Reflections on the Pilot Portfolio, Group 1

Although the first round of portfolios were not yet complete, we had some early thoughts about the work collected. Daniels, Storkel, and Wegner met in August 2008 to discuss the project. Students participating in the pilot were judged to be “average” to “exceptional” master’s students. All felt that the student summary of strengths and weaknesses and initial action plan tended to be a bit cursory (i.e., lacking deep reflection). However, advisor meetings and discussion tended to lead to deeper reflection and problem solving. All of the students appeared to be making adequate progress in the program, but all had areas that could be improved, as well. The advisor meeting seemed helpful in identifying ways to approach already planned Year 2 experiences to promote further development in these weaker areas. In general, the group felt that portfolios were a promising avenue for tracking and promoting student learning but potential changes were identified.

At the beginning of the third semester, it became evident to the three faculty members participating in this pilot project that changes were necessary to improve the consistency and quality of archived artifacts across students. These changes included increasing the number of artifacts included in the portfolio, allowing artifacts outside of the requirements, assisting in the selection of appropriate artifacts, and putting the portfolios into an electronic format. Each of these changes, and the rationale behind them, are outlined below.

a. Increase the number of artifacts: The group felt it was important to monitor clinical progress throughout the program. In some of the portfolios, a weakness would be evident from a clinical artifact but in the following semester a student may not have included a clinical artifact. This made it difficult to determine whether this weakness improved. Thus, it was decided that a clinical artifact should be required every semester except for the summer session. In addition, it was decided that two coursework artifacts would be required for all semesters, excluding the summer. The goal in increasing coursework artifacts was to provide a larger sample of work at the mid-program evaluation point.

b. Allow “outside” artifacts: Many students participate in outside experiences that significantly impact their learning (e.g., training grants, research grants, volunteer opportunities). It was decided that students should be allowed to substitute one outside artifact for a required artifact to allow greater flexibility in documenting learning.

c. Appropriateness of artifacts/reflection throughout the program: Some students occasionally selected artifacts that didn’t seem to represent the breadth or depth of a given experience. Several options were considered to address this issue. One option was to have instructors or supervisors designate artifacts for a course. This option was rejected because it placed the responsibility on the instructor rather than the student. The group felt it was important for the student to reflect on what s/he learned in a given experience and what item best represented that learning. Thus, it was decided to create an Artifact Description Sheet that would be completed for every artifact and would prompt this reflection.
**d. Go electronic:** All agreed that the portfolios must be electronic to save file cabinet space and to facilitate archiving and reviewing. The group will continue to explore electronic portfolio resources. Several departments in Lawrence and Kansas City already use electronic portfolios, so we will begin by visiting those programs. Once an appropriate resource is identified, we may be able to use some funds from the Departmental Teaching Award to hire someone to build the site for our purposes. In addition, the faculty needs to consider the structure of assignments and feedback. If we move to program-wide electronic portfolios, we will need to make it easy for students to have electronic artifacts to archive in their portfolio. Many of us are still very “paper based” in our assignments and feedback, which will be a barrier to using an electronic portfolio. Another issue is that many of us like to keep assignments, exams, and cases confidential so that students across semesters have equal access (i.e., no access is given in class). This also is a barrier to using an electronic portfolio. If we want to move to program-wide electronic portfolios, ideally every experience (i.e., class or clinic) should provide at least one “freely” available electronic artifact, which could take many forms from a summary or performance to the actual work itself. The faculty needs to consider whether this is realistic and also needs to consider whether any new resources are needed to accomplish this. We again could use some of the funds from the Departmental Teaching Award to support this (e.g., purchase new equipment such as scanners or digital cameras).

**e. Keep the rest:** The other elements of the portfolio were deemed appropriate. The rubrics and action plan should be retained in their current form.

**f. Expand the pilot:** The group recommends that a second wave of students be recruited for a second version of the portfolio pilot project. This group will complete portfolios following the above recommended procedures. In addition, the pilot will be opened to all faculty, not just Daniels, Storkel, and Wegner, for fuller faculty input on potentially making portfolios a program requirement.