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Making Student Learning and Experiences Evident in General Education With ePortfolios: A Programmatic Evaluation

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For over almost decade, Mercy University's faculty have been integrating ePortfolios into general education seminar courses, which have empowered students to archive work, demonstrate growth, share diverse experiences, and reflect upon their identities as lifelong learners. This paper features a five-year-long program evaluation with findings that illustrate the value of scaffolding reflective ePortfolio assignments into the general education curriculum with the goal of enabling and assessing intellectual growth. These findings are centered on a preliminary phase of ePortfolio use in the first-year and capstone general education seminar courses. Based on the survey data collected, faculty perceptions and usage of ePortfolios improved over the five-year period regarding student learning and success. Recommendations include learner-centered institutional change through an ePortfolio supported redesigned general education curriculum.

Guided by Eynon and Gambino's (2017) Catalyst Framework, this evaluation sought to answer two central questions. First, how did faculty perceptions of ePortfolios' impact on student engagement, learning, and reflection change over a five-year period of implementation? Second, what evidence of learning and growth do students themselves demonstrate through their ePortfolio reflections? The analysis revealed that faculty perceptions improved significantly, with more instructors reporting ePortfolios were effective for student reflection and learning in 2023 than in 2019. Furthermore, qualitative analysis of student ePortfolios provided compelling evidence of metacognition, skill mastery, and personal development, particularly at the capstone level. However, a main challenge was the lack of significant improvement in faculty-reported ease of use of the technology, highlighting a critical area for future support and development. The findings also indicate that despite persistent technological challenges, ePortfolios significantly enhance faculty perception of student engagement and provide powerful evidence of students' academic and personal growth, offering critical insights for the institution's ongoing general education reform and underscoring the value of ePortfolios as a tool for learner-centered institutional change.

In an era focused on demonstrable student learning outcomes, electronic portfolios (ePortfolios) have been promoted as a high-impact practice (HIP) for their ability to make student growth visible through reflection and integration. This programmatic evaluation investigates the efficacy of a longstanding ePortfolio initiative within the general education curriculum at Mercy University, a Hispanic-serving private institution in New York. Through a mixed-methods analysis of longitudinal faculty survey data and qualitative student ePortfolio artifacts, this study examines if and how ePortfolios succeed in making student learning and experiences evident across first-year and capstone courses.

Literature Review

Over 125 years ago, Harvard President Charles Eliot proclaimed that "Our schools and colleges have been trying to prepare their pupils for a subsequent life out in a world which has itself been shifting and changing with an unprecedented rapidity" (Eliot, 1903, p. 63). Eliot recognized that the reality American schools prepare students for "is an utterly different life from that for which the schools were preparing the children forty years ago—or even twenty years ago" (p. 63). President Eliot was describing a shift in the character of American life that began in the mid-19th century, largely due to rapid technological change. He went on to identify such inventions as the telephone, telegraph, steam engine, and electric light as some of the revolutionary technologies of his time from which "immeasurable benefits have flowed," arguing that schools had to change to keep up with changing times (Cassidy, 2004). Educational institutions in the 21st century must continue to adapt to rapidly changing technologies that impact the teaching-learning process, such as learning management systems and electronic portfolios (ePortfolios).

The advancement of electronic portfolios did not transpire in a void; rather, they descend from reflective print portfolios that have been traditionally used in certain disciplines such as college-level writing, nursing, and teacher education (Kahn, 2014). Three "revolutions" have supported the integration of ePortfolios. According to Wickersham and Chambers (2006), the technological revolution offered the technical tools and strategies to facilitate ePortfolio development, the assessment revolution recognized better approaches to identify, measure, and evaluate student learning, and the active learning revolution advanced more student-centered versus teacher-centered approaches. Many advocates of reform suggest that technology calls traditional faculty instructional

roles into question. In the traditional model, instruction is professor-centered with students in a secondary, often passive, role. Fuller integration of technology such as ePortfolios into college classrooms may eventually convert the college professor from a "sage on the stage" to a "guide on the side" with modification of teaching approaches through the instruction of cooperative or collaborative student-centered learning (Cassidy, 2004). As guides, not judges, instructors can use learning platforms such as ePortfolios to show students how to engage in the practice of student-centered learning. An alternative way to view the approaches is to recognize how ePortfolios distinguish a shift from a "teaching paradigm" to a "learning paradigm" (Kahn, 2014).

In creating ePortfolios as undergraduates, students will develop the ability to converse with others about their interactions with educational attributes such as critical thinking, inquiry, autonomy, and communication across diverse topics in liberal education. They will develop the ability not merely to criticize values, but to add value to multiple organizations in which they participate (Roth, 2013). The liberal arts and general education remain contentious topics in a country committed to technological change as an engine for economic development. Liberal education has also been connected to the increased freedom and autonomy of the individual, and to enhancing the capacity of people to engage in meaningful work. However, liberal education has always included a strong historical function, giving students access to the great intellectual, scientific, cultural, artistic, and political achievements of the past while developing specialization in one or more areas (American Association of Colleges and Universities [AAC&U], 2015; Roth, 2013). AAC&U is the principal organization in the United States that is charged with advancing the quality and strength of liberal education through pursuing excellence in undergraduate education by focusing on facilitating the foundations of equity, access, and quality regardless of academic discipline or career paths of students (AAC&U, 2015). Besides traditional academics, a liberal education gives a sense of social duty, as well as strong, transferable intellectual and practical skills such as communication, analytical, and problem-solving skills, and a demonstrated ability to apply knowledge and skills in real-world settings through a core general education curriculum (AAC&U, 2023).

