# A program-level view of the use of Mahara as an ePortfolio

## Introduction

This document provides a hypothetical scenario which outlines how Mahara, the University of South Australia’s ePortfolio (eP), could be used in a developmental and engaging way across a program of study to help learners demonstrate achievement related to intended learning outcomes.

As noted in the supplementary report of the Australian ePortfolio Project (2010), ‘The extent of ePortfolio practice has moved away from their use mainly in single units of study towards more programmatic implementation in undergraduate student learning’ and as such this matrix recognises that for an eP to be most effective, a whole-of-program approach is desirable.

## Principles of ePortfolio Usage

The scenario presented in this document is based on the following principles related to eP usage:

1. The eP is student-owned and driven, hence it is important to foster a sense of personal ownership between the student and their eP, and
2. The eP will represent a student’s development over time.

Despite the notion of the eP as being a constant ‘work in progress’, it is envisaged that at the completion of the program the student will have an eP ready for presentation for formative and summative assessment and to prospective employers. Drawing from Barrett (2009), the matrix in this document is loosely organised around her three types of eP usage, although there will necessarily be overlap between them as a student progresses through their program.

Level 1 – Collection and Archive

Level 2 – Reflection and Feedback

Level 3 – Selection and Presentation

## Foundational ePortfolio functions

An ePortfolio can operate in many differing ways offering an enormous range of potential functionality. As pointed out by Smith and Tillema (2003) ePortfolios ‘can include many interdependent functional activities’, and some of these activities are highlighted below.

* Reflective practice
* Collection/Presentation of graduate qualities and professional competencies
* Group work/collaboration
* Development of academic and digital literacies
* Interconnectedness
* Critical thinking

**Sample program**: MBMC (Bachelor of Communication: Media and Culture)

**Table 1:** Snapshot of courses by study period and year level with suggestions of where

Mahara can be incorporated in learning and teaching arrangements provides an overview of a whole-of-program approach to utilising Mahara as an ePortfolio. An expanded description for each course can be found in the following pages.

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Year 1 – SP2**  **Collection & Archive** | Introduction to Communication and Cultural Studies | Communication: Rhetoric and Reasoning | Computers: Communication and Society **(eP: Skills Development - Creation of an eP)** | General Studies Sub-major 1: (Creative Writing) *Professional and Creative Communication 1* **(eP: Reflective Practice)** |
| **Year 1 – SP5**  **Collection & Archive** | Screen Matters: Film, Television and New Media **(eP: Textual Analysis & Discussion)** | Global Societies | Media literacies | General Studies Sub-major 2 (Creative Writing) *Writing and Reading Short Fiction* **(eP:Collection & Archiving)** |
| **Year 2 – SP2**  **Reflection & Feedback** | Culture, Place and Meaning | Professional Major Option 1  *Multi-Mediations: Social and Cultural Uses of the New Media* **(eP:** **ePortfolio Project)** | General Studies Sub-major 3  (Creative Writing)  *Creative Writing Practice* **(eP: Reflective Practice & Feedback)** | Communication, Culture and Indigenous Australians |
| **Year 2 – SP5 Reflection & Feedback** | Creative Industries and Ethics | General Studies Sub-major 4  (Creative Writing)  *Writing and Reading Poetry* **(eP: Reflective Practice & Feedback)** | Free Elective  *Public Relations 1 CMM* | Elective 1 / Professional Concentration 1 (Performing Arts) *Effective Communication* **(eP:****Mobile Learning / Reflective Practice & Feedback on Oral Presentation)** |
| **Year 3 – SP2 Selection & Presentation** | Communication Practicum 1 **(eP:** **Professional Development: Competencies & CV/Resume** | General Studies Sub-major 5  (Creative Writing)  *Scriptwriting for Media* | Elective 2 / Professional Concentration 2 (Performing Arts) *Introduction to Film and Television Production* **(eP:****Showcasing Achievement)** | Elective 3 / Professional Concentration 3 (Performing Arts) *World Puppetry* **(eP:****Mobile Learning/Reflective Practice & Feedback)** |
| **Year 3 – SP5 Selection & Presentation** | Communication Practicum 2 **(eP:** **Placement/Fieldwork Reflections)** | Professional Major Option 2  *Television and Society* | General Studies Sub-major 6  (Creative Writing)  *Creative Writing Practice* **(eP:****Showcasing Accomplishments/Portfolio)** | Elective 4 / Professional Concentration 4 (Performing Arts) *Music Sound Studio* **(eP:****Create podcast & RSS[[1]](#footnote-1) feed** |

