

# Chapter I. What? So What? Now What? A Decade of Writing ePortfolios at the University of Georgia

Ron Balthazor  
Elizabeth Davis  
Christy Desmet  
Deborah Church Miller  
Sara Steger  
THE UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA

Two related programs at the University of Georgia have been using ePortfolios for individual and program *assessment* for over a decade. The first-year composition (FYC) program implemented electronic portfolios as a capstone project using EMMA, the department and program's in-house writing environment, in 2005. The use of ePortfolios was expanded to the Writing Certificate Program in 2008. Thus, within the English Department, ePortfolios are well established as a method of assessment. In this essay, we discuss the strategies that we have used—and even been forced to use—in order to sustain ePortfolio use at the curricular level. The challenges in the early part of the program have been discussed in the literature as well as in this collection, including questions of instructor and student buy-in, logistics of implementation on a large scale, user support, technological infrastructure, and software development and user studies. At the other end of the historical process, we face an entirely different set of challenges, including forming a succession plan as the original team of developers moves on; adapting to changes in administrative policies at higher levels; moving away from open-source to proprietary platforms on an institutional level; and dealing with the centralization of technological resources. This chapter focuses on programmatic connections—how to make connections between curricular efforts in a decentralized institution—and the long-term arc of development over a decade, in response to and in resistance against educational trends and institutional practices. We hope our historical perspective will prove useful to institutions at different stages of ePortfolio development and curricular expansion.

The story of EMMA and the electronic portfolios that EMMA has made possible on a programmatic level began quietly, when Nelson Hilton, then Head of the English Department at the University of Georgia, sought a cadre of colleagues who might be interested in exploring his latest technological enthusiasm: markup languages, and more specifically, *XML*, or Extensible Markup Language. For one semester, we met regularly to learn abstractly about the potential of markup lan-

guages for teaching and research, and more concretely, to learn and use XML. Like many digital humanities projects, this one started with a penchant for learning and playing with tools. For the simple reason that many participants were instructors in the first-year composition program, the project eventually found its home there, and the group began thinking about the potential for teaching writing with XML. As the project progressed, however, the emphasis was reversed, as pedagogy began to drive EMMA's technical development as a writing environment. The adoption of electronic portfolios within the first-year composition (FYC) program and their eventual migration to the Writing Certificate Program (WCP) is thoroughly intertwined with the development of EMMA, the integrated writing environment that was developed at the University of Georgia between 2001 and the present.

## What?

What is EMMA, and how has it changed, been developed, and survived between 2002, the year we first piloted the application with a class, and the time of this writing? The changes have been many, the reasons varied. EMMA was “born” within the early days of Learning Management Systems (LMS). Still the dominant form of technological classroom support, LMS began as tools built to assist the delivery of information to students, and in many ways, they still are limited by this initial design imperative, a limitation that other programs have attempted to mitigate via LMS plug-ins for additional affordances (see Dellinger & Hanger, this collection). Composition instructors have long known delivery of information is less-than-central to the composition classroom. Well before user-generated web content was common and expected, the heart of composition pedagogy was the student document. Thus, some fifteen years ago, before Web 2.0 sparked a revolution in how we interact with texts and one another in digital environments, instructors and administrators in the Office of First-year Composition in the English Department at the University of Georgia (UGA) set out to imagine an electronic environment for the writing classroom.

Once the project had found a home within First-year Composition, development focused on pedagogy, for all of the developers were also instructors. As EMMA developed according to their pedagogical needs and requests, it aimed to facilitate collection of the various stages of the writing process—from generation through revision and review. The application, as the teacher-developers realized, should also support asynchronous exchange of students' documents for peer review. More globally, it should encourage a common vocabulary for writing pedagogy from rhetorical to mechanical issues, and as part of this community-building effort, it should make it easy to tag or mark-up any document to make more visible to students, their peers, and their instructors the formal aspects of writing (e.g., everything from “what actually is the thesis of this essay?” to “how many prepositions are in this paragraph?”). The writing environment that we created was initially named EMMA or the Electronic Markup and Management Applica-

tion, in order to reflect the driving purpose at its inception. Though few remember or care what EMMA once stood for or why the name lived for a time in angle brackets (a nod, of course, to XML or eXtensible Markup Language, which was at the core of early development), the underlying pedagogy has matured, along with the software program developed to implement it.<sup>1</sup> To the core features dictated by these initial pedagogical imperatives, we added a variety of tools to provide space for low-stakes writing, tools that support integration of *multimodal* composition, and a portfolio composition and assessment piece to complete the suite of electronic writing possibilities.

