



National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research

February 2006

Cohort #2

- Clemson University
- George Mason University
- Kapi'olani Community College
- St. Olaf College
- The Ohio State University
- **Thomas College**
- University of Georgia
- University of Illinois Champaign Urbana
- University of Nebraska Omaha
- University of Texas San Antonio
- Washington State University

My thoughts re: the February 2006 meeting of the National Coalition for Electronic Portfolio Research (NCEPR) in Portland, Oregon

Purpose of the meeting (and specifically, our attendance at the meeting)

- *Discussion* of the on-going research projects taking place at coalition member college and university campuses.
 - Identification of issues related to research questions
 - instruments of measurement (data identification)
 - subject populations (data collection)
 - relevance to particular institutions (“why” data driven research)
 - interpretation of data (data usefulness)
 - further or tangential study (where to take the data)
- *Conversation* with coalition members who represent institutions where successful e-portfolio implementation has occurred
 - “confidence building”
 - Re: the Thomas process of implementation
 - Re: data validity
 - Pragmatic instruction for implementation
 - “Networking”
 - Brain-storming
 - philosophical premises necessary for the implementation of e-portfolio
 - potential serendipitous end-results
- *Affiliation* with a national group of representatives of higher education
 - Credibility “at home”
 - Contact with a wide variety of post-secondary institutions (small private college, community college, large state university, large private university, etc.)
 - Source identification for questions, issues, and concerns of implementation and institutional commitment

Results and Benefits of Having Attended the Meeting: Thomas College

While the benefits of having attended the coalition meeting may seem somewhat general and even esoteric in nature, they can be defined as having fulfilled our expectations as described above. We participated in many discussions specific to our intentions for the our institution; we had the opportunity to brainstorm on, and then expand upon our expectations with regard to implementing electronic portfolios; and finally, we have strengthened our affiliation with a collection of professionals who are innovators in the realm (and use) of electronic resources in higher education.

The most satisfying product of the coalition meeting is the anecdotal evidence we were able to collect as validation of our (1) general implementation difficulties, (2) planned method of implementation, and (3) anticipated long-term commitment to and for the incorporation of e-portfolio use at Thomas. While there are some who are aware of the value inherent in electronic storage of academic and administrative information as an institution, Thomas is nowhere near a level of implementation that can be considered significant with regard to practical use.

Through conversations with representatives from institutions such as the University of Nebraska at Omaha (Neal Topp), and Washington State University (Todd _____), we have re-discovered the value of the combination of patience and determination; in fact, based on Neal's and Todd's experiences, we can allow ourselves to feel confident that our current plan to simply talk with faculty and administrative staff about the virtues of electronic portfolio is "on track" and a natural progression of the process of implementation. That is to say, we haven't failed yet!

Beyond the obvious benefit of networking in general, that we were able to brainstorm with other members of the coalition who have "been there" and or are nearly "there", has allowed to now hone our technique(s) of implementation, as well as to think about other productive uses for electronic and online resources in general. For example, several members are also struggling with Information Literacy and Online Learning issues (conceptually, pedagogically, and pragmatically), in concert with the mechanical process of incorporating electronic portfolios into academic and administrative information management.

In addition to the discussion, networking, and general support, we also participated in learning exercises which were designed for the purpose of generating tangential lines of research, and workshop sessions for the benefit of users of the electronic portfolio model; in fact, it could be said that our sessions were intended to generate new models of use for e-portfolio that could be used more universally across a wider "audience". For example, as in the case of Thomas, where we have many adjunct faculty who are simultaneously members of the business community, it may be more effective to stress the inherent dynamicity of e-portfolio in the context of adapting a CV or resume for specific career decisions. Another model may be that of the scientific method where the science or professional article can be written in stages via the e-portfolio, and even used as a method for collaboration.

Benefits of Having Attended the Meeting: *cjb*

The overwhelming theme at the meeting for the effective implementation of e-portfolio use is that of “conversation” as it compares to “encouragement” or “mandate”; conversation is described as taking place between faculty, and those who have no power to impose a new product and or philosophy. As the Information Resource Specialist, it is natural for faculty and students to ask questions about, and to comment upon, new technology and the philosophy of technology to me in the context of incorporating new tools into particular and general pedagogy. While it may seem natural that I would be biased in my capacity as the campus IRS, that is, that I may want to promote something that has come from the Dean’s Office, trumpeting new ideas is not an expectation of my position. Consequently, I am in the unique position of being able to “just talk” with faculty and administrative staff as they work through the process of incorporating new technology professionally and personally.

Along with the ability (by virtue of my position) to simply talk with members of the Thomas community, I am charged generally with the responsibility of instruction in the use of online resources including pedagogical, mechanical, and incorporation techniques. My method of instruction includes the premise that as users become more comfortable in the knowledge that a “safety net” exists for them, they will eventually require less frequent personal support as they incorporate different forms of media and resources. That is, if I prepare faculty, administrative staff, and students effectively, they will naturally come to use new technology efficiently, and serendipitously more frequently. Eventually, the planned institutional use of electronic portfolio will become the norm.

The combination of coalition’s experiential evidence of the necessity of “conversation”, and the implication inherent in my professional positioning at the college indicate a need for my involvement in the process of the campus-wide incorporation of electronic portfolio use. In plain English: it just makes sense that I am trained in both the mechanics as well as the philosophy of e-portfolio use as it pertains to Thomas College. I have come away from the coalition meeting with a clearer understanding of both of these aspects, as well as a more solid commitment to fitting e-portfolio use and training into my own professional responsibilities.