To support innovation and social duty in liberal education, in 2005 AAC&U launched the Liberal Education and America's Promise (LEAP) initiative. Through national public advocacy and campus action in liberal education, LEAP supports individual students via identified HIPs (Kuh et al., 2013; Schneider, 2021). One such HIP is ePortfolios. Portfolios have a foundation in the visual and performing arts. Traditionally, in education, portfolios are binders or folders containing a student's best pieces along with the student's evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of the pieces (Sweet, 1993). In 1979, Eugene Williams wrote about how student teachers at Howard University were using portfolios with audiovisual materials such as slide narrations and audio-videotape recordings to replace resumes when seeking employment (Williams, 1979). Since then, the graduate-level teacher education field has not only widely embraced the use of portfolios, but the trend has moved into the undergraduate liberal education field in the form of ePortfolios.

Some key drivers to the use of ePortfolios in liberal education as a HIP are due to several key elements that contribute to enhanced learning outcomes and student development such as reflection, integration of learning, and enriched communication through showcasing academic work. In undergraduate education, ePortfolios have been proven to encourage students to engage in reflection and self-assessment, allowing them to critically evaluate their learning and growth over time (Barrett, 2007). This reflective process helps enhance self-awareness, self-assessment, and deepen learning. ePortfolios also assist in the integration of learning across different outcomes, courses, and experiences. Students showcase their academic work, demonstrate how they apply knowledge and skills from various contexts, and take ownership of their learning by choosing which artifacts to include and how to present them, which supports a full vision of their educational journey (Payne et al., 2020; Kuh, 2008). ePortfolios also follow evidence-based teaching practices that recognize diversity in students' learning, identities, and communities by allowing space for personal expression. According to Lehman et al. (2021), when students use ePortfolios for self-directed learning and reflection over their entire general education curriculum, a deepened understanding of the student experience occurs, and the process of integrative learning is visible. As faculty facilitate students' expression of learning through ePortfolios, the process becomes student-driven, organized, visible, and accessible all in one space (Karami et al., 2019). When students are encouraged to connect general education outcomes to lifelong learning in ePortfolios, they recognize that this tool serves not only as an archive of experiences and evidence, but that it can benefit students' careers by providing visible examples of their ability to collaborate, navigate cultural diversity, and show their skills (Schrand & Tulante, 2022). McAlpine (2005) described a central constructivist paradigm of "ePortfolio as story," and how this tool enables students to explore concepts of identity, particularly concerning authentication when they create their own narratives within the ePortfolios. These drivers collectively mark ePortfolios as a HIP by promoting deeper learning, personal development, and enhanced communication through the practical application of skills that contribute significantly to the student's overall educational experience.

One way that higher education institutions address issues such as student retention and first-year

experiences is by requiring students to complete first-year seminars. High-quality versions of these courses have a robust emphasis on skills that advance students' academic competencies in critical inquiry, information literacy, writing, and collaborative learning (Kuh, 2008). Both community colleges and four-year institutions use similar models. Martin (2013) related how a faculty team incorporated AAC&U's HIP by designing a first-year seminar linked to general education learning outcomes and showcased this collaborative model through students' ePortfolios. These ePortfolios used formative reflections to provide evidence of how students were competent in the learning outcomes and how they were learning (2013).

Prior research that is similar to this programmatic evaluation includes that of Salt Lake Community College and Chattanooga State Community College which used ePortfolio to scaffold student learning throughout the college experience by giving students ownership of their education (Hubert et al., 2015). Also, at Clemson University, a four-year institution, their program required all students to create an ePortfolio in their first year to evaluate the general education program by submitting the ePortfolio as evidence of experiential and academic mastery of the general education competencies (Ring & Ramirez, 2012). This was a long-term endeavor that followed students from their first year to degree completion. Additionally, eight colleges and universities took this concept one step further stemming from the LEAP Challenge initiative and committed to curricular change that incorporates signature work to enhance student learning to ensure their strong liberal education programs were fully demonstrated in every student's educational experience (Hayden-Roy et al., 2018). A *signature work* refers to an academic project or activity that students produce to demonstrate their learning and capabilities, to showcase the knowledge, skills, and competencies that they have developed throughout their degree program. The collective found that success with incorporating signature work depends on how institutions can nurture new ways of thinking, build, and embed the process throughout the campus community, and internalize the changes in institutional systems of learning supported by a feedback cycle of institutional assessment and careful monitoring of the new curriculum (2018). These initiatives show how this program evaluation is aligned with curriculum and technology integration across the United States and with AAC&U's HIPs.

Theoretical Framework

In 2017, Eynon and Gambino published a collection titled *High-Impact ePortfolio Practice: A Catalyst for Student, Faculty, and Institutional Learning.* In the volume, they theorized three "Value Propositions" of supporting reflection, integrating deep learning, and catalyzing learning-centered institutional change that encourages ePortfolio success (Eynon & Gambino, 2017). Building off their previous work in 2014 and Kuh's (2008), through a collection of case studies Eynon and Gambino (2017) developed the Catalyst Framework which outlines the following components for successful ePortfolio use: integrative social pedagogy, professional development, outcomes assessment, technology, and scaling up. Each of the components scaffolds what should be in place to launch, build, and sustain a "high-impact" ePortfolio practice that deepens student learning, improves student success, and catalyzes learning-centered institutional change (2017). The following program evaluation uses Eynon and Gambino's Value Propositions and Catalyst Framework to guide the research questions and findings regarding making student learning and experiences evident with ePortfolios.

Program Evaluation

Problem Statement

The purpose of this programmatic evaluation is to determine if and how ePortfolios made student learning and experiences evident throughout the undergraduate curriculum, specifically throughout general education.

Background

Mercy University is a four-year private liberal arts college located in the heart and suburbs of New York City. Mercy was the first Hispanic-serving institution in New York State to receive the Seal of *Excelencia* from the *Excelencia* in Education organization, as well as the largest private Hispanic-serving institution within 1,000 miles. As of 2023, the full-time undergraduate enrollment was 8,615, with 72% female and 28% male. For over a decade, Mercy University's faculty of the general education seminar courses have been integrating ePortfolios, which have empowered students to archive work, demonstrate growth, share diverse experiences, and reflect upon their identities as lifelong learners. This research features longitudinal findings that illustrate the value of scaffolding reflective ePortfolio assignments into the general education curriculum to enable and assess intellectual growth by helping students make meaning of their learning experiences through reflection. These findings are based on a preliminary phase of ePortfolio use in the first-year and capstone general education seminar courses.