**Program:** MBMC (Bachelor of Communication: Media and Culture)

**First Year (SP2) – Level 1: Collection and Archive**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Course** | **Mahara ePortfolio usage** |
| Introduction to Communication and Cultural Studies |  |
| Communication: Rhetoric and Reasoning |  |
| Computers: Communication and Society | **Skills Development: Creation of an ePortfolio.** As well as learning the technical aspects of the software, and its integration into learn**online**, students will be introduced to the rationale behind the use of an eP and the potential benefits of the system. Assessment could involve the creation of a profile and ‘view’ or collection[[2]](#footnote-2) of views which reflect or develop the student’s notions of digital literacy. Mahara users will also begin the process of connecting with other students and staff as part of a professional network through the eP’s social networking function. |
| General Studies Sub-major 1: (Creative Writing) *Professional and Creative Communication 1* | **Reflective Practice.** The ePortfolio provides an ideal opportunity for students to begin presenting their written work online and to start the process of critical self-reflection. As this is the beginning of the sub-major in *Creative Writing* this practice begins the crucial process of tracing development over time. As students will be encouraged to constantly publish and reflect upon their own work throughout the program it is envisaged that they will be able to look back and witness the development of their own writing skills. Adoption of an eP at a whole of program level can represent a significant cultural change for both staff and students. Writing eP’s in to course materials at this early stage should mean that their use becomes an expected and formal element of the teaching and learning arrangements.  This is also a space for reflection and feedback from other students and staff. Successful pieces of work could be published as part of an eP in the context of seeking employment, entering writing competitions or as collections of written works by individuals or groups of students. |

**Program:** MBMC (Bachelor of Communication: Media and Culture)

**First Year (SP5) – Level 1: Collection and Archive**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Course** | **Mahara ePortfolio usage** |
| Screen Matters: Film, Television and New Media | **Textual Analysis & Discussion.** This course requires close, critical reading of various film, television and new media items. This could be easy facilitated by the creation of a view[[3]](#footnote-3) with an embedded multimedia file or with links to various externally hosted media. The feedback function at the bottom of each eP view page would then allow for textual analysis and discussion of individual film clips.  One aspect of the textual evaluation required in this course is the completion of a shot analysis of a short piece of film. This is given to all students. In Mahara a ‘view’ is analogous to a template, which is copyable and able to be distributed to other eP users. This means that templates and proforma type pages can be easily created and distributed by teaching staff. In this instance the footage under analysis and the written analysis itself, would both appear in the same view. In cases like this Mahara can facilitate collaborative practices and students can be exposed to the good/better/best analytical techniques of other students. |
| Global Societies |  |
| Media Literacies |  |
| General Studies Sub-major 2 (Creative Writing) *Writing and Reading Short Fiction* | **Collection & Archiving.** In this first year of study, and in line with Barrett’s idea of the first level of eP use being one of collecting and archiving, *Creative Writing* students will continue to fill their eP’s with their work. Through the feedback function they can continue to trace the development of their work and to distribute it in any way and to whomever they see fit.  The creation of a blog as part of their profile/professional identity could also be a very effective use of their eP especially as Mahara links easily with internally and externally created blogs. Recent posts can easily feed in to views in Mahara via RSS. |

