Getting to Eportfolios Through Assessment: A Process Model for Integrating Eportfolio Pedagogical Concepts Through Training for Program Assessment

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The American Association of Colleges and Universities recently named eportfolio as a high impact practice. Eportfolios' potential to synergize different learning experiences through opportunities for student reflection and self-representation has led to calls for broad adoption at course and program levels. There are many studies of eportfolio efficacy but few accounts of strategies for successful program-level eportfolio implementation. This paper reflects upon the authors' experience conducting a two-day training for incorporating eportfolio concepts into programs' assessment models. The authors found that their incremental approach to training benefited participants in identifying assessment model and curriculum experiences that could incorporate eportfolio practices.

Keywords: eportfolio, pedagogy, faculty development

INTRODUCTION

The Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) identifies eportfolios as the "11th high impact practice," where HIPs are defined as "institutionally-structured student experiences… that are associated with elevated performance across multiple activities and desired outcomes." While all HIPs reflect observable, assessable improvements to student outcomes, eportfolios can also function as what Watson et. al. coin a "meta-HIP" that "iteratively amplifies the positive benefits" of the reflective practices that students inculcate as they collect and consider artifacts of their learning experiences over time (Watson, et. al., 2016, pp.65-7).

AAC&U's essential overview of eportfolio principles and practices, *A Field Guide to Eportfolio*, succinctly explains the challenges of incorporating eportfolios into student learning: "The process of planning and implementing successful portfolio integration involves many pedagogical and procedural decisions" (DeNatale, et.al., 2017, p.14). Crucial for the success of any impactful eportfolio integration is an adherence to Wiggins and McTighe's principles of backward design (Matthews et. al., 2017), to understand the vision and outcomes for the initiative in order to use eportfolios meaningfully. But they also note the scope of these decisions, as well as the number of decisions to be made and where, how, by whom, and when they will be made, grows when considering programmatic or institution-wide integration of eportfolios, ranging from revising "suites of courses or even curriculum redesign" to identifying "when and how students will be engaged in reflection and who will initiate that process," to considering "opportunities

for [program] redesign to increase synergy across courses, cocurricular experiences, and co-ops or internships" (15-19).

The apparent complexity of implementation of eportfolios beyond a single classroom poses obvious challenges to successfully launching an endeavor that integrates them pedagogically or as a program assessment tool. The most recent book-length collection of research on the scholarship on HIPs practices, including eportfolios, *High-Impact Practices in Online Education: Research and Best Practices* (2018), recognizes the absence of intentional discussions that address the challenges of eportfolio implementation. In their chapter "ePortfolios," Jennifer Sparrow and Judith Török provide "tips for implementation," ultimately suggesting "a small-scale project that leverages a few early adopters." Sparrow and Török also acknowledge the gap in practical strategies for implementation and call for "conversations around ePortfolio pedagogy, practice, and implementation" (190-1).

This paper presents an incremental strategy for adopting eportfolios for program assessment. It is based on the authors' experience conducting a two-day faculty training on eportfolios to select faculty groups at Georgia Gwinnett College (GGC), the purpose of which was to have participating programs adopt some aspect of an eportfolio system for their program assessment models. Our experience indicated the integration of eportfolio HIP principles and processes can be guided by practical considerations of what part of a program assessment model can be changed while taking advantage of efficiencies available through the technology, such as the targeted identification of key curriculum moments for assessment and student reflection, and the rapid collection and review of authentic learning artifacts. While the training's aspiration was to encourage the transformation of programs' assessment models into eportfolios, the authors built the training experience around meeting programs where their assessment models were and helping participants define and take the preliminary steps right for their programs, given their current states. Participant responses indicated an intent to expand eportfolio implementation for program assessment purposes and to bring eportfolios into their individual classrooms to enhance students' learning experiences.