Critical Inquiry (CINQ101) is a three-credit first-year general education course that introduces and reinforces reading fluency, critical thinking, and information literacy among all first-year students at

Mercy University (and transfer students with 30 credits or fewer). These competencies, plus oral communication, writing, and quantitative analysis are later assessed in the three-credit Junior Seminar (JRSM301) capstone, which is also required for all Mercy University students prior to graduation. The JRSM301 capstone is a course where students are expected to reflect upon how they have arrived at milestones in their academic journey, take inventory of their strengths and opportunities for improvement among the general education skills, and focus on ways they can continue to nurture their intellectual growth and evolving identities as lifelong learners.

The ePortfolio practice is scaffolded into the curriculum in these two courses. In CINQ101, the ePortfolio is introduced as a digital archive and a tool for foundational reflection. Students are typically prompted to upload key assignments and write brief reflections on their initial college experiences, focusing on the development of core competencies such as critical thinking and information literacy. This establishes the ePortfolio as a continuous record of their academic journey.

The practice deepens considerably in JRSM301, where the ePortfolio shifts from an archive to a curated showcase of growth and integration. Students are required to reflect on their entire undergraduate experience, select artifacts that best demonstrate their mastery of general education outcomes, and write sophisticated, meta-cognitive narratives that synthesize their learning across courses and disciplines. This structured progression, from collection in the first year to curation and synthesis in the junior year, ensures the ePortfolio evolves alongside the student, making their intellectual development visible to themselves and the institution.

Methodology and Programmatic Evaluation

Program evaluation involves gathering and analyzing data related to the educational program's design, implementation, and outcomes with the aim of monitoring and assessing its value (Al Sinani & Al Naamani, 2021). Historically, most of the attention has been focused on academic program development and implementation; research and evaluation in education have transformed into a practice-based science over the past few decades (2021). Assessment cycles and evidence-based practices reinforce the importance of program evaluation.

For this program evaluation, data were collected through one survey sent twice over a five-year period to instructors intended for program review regarding ePortfolios and through collecting anonymized student writing samples from published ePortfolios. The surveys were distributed to 33 adjunct and three full-time instructors in the Academic Year (AY) 2018–2019 and 23 adjunct and two full-time instructors in AY 2022–23 from Mercy University using a Google Form (as seen in Appendix A). These instructors taught the two general education seminar courses, CINQ101 and JRSM301 during those two academic years. The instrument included three sections: (a) name and course assignments; (b) Likert-scale items on the impact on student learning, the impact of reflections on the students' ability to read and think critically, write and speak effectively, and exercise information literacy and quantitative analysis skills; and (c) open-ended response prompts concerning the intended significance and nature of ePortfolios projects in the courses, as well as perceived pros and cons of using the practice.

Intervening variables that occurred over the five-year period between surveys included requiring ePortfolio usage in both courses, training sessions on how to incorporate ePortfolios into the curriculum, and administration-approved stipends for two part-time faculty members to provide technical and instructional design support to program faculty. The ePortfolio platform was consistent through both data collection periods, but the platform did undergo a user-interface update in between data collection periods.

To provide proof that ePortfolios make student learning and experiences evident, I collected anonymized student writing samples from published ePortfolios from the CINQ101 and JRSM301 courses. By being enrolled in the university's undergraduate programs, the students represent a homogenous sample rather than a heterogeneous sample although their demographic characteristics and educational backgrounds may vary. All written samples were published in English to the Digication ePortfolio platform and followed the prompts provided by instructors of CINQ101 and JRSM301.

Survey data were analyzed using Excel and MAXQDA, a computer software program designed for computer-assisted qualitative and mixed methods data, text and multimedia analysis in academic, scientific, and business institutions. MAXQDA is developed and distributed by VERBI Software. Microsoft Excel is developed and distributed by Microsoft.

Results

Instructor Survey

Of the 33 adjunct and three full-time instructors in Academic Year (AY) 2018–2019 and 23 adjunct and two full-time instructors in AY 2022–23, 10 participants received both surveys. 17 responses were completed in AY 2018–19 and 15 were completed in AY 2022–23. In AY 2018–19, four respondents taught CINQ, seven taught JRSM, and seven taught both courses. In AY 2022–23, three respondents taught JRSM and 12 taught both courses.

Figure 1

Comparing Responses on the Use of ePortfolio in Engaging the Students in the Learning Process