**Program:** MBMC (Bachelor of Communication: Media and Culture)

**Second Year (SP2) – Level 2: Reflection and Feedback**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Course** | **Mahara ePortfolio usage** |
| Culture, Place and Meaning |  |
| Professional Major Option 1  *Multi-Mediations: Social and Cultural Uses of the New Media* | **ePortfolio Project.** eP’s can form part of a student’s online identity and as such could be considered as part of the broader narrative of their tertiary teaching and learning experience. This narrative may also form part of what the student wants to present about themselves at the completion of their studies. This idea is an exemplar of the kinds of themes discussed in this course and could be explored by students further through the creation of an ePortfolio project detailing a part of their lives or experiences.  Mahara also provides an easy way to create linkages to other elements of a student’s online presence (e.g. *YouTube, Flickr, Slideshare, Googledocs)* and so can be a conduit for an individual students talents and interests. |
| General Studies Sub-major 3  (Creative Writing)  *Creative Writing Practice* | **Reflective Practice & Feedback.** This would see a continuation of the practice of reflection started in the first year of this sub-major. Students could continue to publish their written work as part of their writing portfolio and as part of the process of collecting and archiving material for future eP presentation. This could be an opportunity to showcase explicit developmental progression by requiring students to work with/on a piece of writing they did in the first year of the program. |
| Communication, Culture and Indigenous Australians |  |

**Program:** MBMC (Bachelor of Communication: Media and Culture)

**Second Year (SP5) – Level 2: Reflection and Feedback**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Course** | **Mahara ePortfolio usage** |
| Creative Industries and Ethics |  |
| General Studies Sub-major 4  (Creative Writing)  *Writing and Reading Poetry* | **Reflective Practice & Feedback.** This, too, would see a continuation of the practice of reflection started in the first year of this sub-major. Students could continue to publish their written work as part of their writing portfolio and as part of the process of collecting and archiving material for future eP presentation. In addition, detailed feedback would also be given by peers and academic staff and this could provide an opportunity to use ‘groups’ and a student’s network of ‘friends’ to explicitly structure the feedback process. |
| Free Elective  *Public Relations 1 CMM* |  |
| Elective 1 / Professional Concentration 1 (Performing Arts) *Effective Communication* | **Mobile Learning/Reflective Practice & Feedback on Oral Presentation.** This course aims to increase a student’s ability to communicate to a live audience. It presents an opportunity for the use eP and mobile learning technologies. Students would use smart-phones[[4]](#footnote-4) to record and upload footage of themselves (using the smart-phone App ‘PortfolioUp’) through the various stages of the course as they prepare for their final presentation. After they have uploaded footage of their efforts they could reflect on where they need to improve. Classmates and staff could provide feedback on the same.  Their most successful presentations could be presented as part of their CV/resumes as examples of their experience of, and ability to, communicate effectively. |

**Program**: MBMC (Bachelor of Communication: Media and Culture)

**Third Year (SP2) – Level 3: Selection and Presentation**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Course** | **Mahara ePortfolio usage** |
| Communication Practicum 1 | **Professional Development: Competencies and CV/Resume.** This course is the first part of a 2 part practicum that culminates in a 5 day workplace placement. Part of this is to produce a report on the placement organisation. In this first part however, attention could turn to the presentation of professional competencies. These could include the previously mentioned, *Effective Communication* (both written and oral) and be taken further in this course with the preparation of a report or case study, produced to a professional level. This piece of work is the culmination of the second part of this two part (year-long) practicum. Mahara could be used at this stage to outline professional expectations and to secure placement positions for students. This could be accomplished by using the eP to showcase participating students achievements and interests to potential organisations. |
| General Studies Sub-major 5  (Creative Writing)  *Scriptwriting for Media* |  |
| Elective 2 / Professional Concentration 2 (Performing Arts) *Introduction to Film and Television Production* | **Showcasing Achievement.** This course requires the production of three separate pieces of video work. All of these are to be completed in small groups[[5]](#footnote-5) and are collaborative at almost every stage of production. In the first Instance Mahara could be used to distribute a uniform template/view of script format. It also provides an online space for script development/feedback/reflection. In the second instance it provides a space to showcase successful pieces of video work. |
| Elective 3 / Professional Concentration 3 (Performing Arts) *World Puppetry* | **Mobile Learning/Reflective Practice & Feedback.** This course could operate in a similar fashion to the above-mentioned *Effective Communication*. Smart-phones could be used to photograph/video and upload material to Mahara and through this function to plot the development of the student’s craft. This provides a ready platform for reflection and feedback throughout the duration of the course. It also provides a way to present the final performance for both assessment and for potential presentation in a portfolio of student achievements. |