BACKGROUND AND PROCESS

During July 2020, 10 faculty participants from five majors across GGC were involved in two, three-hour days of training that focused on the use of GGC's eportfolio platform, Via, for some aspects of program assessment. The acquisition of an eportfolio system was part of GGC's 2017-2022 strategic plan objectives and met one goal of the division of Academic Affairs' support of the overall college plan, to acculturate students to life and learning at GGC ("Authentic Acculturation"). System administration and technical support responsibilities were assigned to GGC's Office of Academic Assessment in December 2018. Early operationalization of the college-wide strategic plan focused on the integration of HIPs at various points of student experience, where the eportfolio platform could serve as a hub for bringing together artifacts and assessment of those practices, as well as student reflections on learning. The initial integration of the Via platform was gradual, limited to students and faculty in programs that needed an eportfolio system for assessment, teaching, or accreditation. In May 2020, eportfolio access was available to all faculty and students.

An incremental approach to adopting an eportfolio system for assessment, within the context of fulfilling an aspect of an organizational strategic plan, might seem counterintuitive. Incrementalism, as political science theory is descriptive of the relationship of choice and change within policy frameworks and economic systems, is often seen as inconsistent with top-down models of change implementation, such as, in this case, the operationalization of the college's strategic plan. The value of an incremental approach within GGC's broader strategic planning framework is that changes and steps that could be taken can be perceived as appealing for participants who could see how changes coincide with choices they would make in pursuit of their other curricular interests. This is similar to how Levmore elsewhere describes the value of incrementalism in the area of policy advocacy and change: "a proposal is incrementalist if advocates of more drastic change support the proposal both because they approve of the change it represents and because it may be a step toward their larger goal" (Levmore, 2010, p.817). The challenge for the authors of this paper was to help guide the choices faculty participants should make, given where each program was - and,

assuming that the state of each program's assessment model influenced what a program's interests were, help them facilitate changes they could make. The approach of the authors aligned with what Thaler and Sunstein describe in *Nudge* (2016) as the role of "choice architects": "They are self-consciously attempting to move people in directions that will make their lives better" (6). If we sought the transformation of program assessment models into eportfolios, we needed to accept that such a transformation could take a great deal of time for each program and involve steps and improvements particular to each program and relative to each program's amenability to changes that could follow. We needed to guide Participants to make choices to get them to where future choices in the direction of eportfolios would be more comfortable and feasible.

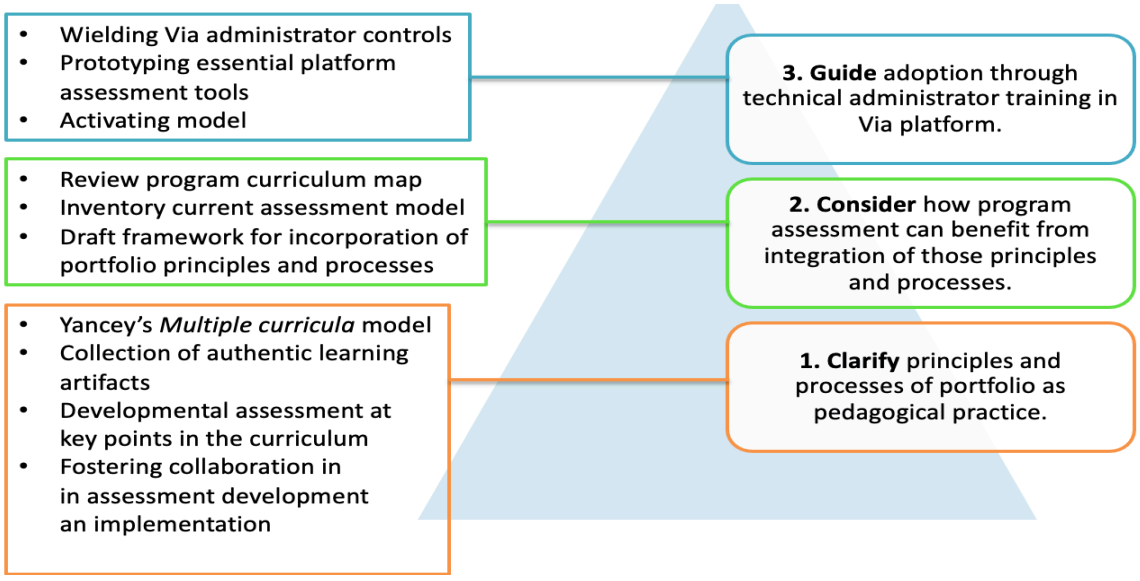
The July 2020 training was explicitly intended to accelerate student and faculty use of Via in programs that had not already been trained to use it. Participation in the July training was advertised to the chairs of the degree programs of the college. Within 24 hours of the initial announcement, all five program spots were filled. Two faculty representatives from each program participated. Participants were paid a $450 stipend for completion of both days of the training. Participants were from programs in Cinema and Media Arts Production (CMAP), History (HIST), Human Development and Aging Services (HDAS), Political Science (POLS), and Special Education (SPED).