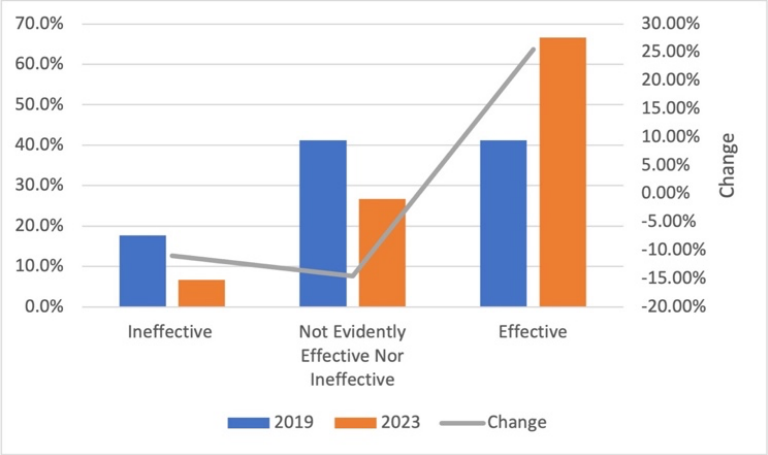
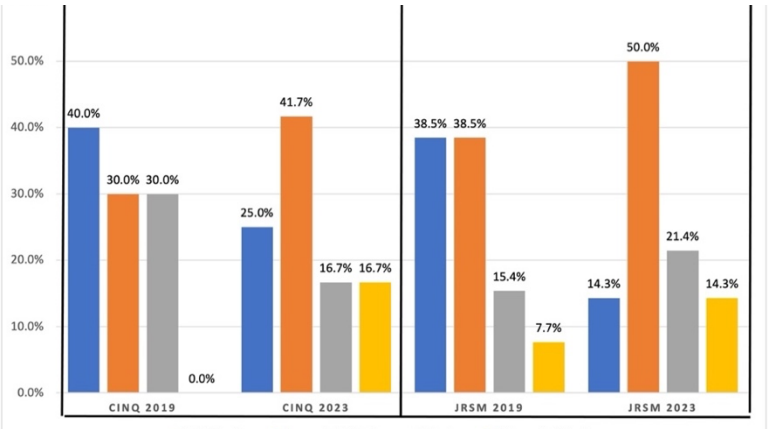


Figure 2

Comparing Responses on the Use of ePortfolios for Reflective Work



Likert-Scale Items

The Likert-scale section of the survey included some notable longitudinal findings. Since the samples were so small, descriptive findings are appropriate using percentage comparisons.

In 2023, more faculty found ePortfolios effective in engaging students in the learning process than in 2019. Figure 1 illustrates a decrease of 10.98% in the "ineffective" and 14.51% in the "not evidently effective nor ineffective" choices, while there was an increase of 25.49% in the "effective" option.

In 2023, more faculty found ePortfolios effective for reflection in CINQ (the first-year course) and JRSM (Junior course) than in 2019 as seen in Figure 2. In 2019, no respondents selected "extremely effective," but 40% selected "not effective" for CINQ in 2019. There was a 16.7% increase for the "extremely effective" option and a decrease of 15% for "not effective" for CINQ in 2023. As far as JRSM, there was an even greater decrease of 24.2% for the selection of "not effective" with a 12.6% increase combined for "effective" and "extremely effective." Overall, faculty found using ePortfolio for reflective work effective for both courses more than originally reported in AY 2018–19.

In 2023, more faculty found ePortfolios effective in enhancing student learning than in 2019. As shown in Figure 3, 35% of respondents in 2019 reported that ePortfolios were "not helpful" in enhancing student learning. By 2023, the selection of that response decreased 22% to 13.3%. The "helpful" and "extremely helpful" categories increased 17.3% in that same period. Faculty perceptions of ePortfolio efficacy improved significantly over the five-year period, with more faculty members reporting that they effectively engage students and enhance learning.

Figure 3
Comparing Responses on the Effectiveness of ePortfolios on Student Learning

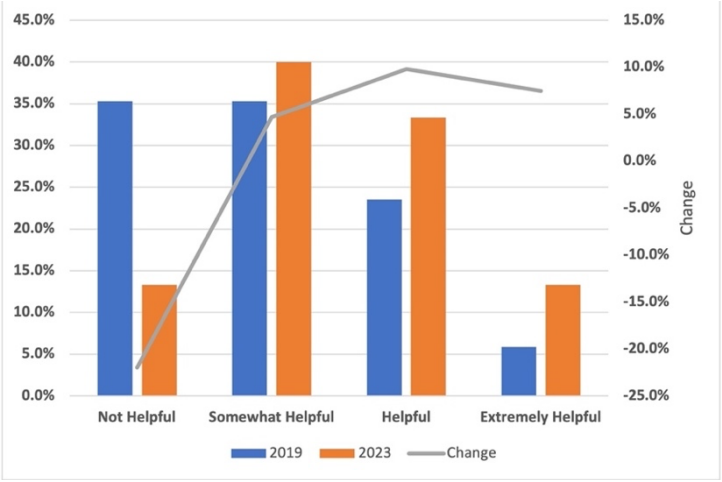


Figure 4
Comparing Responses on the Ease of Use of the ePortfolio Platform



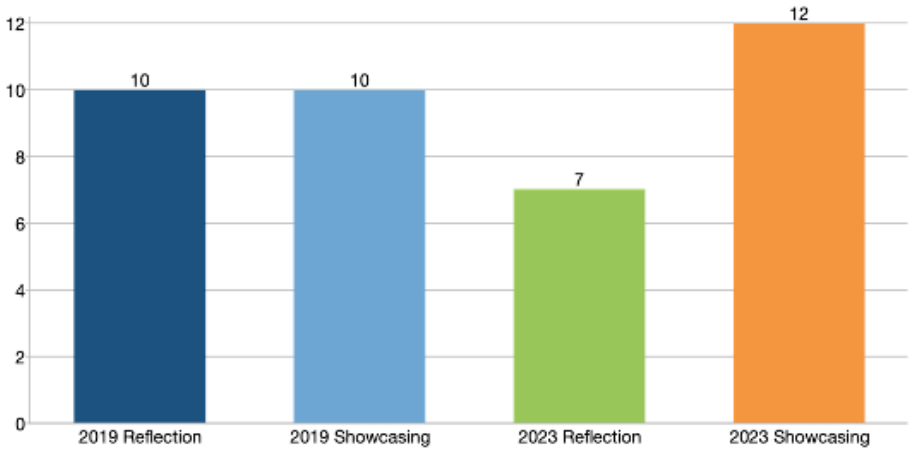
There was no considerable difference between 2019 and 2023 regarding the ease of use of the ePortfolio platform's technology. As seen in Figure 4, most responses in both time periods were in the "manageable, but somewhat difficult" (50%) and "not 'easy,' but certainly manageable" (30% for 2019 and 40% for 2023) categories. During this period, the platform did undergo a user-interface upgrade.

