PRAC Assessment Grant Report
Content Analysis of Course Syllabi and Assignments for IU ePort Pilot
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1. **Summary of overall project accomplishments**

   a. The project committee, including four faculty members and two senior personnel, reviewed a set of syllabi and assignments collected from faculty teaching in the Fall 2004 and Spring and Fall 2005 ePort pilots at IUPUI. Most, but not all, of these pilot classes were taught as part of freshman-level Themed Learning Communities. The syllabi and assignments were analyzed for key features that indicated how pilot faculty incorporated ePort into assignments and courses. That is, we tried to understand the approaches faculty used:

      - To present and explain ePort to their students
      - To design learning experiences and create assignments that could yield ePort artifacts demonstrating competence in one or more PULs
      - To take advantage of ePort as a pedagogical tool, especially in making the PULs more understandable to new students
      - To embed ePort work in their courses

   b. The committee developed two content analysis rubrics: one for syllabi for courses using ePort and one for assignments intended for uploading to ePort. Initial drafts of the rubrics combined more descriptive elements with elements that committee members felt were important for effectively incorporating ePort into syllabi and assignments, all drawn from the examples we collected. The current drafts emphasize the latter elements—those that the committee believes represent good practice in using ePort. These rubrics are intended to help faculty members use ePort to achieve its intended purposes: that is, to support student learning of the PULs and program-specific learning goals and objectives and to align courses and assignments with campus and program learning goals in more intentional and thoughtful ways. The rubrics are also designed to help Center for Teaching and Learning staff responsible for faculty development programs on ePort to provide guidance to faculty new to ePort. Finally, we expect the rubrics to be helpful for future analyses of how faculty are incorporating ePort into courses and assignments.

2. **Data Collection Methods and Analysis**

   As part of the ongoing assessment and evaluation of the ePort initiative, and for a 2004-2005 externally funded ePort grant, senior personnel for this project have been collecting syllabi and assignments created by ePort pilot faculty since Fall 2004. In addition to using our analysis of these materials to create good practice rubrics, we have provided the best of them to CTL staff as models to use in faculty development programs on ePort. Project staff have also researched e-portfolio work being conducted nationally and internationally and have been engaged in regular discussions and focus groups with faculty on ePort practices since the inception of the ePort project. The rubrics attached to the appendix of this report represent the conclusions we reached after examining these data.

The rubrics encapsulate several important principles for incorporating ePort into courses and assignments:

- Students new to ePort need to understand its purpose and relevance to their learning.

- Expected learning outcomes for both courses and individual assignments should be clearly stated and explicitly aligned with program and campus-wide (PULs) learning goals and objectives. Eventually, these expected outcomes will allow assignments uploaded to ePort to be "meta-tagged" and associated with specific cells in students' PUL and other ePort matrices.

- Courses and ePort assignments should include opportunities for students to demonstrate developing knowledge and skills in authentic ways that can be assessed according to faculty-designed rubrics.

- ePort work should be organically embedded within courses as part of the learning of the course—not added on just to provide material for ePort.

The syllabi and assignments we analyzed embodied these principles to varying extents. For example, most of them make explicit connections between course work or assignments and the PULs. On the other hand, some of the student assignments intended for inclusion in ePort did seem to be "added on" to courses (and we know from discussions with faculty members that this was the case).

We do not see the current rubrics as "final" products. While they represent the best features we found in the syllabi and assignments we have collected and analyzed to date, we expect that as the ePort project continues, we will further refine the rubrics. We may learn more about effectively incorporating ePort into syllabi and assignments as time goes on, for example, or we may find that, as faculty become more comfortable with ePort, they need less basic, more sophisticated guidelines. In addition, as ePort in used is more upper-division classes, we may find that good practices are somewhat different from those in freshman-level courses.

3. **Obstacles and Challenges**

The main obstacle we encountered was that we had fewer syllabi and assignments to work with than we anticipated when we wrote the proposal. In particular, we had expected that the Fall 2005 ePort pilot would yield more of these materials than it did. Part of the problem, we believe, was that faculty in this pilot were a larger group than we had had in previous pilots and did not convene regularly to exchange materials and ideas. They may have had less of a sense of being part of a distinct initiative. While they were provided with several opportunities to convene and were asked repeatedly for their materials, we were able to collect very little from them.

Because we had too small a sample of materials to conduct an extensive content analysis, we shifted the emphasis of the project somewhat. The original goal of the project was to provide "empirical evidence that demonstrates the extent of the alignment between faculty-developed course syllabi or assignments and student outcomes as reflected in the objectives of the ePort pilot project." Rather than trying to develop descriptive evidence when we had very little on which to base such evidence, we focused on developing "best practice" rubrics and then testing and refining these rubrics based on relevance to the syllabi and assignments we had collected. The rubrics also reflect the current phase of the ePort initiative, which we now consider to be an implementation, rather than a pilot, phase. In this context, we believe these rubrics will be useful for faculty development purposes and for future analysis and evaluation of faculty ePort practices.

4. **Addressing Obstacles and Challenges**

The project committee moved forward with the project based on the materials we had in hand. If we had had more examples of assignments and syllabi, we could have drawn more detailed conclusions about the extent to which faculty were incorporating the principles described above into their ePort work with students. As it is, that analysis will need to wait until we have a considerably larger number of faculty and courses involved with ePort. We believe that the products of the project will nonetheless be useful to faculty and to Center for Teaching and Learning staff who work with faculty.