Planning the training regimen involved balancing conceptual and platform knowledge on one side, and group learning and team-workshop time on another. We defined three objectives for the training, which stressed the building and implementation of something that would have a tangible assessment impact:

- Integrate portfolio concepts into a program assessment model
- Develop in the Via platform a prototype portfolio activity
- Prepare Via to deploy the prototype portfolio activity in the fall semester

We chose to structure the training around the building of a "prototype" rather than participation in a "pilot" because we wished to stress the ability to export the activity after its initial deployment . Next, we defined essential concept frameworks and skills areas. Concepts and practices were then scaffolded, starting with the *multiple curricula* model of eportfolio pedagogy developed by Kathleen Yancey and HIPs and authentic learning artifact assessment research from the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment and AAC&U, and ending with the technical skills needed to operate Via (see Fig. 1). *Clarifying* the research and theory and *considering* what aspects of their assessment models could change needed to come first. *Guiding* the operationalization of those changes in the platform followed.

FIGURE 1
PROCESS MODEL FOR EPORTFOLIO PROGRAM ASSESSMENT TRAINING



As we conceptualized the process, we became aware that we lacked some tools for successfully implementing it. We needed to accommodate participants so that they could implement changes "right" for where their assessment models were at the moment of the training. Five different programs would have as many as five different states of readiness to adopt one or more portfolio practices at stages or moments appropriate for them. Participants needed to start at a similar level of readiness to be guided to identify areas of their particular assessment models that could change to parallel eportfolio concepts and practices. They also needed guidance on how to choose where, when, and the extent to which they could perform changes specific to their assessment models. To those ends we designed two tools for the training: an "ePortfolio Assessment Inventory" for gathering curriculum and program tools, which would establish baseline programmatic criteria for participation in the training (see Appendix 1); and a "Learning Artifact/ePortfolio Assessment Designer" for guiding choices towards curricular moments amenable to implementation and that could be feasibly changed (see Appendix 2).

In considering how to deploy these tools, we realized we needed to dedicate time to their completion. Our first formal training act, even before distributing the training agenda, was to require participants to complete their inventories before the first day of the training. Participants could not make the choices we would guide them to make without access to all of their current assessment and curricular tools. This showed us we would need to incorporate a significant portion of training time to working through the ePortfolio Assessment Designer. That work, furthermore, needed to occur in close proximity to their pedagogy training because it would determine what their technical training needs would be, when Participants moved into the Via system. As all of this would gather more accurate and direct learning outcomes data for their academic programs, we needed also to introduce them to Via through showing them how it can collect those data – which would be the result of the choices they made to implement portfolio concepts and practices in their curricula.

The two-day schedule for the training is shown in the table below. The training was conducted virtually over Microsoft Teams, as the GGC campus closed in response to coronavirus.

TABLE 1
TWO-DAY TRAINING SCHEDULE

Day 1: 7/14	
9:30–10:00	Welcome Introductions Overview of workshop goals, resources, and tools
10:00–11:00	Portfolio pedagogy Portfolio in assessment
11:00–11:10	Break
11:10–12:15	Groups work in their channels to complete their design choices
12:15–12:30	Via data reporting overview
Day 2: 7/15	
9:30–10:10	Via admin overview – standards, rubrics, and templates
10:10-10:20	Break
10:20–12:00	Groups work in their channels to build out standards, rubrics, and template(s)
12:00–12:30	Teams share their products Next steps – implementation in the Fall