Open-Ended Responses

With regards to the open-ended questions, the responses were coded in MAXQDA by year but also combined to discover major themes that emerged throughout the entire period. Two major themes emerged within the responses to the open-ended response prompt concerning the intended purpose and nature of ePortfolio projects as seen in Figure 5. In AY 2018–19, 59% (n = 10) of faculty reported using ePortfolios to have students reflect on coursework and their experiences. 59% (n = 10) also reported using the technology to showcase student coursework. In AY 2022–23, 47% (n = 7) of faculty reported using it for reflections on coursework and experiences, while 80% (n = 12) used ePortfolio to showcase student coursework.

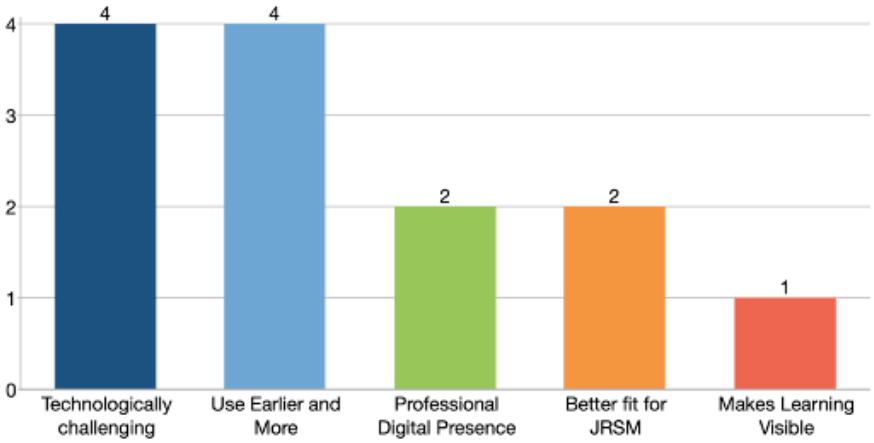
The additional open-ended response prompt regarding the perceived pros and cons of using the practice was also coded by year. As seen in Figure 6,

Figure 5
Categorized Responses on the Intended Purpose and Use of ePortfolios



Note. N of 17 for 18/29, N of 15 for 22/23

Figure 6
Categorized Responses on the Perceived Pros and Cons of Using ePortfolios for AY 2018–19



Note. N = 16

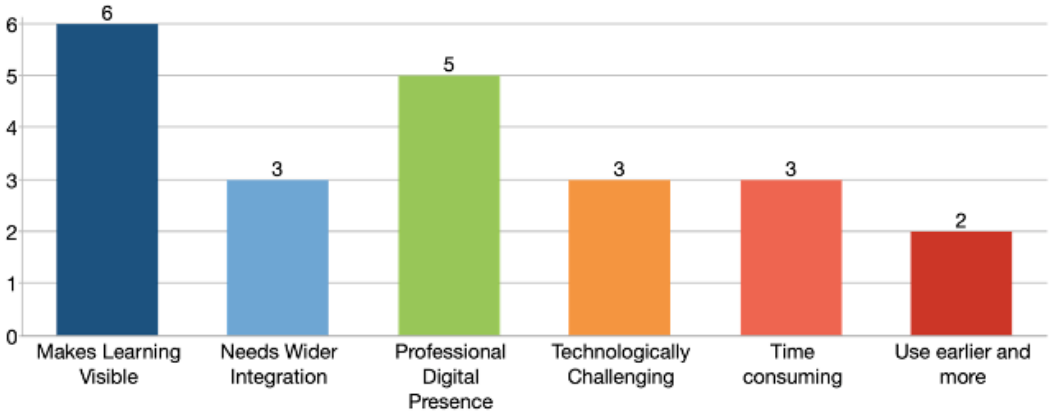
five categories surfaced from the 17 responses. 24% (n = 4) of faculty believe that the platform was technologically challenging and is also best used earlier in the course and more often. Overall, 12% (n = 2) of faculty recognize that ePortfolios help students build skills in developing a professional digital presence. Another 12% (n = 2) report that ePortfolios are a better fit for the upper-level JRSM301 course. One respondent (5%) mentioned how ePortfolios make learning more visible for students and instructors.

The same prompt was also coded by AY 2022–23. As seen in Figure 7, six categories surfaced from the 15 responses. In comparison to 5% from AY 2018–19, 40% (n = 6) of faculty described how ePortfolios make learning more visible for students and instructors. 20% (n = 3) of faculty believe that the platform was technologically challenging, reduced from 24% in AY 2018–19. 13% (n = 2) stated how ePortfolios are best used earlier in the course and more often, again down from 24% in AY 2018–19. 33% (n = 5) of faculty recognize that ePortfolios help students build skills in developing a professional digital presence, up from 12% in AY 2018–19. Two new themes that surfaced in AY 2022–23 (20% for both, n = 3) were criticisms of the platform's user-friendliness and a need for wider integration across the general education curriculum.

When the two years are combined, four major themes emerge throughout the entire period as seen in Figure 8. 44% of faculty report that the ePortfolio technology can be challenging. 37% believe that ePortfolios prepare students to have a professional digital presence. 37% also recommend using ePortfolios early in the semester and often. Another 37% of faculty believe ePortfolios make learning visible for students and instructors.

