Do you have any suggestions / quick tips to disciplines where e-portfolios are not being traditionally used and how critical is it going to be for their assessment?

Candyce Reynolds: Be clear about its purpose. Start with the end in mind. There are some departments who already are using ePortfolios extensively. The sciences are using it a lot more especially at the graduate level. Part of it is because as a scientist, you are developing your identity and there has to be some reflection that goes along with that. So, ePortfolios are a great way for scientists to develop a scientific identity as well as give audience to their work. ePortfolios are also being used by School of Business in their undergraduate online program. The desire for that group is to help students prepare for the job market and be able to present themselves well. And part of that is reflection on knowing what you know and be able to present that. That’s a good example of a department sort of saying what do we get out of this? What do we want to get? What are some needs that we have and how could ePortfolios fulfill those needs? So, again starting with an end in mind, that’s really an important part.

Another practice is to really think about how to build that capacity for integrating ePortfolios not just in terms of tech but in terms of practices that it is going to use to be able to it with integrated learning ePortfolios. So, making sure that you have assignments that ask them to reflect, activities that help them make connections. We don’t do that naturally and necessarily and we certainly don’t reward that in the academy.

In the next few years, how do you envision the integrated learning initiative through ePortfolios is going to unfold? How do you envision students making continued use of their ePortfolios post-graduation?

I hope it really takes off. At this point in time, we are developing a plan to roll it out to the campus and hopefully get people excited about the possibilities and creating learning communities that encourage faculty and students to be using ePortfolios and displaying that to the rest of the campus, so that we can all get a sense about the value that ePortfolios add to our student success. I am really excited to see our new ePortfolio platform team come in as it creates a lots of opportunities and you may not even know that it’s an ePortfolios because it does a lot of things.
E-Portfolio Initiative - Transform Learning and Assessment at PSU

Over the next few months we will feature excerpts from an interview with Dr. Yves Labissiere, Assistant Director, University Studies at PSU

What was the basis for the ePortfolio initiative? Were there any additions to / deviations from the initial project goals as you started working on the ePortfolios initiative?

Yves Labissiere: I would say, we have been pretty consistent with what we want. We have been attempting to build a system that supports the development of portfolios for a while. There are many places on campus, where folks have taken on this initiative and we just said, what if we were to do it together. We can achieve much more together than we can individually and within University Studies, we have realized that if we really wanted to scale this up for all students who touch general education to have access to ePortfolios as a mechanism to make sense of what they are learning, that help them make things cohere. That’s really our goal. Our goal is to promote metacognitive reflection so that people can have a better sense of what is it that I am learning through this math class, or this biology class as a major, one of the skills that I am developing and how to talk about / represent my skills to others who may not know, in a way that communicates well. Say for an English major who wants a position at Intel, how do they convey as an undergrad, these are the skills that I have developed and honed that would be of benefit to the context of Intel. We felt that the more the students can understand and represent their learnings in those ways, the ePortfolios can be the mechanism for making that happen.

What were some unexpected challenges and questions you have encountered during the due-diligence/ early-days phase of this project? What are some of the specific lessons learned from this initiative so far?

I would say that we didn’t not have any unexpected challenges. We have learned from our own mistakes and the mistakes of others and we were able to embark on an informed process that was going to take some time, to weigh in the need for assessment to support the pedagogy.

What we decided to do that was different was to take a very slow methodical process, where the process itself was a work. We said, this is not about selecting a tool or platform. This is about galvanizing a campus community around the issues of student learning and assessment. That is really what at the heart of it is. It’s not an ePortfolio solution. We used the selection process as an occasion to encourage, to invite and to bring in as many people into that conversational space as possible. And, I think we have done that.

(To be continued in upcoming issues)