The first day focused on an overview of the workshop as well as the following topics: portfolio pedagogy, portfolio use in assessment, group work to determine their program specific goals (using the ePortfolio Assessment Inventory and the Learning Artifact/ePortfolio Assessment Designer), and a Via data reporting overview. The second day of the training was devoted to working in the Via system to develop their ePortfolio assessment prototypes. The last thirty minutes of the second day were spent sharing work,

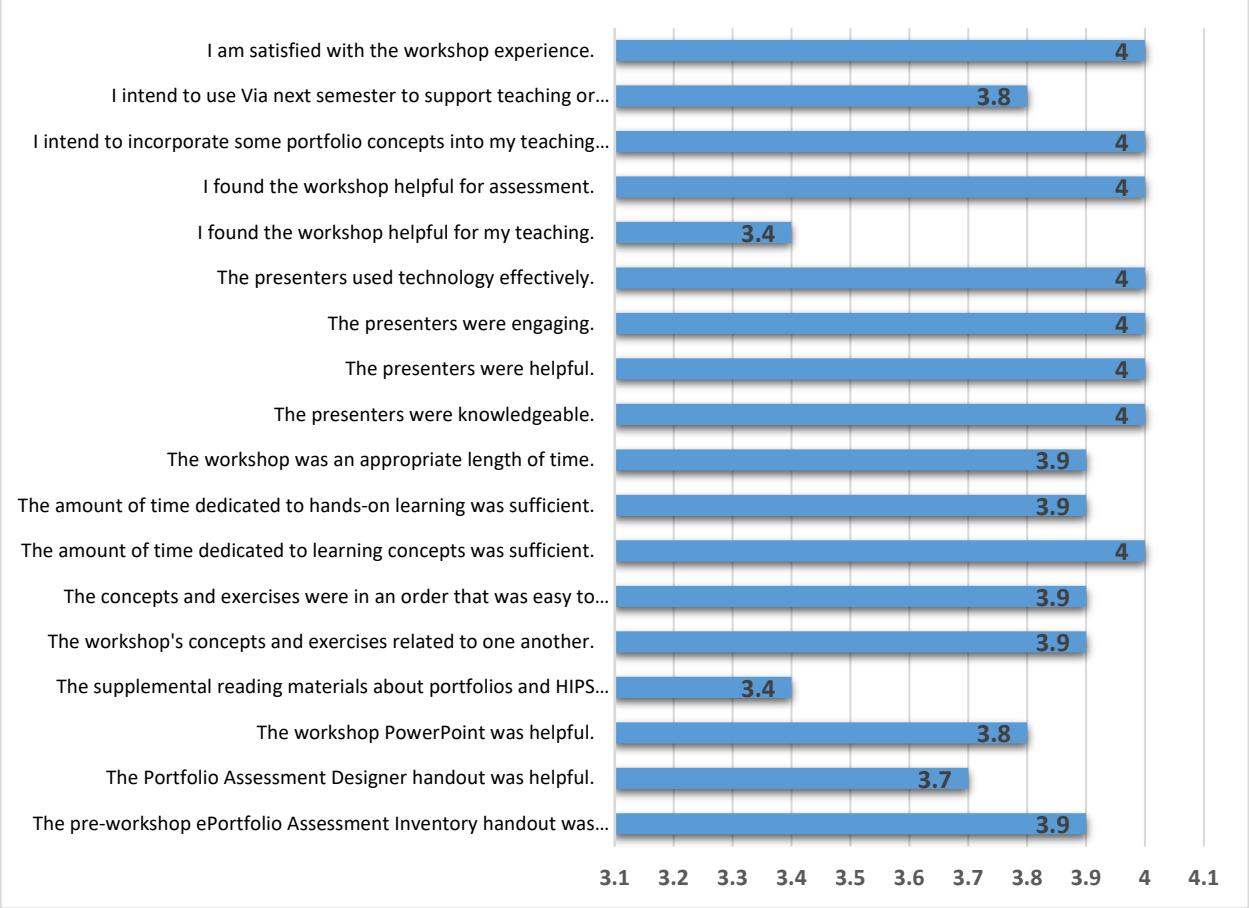
laying out the after-training follow-up schedule, and distributing a survey to gather participant feedback on the quality of the training experience and intent to continue using the practices or platform beyond the fall semester (see Appendix 3). 90-minute follow-up meetings were held in October 2020 and March 2021 to instruct the participants on the technical activation of their prototype activities in Via and how to extract learning data from the platform. Participant consent was secured and approved by GGC's institutional review board prior to having training results and survey responses shared.