**Program:** MBMC (Bachelor of Communication: Media and Culture)

**Third Year (SP5) – Level 3: Selection and Presentation**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Course** | **Mahara ePortfolio usage** |
| Communication Practicum 2 | **Placement/Fieldwork Reflections.** This is the second part of the communications practicum. It requires students to negotiate and complete a one-week placement in an organisation. Mahara could be used effectively in two ways here. If the eP has been used as part of the overall program, there should be by this stage an eP filled with various artefacts outlining the various achievements of the individual student. This collection could be used to outline to a prospective organisation the various strengths and experiences of the student who wants to join them. The other element of use from the eP is the ability to create field notes (in the form of a blog or text box). Using this function it becomes easy for the supervisor of each project to provide feedback, and secondly, for the student to reflect critically on their field notes when it comes time to complete their final report. As in above-mentioned cases, a Mahara view (or template) could be created for the final report/case study assignment. |
| Professional Major Option 2  *Television and Society* |  |
| General Studies Sub-major 6  (Creative Writing)  *Creative Writing Practice* | **Showcasing Accomplishments/Portfolio.** In this final part of the sub-major attention could turn to showcasing all the work of the student through the completion of a portfolio of writing. This portfolio could form part of the student’s resume, be used to enter competitions or be used as part of an application for post-graduate study. |
| Elective 4 / Professional Concentration 4 (Performing Arts) *Music Sound Studio* | **Create podcast and RSS feed.** Various items of assessment for this course involve the creation of sound files (\*.mp3’s). Mahara provides an ideal platform for presentation of these as standalone files or as podcasts with RSS feeds. As with previously mentioned media files they then become available for storage, personal reflection, assessment and feedback.  Successful pieces of work could become part of a student’s profiles or evidence of a professional competency in the field of sound engineering. |

**Appendix 1**

**Mahara and ePortfolio Glossary**

**Collection**- A set of views which allows a user to highlight particular aspects of his/her work

**ePortfolio,** sometimes, eP – 1. An information technology system used to collect, store and present electronic items known as *artefacts*. Mahara or Pebble Pad are examples of eP systems. 2. One particular collection of electronic artefacts owned by an individual or group.

**File –** A unit or set of information which can be displayed in an eportfolio, e.g., a document, video clip or image. Files can exist separately from the eP system and must be uploaded into the sytem.

**Friend** – Status which signifies a connection between users of the eP system. This status is used to control who can see a user’s eP and who can communicate with them within the system.

**Group –** A collection of users. Membership within a group can be used similarly to friend status to control access and communication within the system. For example, lecturers might create groups related to their course and users who are members of the group can have shared access to one anothers’ ePs.

**Profile –** a page which contains information about a user. Each user has a profile page. Each user can add information to the profile page and control others’ access to it.

**Resume –** a special set of information including a user’s contact details, education, employment, goals and other personal information. Information in the resume is added by each user and different parts of the resume can be used together (as a resume) or separately, with other files as part of a view.

**RSS** – stands for ‘Really Simple Syndication’ and is a system in which information is ‘pushed’ out to a user who has ‘subscribed’ rather than the user having to visit the site where the information was published.

**Smart-Phone –** A smart-phone is a mobile phone device offering advanced features. These include greater connectivity to the Internet, larger touchscreens and the ability to run a wide range of applications. As such they are becoming like handheld computers, though it should be noted that smart-phones currently have some limitations with the displaying of multiple screens or the running of multiple applications.

**View**- A compilation of information and files which have been arranged to present particular aspects of a user’s work to a known audience.

**References**Barrett, H 2009, *Balancing the two faces of ePortfolios*, [Retrieved November 24, 2010 from <http://electronicportfolios.com/balance/balance.pdf>]

Smith, K & Tillema, H 2003, ‘Clarifying different types of portfolio use’, *Assessment and Evaluation in Higher Education,* vol. 6, no. 28, pp. 625 - 648.

Hallam, G, Harper, W, McAllister, L, Hauville, K, & Creagh, T 2010, *ePortfolio use by university students in Australia: Informing excellence in policy and practice (Supplementary Report)*, Australian Learning and Teaching Council.

1. See appendix 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See appendix 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See appendix 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. See appendix 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See appendix 1 [↑](#footnote-ref-5)