us to aggregate findings about student learning or to submit queries for reporting in iPort. In addition, we had hoped that we might be able to draw on ePort for dramatic examples of individual student learning and progress, but we do not yet have students using ePort over the course of their entire college careers. Perhaps our department grants will generate some good longitudinal examples. We continue to plan for eventual interaction between the two portfolios, but our priority for the moment is to ensure that ePort technology works well for its most immediate users and (we hope) beneficiaries: our students and faculty.