RESULTS

Four of five programs developed prototype activities that aligned with one or more practices consistent with program-level eportfolios. CMAP and POLS instituted cumulative projects in their capstone courses and used the platform to gather student work and separately assess it. HIST instituted an assessment portfolio model across multiple points of their curriculum and assessed artifacts with common rubrics. HDAS instituted a cumulative showcase eportfolio aligned with their program learning outcomes as its capstone course project. The fifth participating program, SPED, used Via to collect and assess an action research project in one course. CMAP, HIST, HDAS, and SPED activated their prototypes in the fall 2020 semester, while POLS activated theirs in the spring 2021 semester.

Results of the two-day training survey (see Fig. 2) indicate participants believed that all parts of the training experience were effective. Mean agreement for all statements ranged from 3.4 – 4.0 on a 4-point scale.

FIGURE 2
TWO-DAY TRAINING PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS



Participants thought that the presenters were knowledgeable, helpful, engaging, and used technology efficiently (4.0). In addition, they stated that the training concepts and exercises related to one another and were in an order that was easy to follow; furthermore, that the amount of time devoted to learning the concepts and hands-on learning, and the length of the workshop, were appropriate. Participants indicated the ePortfolio Assessment Inventory (3.9) and Learning Artifact/ePortfolio Assessment Designer (3.7) were helpful, and participants expressed a strong intent to incorporate some eportfolio concepts into their teaching practices (4.0). At the same time, survey results showed that participants felt the least effective parts of the training were the readings on HIPs and eportfolios (3.4) and how helpful the training was for their teaching (3.4).

Free responses indicated that participants would like to have had more workshop time spent on Via platform terminology, hands-on learning, using Via as a tool to help students secure employment, and viewing student portfolio examples and data about employers' experience of eportfolios of student applicants. They also stated a preference for spending more time learning how to use Via within a classroom and less time on pedagogy and HIPs research.

Discussion

In light of our stated objectives, the authors consider the workshop a success. Participating programs did integrate some eportfolio concepts into their program assessment models and did design and use some prototype activities in their curricula. The diversity of activities that were created and of the choices of how and where to integrate those activities suggests a strength of the underlying incrementalist strategy of guiding programs to apply concepts and processes appropriate, at that time, for their assessment models. No program transformed its assessment model into an eportfolio, but most took steps towards perceiving an eportfolio as a possible outcome of future changes to their assessment models, and in the cases of HDAS and HIST, seeing eportfolio as a likely goal for their programs. It is affirming to observe that participants' assessment work can proceed in a direction of incorporating more and better pedagogical and assessment practices, especially once they understand the benefits of the changes they made because of the training. This also benefited us by indicating what new training experiences we could develop to continue movement in that direction. We gave ourselves more work to do, just work in the service of incorporating into, developing, and refining this high impact practice in our programs.

At the same time, results of the training suggest limitations to this strategy. Figure 2 shows a wide gap between faculty perceptions of the helpfulness of supplemental readings on HIPs and eportfolio research (3.4) and of the workshop with respect to their teaching (3.4), and their intent to incorporate some portfolio concepts into their teaching or assessment practice (4.0). This does not strike the authors as, primarily, indicative of participants not recognizing that because they intended to (and did) incorporate some portfolio concepts through assessment, they were "helping" their teaching. The training's scope and duration could have been broadened so that participants had more time to understand and interact with the research and pedagogy and more time experimenting and building in the platform. Individualizing the training around programs where they were was an important tactic. Because the training was built around, first, understanding the particularities of programs' assessment models, then showing how changes towards portfolios could happen within the Via platform, training focused on "how to use Via" to revise their established assessment processes. Broadening the training would have required additional tools we did not have and did not anticipate, such as more detailed information about the curricula and learning models of the participating programs, as well as prototype activities of our own that could stand as exemplars. Participants might not have had a perspective to allow them to see eportfolio-as-pedagogy and assessment working in tandem. This oversight is even more noteworthy given the absence of a reflection activity from the list of prototype activities produced during the training. Among HIPs, reflection is recognized as a special quality of eportfolios, allowing students to consider their relationship to learning in ways that encourage synthesizing knowledge from several learning experiences and constructing new knowledge about themselves and how they learn (Matthews-DeNatale et. al., 2017; Sparrow & Török, 2018; Yancey 2019). A more sustained, resource-intensive training with a broader vision may have resulted in a deeper