Figure 7

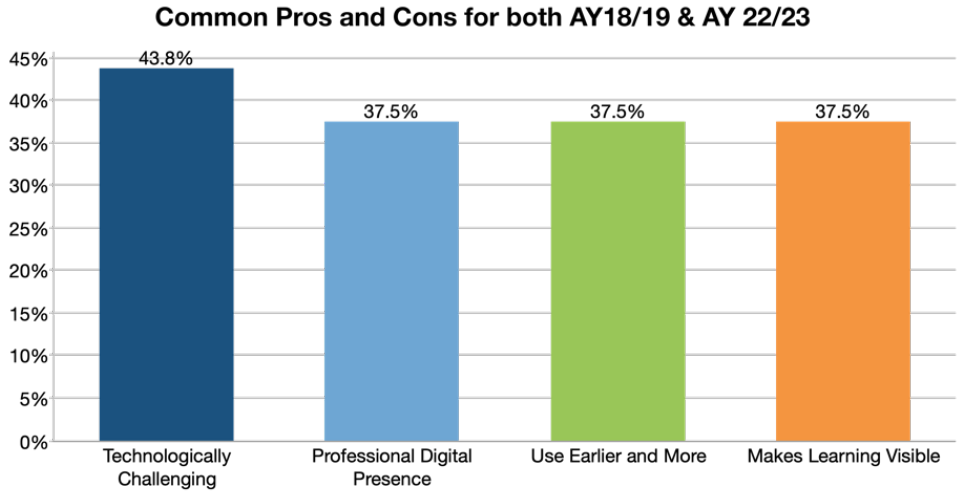
Categorized Responses on the Perceived Pros and Cons of Using ePortfolios for AY 2022–23



Note. N =15

Figure 8

Categorized Responses on the Perceived Pros and Cons of Using ePortfolios for Both Surveys



The two open-ended responses provided faculty with the opportunity to share their own narratives and reflections on using ePortfolios in their courses. Regarding student usage and engagement, Professor C stated, "In a world of evolving software, it is important to have basic skills in following directions and creating online content. The ePortfolios allow an introduction to these competencies for folks who may be intimidated by an online environment." Respondents also noticed how the students themselves see the impact of ePortfolio use. For example, Professor U affirmed how they "receive many positive comments in course evaluations and reflection pieces about how impactful the portfolio project is for students."

One respondent, Professor H described how ePortfolios are a flexible professional tool by stating, "I have an ePortfolio of my own. That was helpful because I could show the students what it looked like finished." The practice of professional digital identity was also touched upon when Professor V wrote, "I hope it encourages their sense of a wider audience than just me" while Professor T asserted, "I think the major benefit is knowing for sure that you can build and present a professional presence online with little difficulty."

Difficulty with technology and engaging student learning was expressed by a few respondents. Professor E believes that first-year students were "overwhelmed with use of new technology, and they showed little to no interest in learning. I think this is a better fit for JRSM. First semester freshmen spend more time coping than reflecting." Professor U describes the technological adoption issues with how:

> it took an entire class to get the students to understand the architecture design. . . . I felt that I needed roller skates in the computer room to help with all of the issues or questions. . . . I believe then the students would have been able to work on their ePortfolios with help. They get stuck at home or forget and then they get frustrated with the technology aspect.

To address the isolating aspects of teaching the platform design and interface, Professor S reflects on how it "would be easier to justify if the work of the portfolio were it being more heavily integrated across more general education courses. It would also share the burden of building the instructional curve for students." In the open-ended prompts, the faculty reinforced the notion that ePortfolios make student learning visible while highlighting technological challenges and the importance of broader curricular integration.

Longitudinal Findings

Five instructors completed both the AY 2018–19 and AY 2022–23 surveys. Overall, they all continued to implement ePortfolios during AY 2022–23 in the CINQ101 and JRSM301 courses and shared similar perceptions on the impact ePortfolios have on student learning, student engagement, and the reflection process in both responses. A noteworthy discovery is how faculty used the tool in similar ways, but two respondents explicitly reported the importance of integrating ePortfolios throughout the general education curriculum. Reasons given include to help lessen technological hurdles, as well as to promote student learning and reflection. Finally, one respondent related, "In a world of evolving software, it is important to have basic skills in following directions and creating online content. The ePortfolios allow an introduction to these competencies for folks who may be intimidated by an online environment." This echoes the research and literature that indicate the importance of implementing ePortfolio into general education curricula.

Student Writing Samples From Published ePortfolios

The purpose of this program evaluation and article is to determine if and how ePortfolios make student learning and experiences evident in general education. To determine whether there is evidence of student learning, narrative student writing samples from the ePortfolios need to be evaluated. Qualitative research empowers participants, such as students, by utilizing narratives to share findings effectively (Johnston et al., 2023). Narratives present information engagingly while making experiences evident. This program evaluation includes a collection of narratives from student ePortfolios from the first-year and capstone general education courses.

Student narratives from the first-year course included reflections on the process and purpose of creating an ePortfolio. Student A from CINQ101 wrote:

> The process of creating this e-portfolio was educational since I have never made an e-portfolio before. It was a new experience, but it was enjoyable being able to personalize the portfolio to my liking. By creating this portfolio it helped me organize the assignments I have completed throughout the semester. (Student A)

Another student reflected on the ePortfolio, writing:

> [It] taught me how important it is to revise all of my information before it is uploaded. It also was a great reflection for me towards the end of the year. It allowed me to expand my knowledge on topics I have previously written about in school. (Student B)

Other students reflected on how they engaged with specific topics and the expression of learning. Student C revealed that the ePortfolio allowed them "to express my thoughts and opinions on something that is meaningful to me which is the importance of mental health, a topic that I once was ashamed to talk about." Another student wrote:

> Completing this e-portfolio was a very enjoyable time. . . . I really like that this gives me the chance to show future employers work that I have done, as well as lets me look back at what I did this year in Critical Inquiry. (Student D)

By integrating personal reflection, skill development, and career preparation, ePortfolios used in first-year courses serve not only academic functions but also deepen students' connection to their learning journeys. This learner-centered approach empowers students to take ownership of their education and express their growth in meaningful ways.

