Using a Capstone ePortfolio to Encourage Integration across a Degree Program

(Work in Progress Paper)

R J Lawson, University of Technology Sydney
C. Bajada, University of Technology Sydney

The Bachelor of Business Program in Faculty of Business at the University of Technology Sydney has been undergoing a review process over the last twelve months. As a result of this process the Undergraduate Review Panel (URP) noted various areas for improvement in the degree including:

- A clear set of graduate attributes for the Faculty from which the learning goals and learning objectives for the degree may be derived;
- A greater integration of cross-disciplinary knowledge;
- The inclusions of the themes such as creative thinking, ethics and sustainability.

In order to address this, the panel recommended embedding the themes of creativity, ethics and sustainability in an integrative manner across the whole degree.

To achieve this, students will be required to collate evidence and reflections on the ongoing themes throughout their degree in a capstone ePortfolio, which will form part of their final subject’s assessment. Students will also be engaged with the graduate attributes, using the ePortfolio as a mechanism for showcasing best examples of each of the competencies students are expected to develop. This paper is a work in progress outlining the philosophy behind these recommendations and the proposed steps to achieve them.

The reasons for introducing ePortfolios in the Bachelor of Business were numerous and varied. The process will drive students to explore their own competence and achievement, it will lead to a more fulfilling learning experience through providing a mechanism to understand the integration of themes and disciplines, and it will also provide a process of selecting and recording samples of one’s own work, reflecting on experiences and assembling them into a ePortfolio which is seen as profoundly important to students whilst at university and in their lifelong learning.

The ePortfolio will act as a vehicle for promoting integration across subjects, as well as a record of the students’ capability for employment opportunities. Student support for developing ePortfolios will be introduced in the foundation subject when students complete a weekly reflective posting. This support will continue through the core subjects and majors when students will be guided to develop their portfolio, in subjects that cover the ongoing themes. This evidence will form an e-portfolio where students self-assess their progress in order to submit their best examples of competence, understanding and critical reflections. This process will be encouraged throughout all the core subjects and within each of the majors. The completed ePortfolio (referred to as a Capstone portfolio) will then form part of the “real life” activity assessment within the Capstone subjects.

The Capstone portfolio will also identify an important connection with extra-curricular activities. Throughout the degree students will be encouraged, and supported where possible, to gain relevant practical experience to better prepare for a career in business. Students will be able to further develop their knowledge and skills that complement activities directly related to the curriculum, from which experiences can be recorded in the Capstone portfolio.

ePortfolios can be defined as a purposeful collection of student work that illustrates efforts, progress and achievement in one or more areas over time. It is appropriate to define portfolios as a process, rather than just a product or a technological system. An electronic portfolio uses digital technologies, allowing the portfolio developer to collect and organise portfolio artefacts in many media types (audio, video, graphics, text). When working with ePortfolios in an educational context, it is important to not only introduce the method (and an appropriate tool), but to also implement ePortfolios as an overall concept. Tutors need strategies to support students in creating and maintaining their ePortfolios, and in evaluating the outcomes. For the students, the challenge is to acquire the necessary skills to build a portfolio and, more
fundamentally, to develop the ability to reflect on and accept greater responsibility for their own professional development.

An ePortfolio will be used in the bachelor of Business to promote the continuity of the skills and themes across the degree program as illustrated in Figure 1. Using an ePortfolio process, students will be required to compile a portfolio which contains two dimensions: (i) evidence to demonstrate best practice in each of the degree Learning Objectives (not assessed); and (ii) a reflective element based around the common themes within the degree. This process will be encouraged throughout all the core subjects and within each of the majors. The completed ePortfolio (referred to as a Capstone portfolio) will then form part of the assessment within the Capstone subjects, which will include reflective pieces based on each of the ongoing themes and will then be used as a vehicle for completing the “real life” activity assessment.

*Figure 1 – Integrating the Major through the Capstone*

The portfolio will be promoted in the core of the degree, initially as a record of the students’ capability in each of the graduate attributes for employment opportunities. Student support for developing e portfolios will be introduced in the foundation subject when students complete a weekly reflective posting. This support will continue through the core subjects and majors when students will be guided to develop their portfolio, in subjects that cover the ongoing themes (See Figure 2). It will act as a vehicle for promoting integration across subjects where the need for these reflective pieces to complete the capstone assessment will be emphasised throughout the degree.
The Capstone portfolio will comprise of a five-stage approach:

1. Aims that are appropriate to an individual student or groups of students (aligned to the degree’s Learning Goals);

2. Initial assessment to establish the student’s starting point;

3. Appropriately challenging Learning Objectives (self assessment implemented in evidence selection process);

4. Ongoing recognition and recording of progress and achievement during the course (formative assessment linked to ongoing themes);

5. End of subject or course student self-assessment; tutor summative assessment; review of overall progress and achievement (embedded within the Capstone assessment).

The staged approach will:

- focus on and promote the needs and interests of students;
- take account of students’ diverse and sometimes multiple purposes in learning;
- encourage students to reflect on and recognise their own progress and achievement, thus increasing their confidence;
- promote and support informed student self-assessment, peer assessment and dialogue, about learning and achievement between students and tutors/lecturers;
- enable both the achievement of planned Learning Objectives and learning outcomes not specified at the outset to be recognised and valued;
- promote good practice in teaching, learning and assessment;
- enhance providers’ quality assurance and improvement practices.

The Capstone portfolio, as illustrated in Figure 3, identifies an important connection with extra-curricular activities. Throughout the degree students will be encouraged to better prepare for a career in business. One possible avenue for this will be through the Beyond-UTS International Leadership Development (BUILD) program. The BUILD program is a non-academic, extra-curricular program that provides opportunities for students to gain leadership and networking skills from a global perspective. Students will be able to further develop their knowledge and skills that complement activities directly related to the curriculum, from which experiences can be recorded in the Capstone portfolio.
This process for using an ePortfolio to integrate across a degree is proposed to be implemented in 2011 and at present teaching teams are working together to develop their practice to make this an effective mechanisms for developing students.