understanding of eportfolio-as-pedagogy and the development of assessment opportunities for students to reflect on their program learning.

Ultimately, the authors do not see the absence of the creation of a reflection activity as a limitation of the training. Rather, we see it as a horizon and target – and as potential, illuminates another practical benefit of our incremental approach. More of the college's programs are positioned to move toward the incorporation of deeply impactful eportfolio pedagogical concepts because they have taken first steps, through assessment, to prepare their curricula, students, and faculty, to see, and value, where and how reflection experiences can occur. We can change our work as trainers to stress how, from their first steps in assessment, programs can take longer strides towards those better pedagogical practices.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

ePortfolio Assessment Inventory

Part 1. Things you should have with you for the workshop

	We have this
b. Program learning outcomes	
c. Program plan	
d. Curriculum map	
e. Program outcome rubric or rubrics	
f. Course syllabus (or syllabi)	
g. Course outcomes	
h. Model / example assignment description	
a. Assignment rubric or rubrics	

Items A-D are for positioning artifact collection at the appropriate level of the program and for developing intentional program assessment processes around those artifacts. **Items E-H** are for situating artifact collection or Via or portfolio development within a course experience.

Part 2. Things you should do to prepare for the workshop

	We did this
b. Access the Teams Channel for the 2-day Training	
c. Download the Via Access Info Handout 1.1 from the Files	
d. Access your group's subchannel	
e. Upload to the Files of your group's subchannel the documents from Part 1 of this inventory	
f. Answer any questions in your subchannel Chat.	
g. Log in to Via	
h. Navigate over to the Admin portal, if your Via does not already. Use the screenshot on page two of this worksheet to navigate to the Admin portal.	
i. Check the Standards tab from within the Admin portal for your area in Via	
j. Determine: we have our Standards, or we need to change or add Standards	
k. Identify the thing you want to assess. Is it an outcome? Is it a learning artifact?	
a. Consider how you want to assess it. Do you have an experience around that outcome? Do you have a rubric for that learning artifact?	

APPENDIX 2

ePortfolio Assessment Designer

Part 1. Preliminary Choices

What you want students to do: We are interested in collecting… (check what applies)

	Interested?
b. …one artifact from one course	
c. …one artifact from more than one course	
d. …more than one artifact from one course	
e. …more than one artifact from more than one course	
f. …a collection of artifacts from one course	
g. …a collection of artifacts from more than one course	

Items A-D are for considering the number of discrete collection activities you wish to deploy throughout the curriculum. **Items E-F** are for considering an eportfolio as a discrete activity for students to complete. If your answers are more from "one course," then you are designing an Activity Template or Templates to be deployed in one course. If your answers are more from "more than one course," then you are designing an Activity Template or Templates to be deployed across multiple courses.

How you want to look at what students do: We are interested in assessing… check what applies)

	Interested?
b. …one artifact one way	
c. …more than one artifact one way	
d. …a collection of artifacts one way	
e. …one artifact more than one way	
f. …more than one artifact more than one way	
g. …a collection of artifacts more than one way	

Items A-C indicate you wish to use one rubric for assessment of one or more learning artifacts. **Items D-F** indicate you wish to use more than one rubric for assessment of one or more learning artifacts.

Whom you want to look at what students do: We are interested in assessment… (check what applies)

	Interested?
b. …performed by one person, the instructor of the course or courses from where the artifacts are being collected	
c. …performed by one person, not the instructor of the course or courses from where the artifacts are being collected	
d. …performed by more than one person, one of whom must be the instructor of the course or courses from where the artifacts are being collected	
e. …performed by more than one person, one of whom may be the instructor of the course or courses from where the artifacts are being collected	
f. We are not interested in assessment, only in artifact collection.	