At the JRSM301 Capstone level, the writing samples illustrate the academic and personal advancement of upperclassmen. Student E from the capstone course described how before taking the course they believed "I needed to sound a particular way in my writing, that I needed to sound like an intellectual academic. What I came to discover is that my thoughts flow so much more easily when I am being my authentic self." Another JRSM301 student described:

> When reflecting on the process of completing this e-portfolio, I realized how much I was able to learn about my academic abilities. I feel more confident in my

> critical thinking, information literacy, oral communication, and written communication skills. I also was able to improve my time management skills as this process of completing the many parts to this project took quite some time. I divided my time into creating my PowerPoint presentation, writing my script for my final video presentation, and rehearsing what I was going to say. I also had to decide how I wanted to structure the e-portfolio and the colors I wanted to choose to make it very cohesive. Overall, I was able to solidify my expertise in all of the competencies that you will learn about through my portfolio. (Student F)

Not only can the students reflect on the process of using ePortfolios, but they have the opportunity to partake in meta-cognitive reflections on their undergraduate experiences in the course and their full curriculum. As far as deeper meta-cognition that connects directly to course-level outcomes, Student G explained how:

> As I have completed this portfolio, I have been pleased to see my improvement in certain areas. As I was going through semesters, I never had the time or space to identify growth in areas of my academic career. Although looking at the differences now, I can confidently say that I have improved in many skills. My critical thinking skills improving surprised me because I assumed they were always pretty good. Although I have tremendously improved my skills with information literacy since coming to Mercy, I still have areas to improve. With oral communication, I was fortunate enough to take an oral communication college course while I was still in high school, which improved my skills before coming to Mercy. Although I have good oral communication skills, I still need to improve my outlines for presentations and speeches. My quantitative reasoning skills will continue to improve as I learn how to manage my money in the future. Reading fluency is a skill I have had since I was very young, and I'm optimistic that as I continue with higher education, it will continue to improve. Although I have improved my written communication skills, I know that I will need to continue working on specific aspects of writing in the future. I was delighted with the outcome of this portfolio, which shows that my education has positively impacted me.

The samples effectively capture the transformative nature of using ePortfolios in the capstone experience, where students not only enhance their academic competencies but also engage in personal growth. By fostering a sense of authenticity and equipping students with practical skills, the course and ePortfolios prepare them for future challenges both within and beyond academia.

Discussion and Recommendations

The program evaluation results can be viewed through the lens of the Catalyst Framework, which explores how ePortfolios can deepen student learning, improve student success, and catalyze learning-centered institutional change (Eynon & Gambino, 2017). The goal of the study was to discover how the respondents perceived ePortfolios' ability to enable and assess intellectual growth by helping students make meaning of their learning experiences through reflection. Based on the survey data collected, faculty perceptions and usage of ePortfolios improved over the five-year period.

Some external factors that may have influenced the changes in perceptions over the five-year period were the program-wide requirement to implement ePortfolios, training of instructors on training for instructors on the technical and pedagogical use of the platform, support from the University's Center for Teaching and Learning, and familiarity with the platform for faculty and students.

Student Learning and Success

Over half of the faculty reported using ePortfolios to enable students to showcase coursework and share experiences. In 2023, more faculty reported that ePortfolios effectively engage students in the learning process and enhance student learning than in 2019. More participants also found ePortfolios effective for reflection in CINQ101 (the first-year course) and JRSM301 (the capstone course) than in 2019. This suggests that sustained exposure, mandatory implementation, and ongoing training can overcome initial instructor skepticism. This growing faculty buy-in is a critical foundation for any institution-wide educational innovation, as it creates a cohort of advocates who can mentor reluctant colleagues. Overall, faculty attitudes about the purpose and efficacy of integrating ePortfolios into these courses improved over the five-year period. A recommendation would be for the university to capitalize on this positive shift by creating a formal community of practice where these experienced faculty can share best practices and mentor faculty, further solidifying support and promoting consistent pedagogical approaches.

In contrast, faculty's experience with ePortfolios ease of use did not show significant improvement over the five-year period; 44% of participants explicitly reported technology hurdles with ePortfolios in the open-ended questions. Of those faculty, a majority expressed that students encounter technical issues with the platform, and almost half stated that students require hands-on assistance from faculty during initial use. This trend indicates that the current adoption and support structures are insufficient. If left unaddressed,

these technical barriers can undermine the pedagogical benefits of ePortfolios, increase frustration for both students and faculty, and threaten the program's sustainability. Faculty are having to act as tech support, which detracts from their primary role as instructors. Future data collection and research that focuses on overcoming technological hurdles through an intervention, a new platform, or new procedures can address this issue. One such intervention can include embedding mandatory, credit-bearing ePortfolio tutorials into the curriculum, staffed by IT assistants or peer support, and by creating a suite of easily accessible video guides for students.

The open-ended questions also revealed that faculty believe ePortfolios prepare students for the future by developing a professional digital presence, and they are a better fit in upper-level courses than introductory-level courses. The latter could be a result of upper-level students demonstrating more advanced reflection and technical skills. This perception creates a strategic risk. If ePortfolios are introduced only in the junior year, students miss the opportunity for longitudinal growth and reflection across their entire academic journey. The struggle in first-year courses is likely not due to an inherent misfit but to a lack of adequate scaffolding and support. Rather than delaying ePortfolio use, the GE program should enhance scaffolding in first-year courses. This includes simplifying initial tasks, such as "upload one paper and write a two-sentence reflection" or integrating low-stakes tech practice early in the semester, while explicitly framing the CINQ101 ePortfolio as the foundation for a project that will culminate in JRSM301. Future research would benefit from focusing on the impact of integrating ePortfolios early in the first year rather than waiting until students are in upper-level courses.

Overall, the writing samples from both first-year and upper-class students demonstrate that ePortfolios facilitate a learner-centered approach that enhances academic engagement, personal growth, and preparation for future endeavors. The students describe the purpose and impact of ePortfolios, how ePortfolios and narratives are a tool for engagement, how they have transformed through the curriculum, and how ePortfolios allow them to be their authentic selves. This analysis reinforces the potential of ePortfolios as transformative educational tools in higher education.