Items A-D indicate the content and type of Activity Template you will choose. These also indicate the Via membership administration you will need to perform, as well as the number of people who will need to be trained to access and perform assessment in Via. **Item E** indicates you will not use the Assessment features when designing a Via Activity Template (you can always change that later).

Part 2. Design and Deployment of your Assessment Activity Template

2. Look your answers to part 1a, "What you want students to do." First, determine the scope of your collection. Which are you?

   If you selected A or B, then you are interested in collecting one learning artifact.
   If you selected C or D, then you are interested in collecting different learning artifacts.
   If you selected E or F, then you are interested in collecting a student eportfolio.

3. Crosswalk your answers to Part 1a with your curriculum map and program plan. Identify what course or courses would be the sources of the learning artifact, artifacts, or eportfolio.

4. Consider your answers to Part 1b above. Do you have a rubric or rubrics for assessing that learning artifact, artifacts, or eportfolio? Is that rubric part of the course or courses identified in your answer to 2.2 above? Do you have instructions for how students are supposed to do the activity that generates that artifact? Are those instructions part of the course or courses identified in your answer

to 2.2 above? Make a list of items students need to know: what do they need to submit? How do they build a showcase? What expectations do you have for their showcase design and content?

Part 3. Putting this all together

The activity we want students to complete is (name it):

The activities we want students to complete are (name them):

The items students need to put in their portfolio are (name them):

We will collect one artifact from this course (course name and number):

We will collect artifacts from these courses (course names and numbers):

Students will build an eportfolio in this course (course name and number) that will draw from artifacts from these courses (course names and numbers):

We will assess artifacts using this one rubric (name the rubric):

We will assess artifacts using this other rubric (name the rubric):

We will assess eportfolio using this rubric (name the rubric):

APPENDIX 3

Via 2-Day Training Participant Satisfaction Survey

Class Climate	Via 2-day Training Trainee Satisfaction	SCANTRON.

Georgia Gwinnett College

Office of Academic Assessment

Mark as shown: ☐ ☒ ☐ ☐ ☐ Please use a ball-point pen or a thin felt tip. This form will be processed automatically.

Correction: ☐ ■ ☐ ☒ ☐ Please follow the examples shown on the left hand side to help optimize the reading results.

1. Regarding Workshop Resource Materials

1.1	The pre-workshop ePortfolio Assessment Inventory handout was helpful.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
1.2	The Portfolio Assessment Designer handout was helpful.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
1.3	The workshop PowerPoint was helpful.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
1.4	The supplemental reading materials about portfolios and HIPS were helpful.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
1.5	Something that would improve the workshop materials would be...				

2. Regarding Workshop Organization

2.1	The workshop's concepts and exercises related to one another.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
2.2	The concepts and exercises were in an order that was easy to follow.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
2.3	The amount of time dedicated to *learning concepts* was sufficient.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
2.4	The amount of time dedicated to *hands-on learning* was sufficient.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
2.5	The workshop was an appropriate length of time.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
2.6	Something that would improve the workshop's organization would be...				

3. Regarding Workshop Presenters

3.1	The presenters were knowledgeable.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
3.2	The presenters were helpful.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
3.3	The presenters were engaging.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
3.4	The presenters used technology effectively.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
3.5	Something that would improve the presenters would be...				

4. Regarding Your Overall Experience

4.1	I found the workshop helpful for my teaching.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
4.2	I found the workshop helpful for assessment.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
4.3	I intend to incorporate some portfolio concepts into my teaching or assessment practice.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
4.4	I intend to use Via next semester to support teaching or assessment.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree
4.5	I am satisfied with the workshop experience.	Disagree ☐	☐	☐	☐ Agree

4. Regarding Your Overall Experience [Continue]	
4.6	Something that would improve the overall workshop experience would be...
4.7	Other topics about HIPs, portfolios, assessments, or Via I would like to learn more about are...
4.8	Some questions I still feel I need answered are...