Learner-Centered Institutional Change

Other recommendations from faculty include starting ePortfolio integration early in the semester and embedding ePortfolios throughout a wider curriculum, such as general education. Isolated ePortfolio use in one or two courses places a disproportionate burden on those instructors. This frames the ePortfolio as a separate "add-on" rather than an integral part of the learning experience. Wider integration normalizes the technology, distributes the responsibility for teaching its use, and allows students to see connections between all their courses, which is the goal of integrative learning. The entire structure of Mercy University's general education curriculum is undergoing a redesign, and the encouraging evidence from various courses on student engagement and success with ePortfolios serves to support an expansion of its use throughout the curriculum. These program evaluation findings support the redesign structure that has been proposed. The updated general education curriculum makes embedding the use of ePortfolio a priority. First off, the foundation of the curriculum is grounded in three Integrated Seminars. These scaffolded seminars will be where the general education mission's commitment to a collaborative classroom environment centered on applying their knowledge is made most relevant and dynamic to students. To ensure success, this rollout must be accompanied by the recommended robust technical support and cross-disciplinary faculty development to ensure consistency and shared expectations.

A First-Year Seminar course will assist students with transitioning to college, developing a sense of belonging at Mercy, and helping students leverage the general education curriculum. The second seminar will focus on a transformative idea that has made a profound impact on our shared lives, which intends to highlight the relevance of the liberal arts as a way of understanding the world, while teaching students communication, technology, critical thinking, and teamwork skills. This Transformative Ideas Seminar will lead students to the third seminar, Big Problems, in which students will apply their liberal arts education to a real-world problem. This course affirms Mercy's institutional commitment to global citizenship and invites each student to build on the First-Year Seminar by further developing their sense of personal and professional mission. Each seminar will have signature assignments for students to upload into an ePortfolio, allowing students to reflect upon their progress as learners, encouraging them to connect their learning, and providing a foundation for a dossier (which can be augmented from work in their respective majors or elsewhere in the curriculum) that will help them as they enter the job market. While these seminars will be designed to help students understand the relevance of the liberal arts to a range of professional and academic trajectories, none will be exclusive to one program or discipline.

Study recommendations are for the university to leverage this dynamic platform in the new general education curriculum to make the diverse stories of undergraduate learning more visible to students, faculty, and administrators. For reflective and learner-centered ePortfolio implementation to be successful across the curriculum, technical and pedagogical support for faculty and students is critical. This revision

to the general education curriculum could improve on the existing processes and support student learning.

Conclusion

The implications of this study extend far beyond a single institution, offering valuable insights for the broader higher education community engaged in implementing HIPs. The findings demonstrate that the successful integration of ePortfolios is less about the specific technology chosen and more about a sustained, institution-wide commitment to pedagogical and technical support. The observed improvement in faculty buy-in over the five-year period underscores that initial resistance can be transformed into advocacy through mandatory implementation, ongoing training, and evidence of student success. However, the persistent challenge of technological barriers serves as a critical caution: without dedicated, easily accessible support structures and platforms that relieve faculty from serving as first-line tech support, even the most powerful pedagogical tools can be undermined. Ultimately, this study reinforces that ePortfolios are a potent mechanism for making learning visible, but their success is contingent on a strategic, supported, and scaffolded approach that integrates them into the curriculum not as an isolated project, but as a foundational element of the student's entire educational journey.

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Appendix A
Survey Instruments From AY 2018–19 and 2022–23

Seminar Faculty ePortfolio Reflection Form (AY 2018–19)

You have been identified as having taught either (or both) Critical Inquiry and Junior Seminar at Mercy College in the following semesters: Fall 2018 or Spring 2019. We are collecting information regarding the usage of ePortfolios within the Seminar Program.

Seminar Faculty ePortfolio Reflection Form (AY 2022–23)

You have been identified as having taught either (or both) Critical Inquiry and Junior Seminar in the following semesters: Fall 2022 or Spring 2023. We are collecting longitudinal information regarding the usage of ePortfolios within the Seminar Program. This form was also sent out in AY 2018–19, so the results will be compared to previous findings.

1. Name

2. Classes. In which classes have you used ePortfolio in your courses?
   - Critical Inquiry
   - Junior Seminar
   - Both
   - Other

3. If this is not your first semester using ePortfolio, what is the total number of your sections per Academic Year that have used it to date?

Intended Purpose

4. For what purpose did students create these folios (e.g., student showcasing and/or reflection of personal and academic progress, strengths and challenges)? To show knowledge of competencies?

Student Learning

5. How helpful do you think the use of ePortfolio was in enhancing student learning and achievement of course competencies?
   - Extremely Helpful
   - Helpful
   - Somewhat Helpful
   - Not Helpful

Reflection

6. For CINQ Faculty only. How effectively did e-portfolio help your students to reflect on their ability to read critically, think critically, and practice information literacy?
   - Extremely Effective
   - Effective
   - Somewhat Effective
   - Not Effective

7. For JRSM Faculty only. How effectively did e-portfolio help you to reflect on your ability to read and think critically, write and speak effectively, and exercise information literacy and quantitative analysis skills?
   - Extremely Effective
   - Effective
   - Somewhat Effective
   - Not Effective

Student Engagement

8. How effective do you think the use of ePortfolio was in engaging the students in the learning process?
    - Extremely Effective
    - Effective
    - Not Evidently Effective nor Ineffective
    - Ineffective

Ease of Use

9. Overall, how manageable or difficult was the use of technology?
    - Easy
    - Not "Easy," but Certainly Manageable
    - Manageable, but Somewhat Difficult
    - Extremely Difficult

10. Feel free to elaborate on the nature of the ePortfolio projects in your Seminar classes, and your perceived pros and cons of using it (both in class and in the future).