Even though EMMA was initially designed to facilitate an established writing process and encourage pedagogy grounded in that process, writing itself is a technology, and it is a technology in the midst of dramatic changes catalyzed by the very same shift from paper to screen that we were making with EMMA. Thus EMMA's own evolution reflects some of the changes the application itself may have instigated in the way students and instructors write and the way they present and evaluate that writing, particularly in the culminating product of the ePortfolio.

### Early Days with XML

We began naively, thinking that we could build our own writing application, a word processor of sorts that would meet the broader needs of the writing classroom. But quickly recognizing this project was in so many ways beyond us, we adopted an open-source code editor (jEdit) and began to modify and repurpose it in order to realize the markup dreams we had for student writing. We anticipated that eXtensible Markup Language (XML), as a language that is at once readable by people and machines, could help writers become more reflective, or self-conscious about their choices and processes. At the very least, marking one or more sentences as <thesis> would make a writer or peer reviewer think twice about what actually was a document's "center of gravity." On an even more mundane level, marking subjects and verbs within a sentence would confirm whether or not the writer/reader could identify these grammatical parts. Moving outward to more global issues, it was thought, would foster reflective practice without interrupting the flow of writing with revision or editorial concerns. Best of all, writers could literally see their documents in new and more intentional ways.

During the first year in which we implemented electronic portfolios as capstone projects through EMMA for FYC classes, documents were uploaded, marked up, and shared using jEdit as an XML editor. To the amazement of some

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1. XML is a protocol for marking the structure of documents, and is designed to store, transport, and exchange data (rather than display data, like *html*). XML is used for organizing data of any kind in a systematic manner by creating descriptive markup tags (e.g., an essay might include tags for marking paragraphs, sentences, introductions, thesis statements, etc.).

(and the chagrin of many), we had all of our composition students actually tagging their work to produce well-formed XML documents. But in spite of the strengths of XML as an open, customizable text standard that could easily be manipulated to create information-rich displays on screen and mined for research and assessment purposes, the creation of Document Type Definitions (DTDs) and valid XML documents predicated on them proved a significant challenge and hindrance to students and instructors.

As an unintended—and undesirable—consequence of the complicated markup interface, the act of composing documents became largely divorced from preparing them for display in a web browser. Students basically wrote their essays in a traditional word processor, then copy-and-pasted their texts into the XML editor and marked them up with the appropriate tags for display (Figure 1.1). The results were clean and beautiful displays—that is, once the XML parser was satisfied that all of the code was well-formed and valid. One mistake was fatal and would produce only a blank document or an error code. Since markup took place at the end of the process, when an essay or final portfolio was due, the exacting nature of the markup became a source of added tension.

Those early years of EMMA, during the pilots in 2003 and 2004, and the big rollout year in 2005 garnered a problematic reputation that took several years to overcome, principally because all 6,000 students taking first-year composition were marking up their essays in order to turn work in to 90-some instructors. That period became a cautionary tale about finding a balance between the surface of digital text and the technological language that lies beneath, constructing the text. To provide a sense of the ambient level of technical expertise in the years EMMA was being introduced (2003–2005), we can look at a few examples. Up until 2004, the first-year composition’s “computer support” consisted largely of a small group of teaching assistants dedicated to providing minor fixes to issues in the three computer lab rooms (e.g., removing stuck floppy disks with a wooden tongue depressor). Computer-support teaching assistants also made sure that the twenty-two new Dell desktops in each of three labs were booted up in the morning and shut down at night, cleared of renegade documents, desktop messages, and pictures. Because all FYC classes were required to spend two weeks each semester working on “digital communication & writing skills,” support staff also oriented teachers and students to the computer use in labs and recommended computer-focused pedagogical approaches. In lab orientations, they covered skills such as opening, closing, and minimizing Windows; writing, copying, pasting, and saving documents in Microsoft Word; using the “Netscape” browser; and emailing using a dial up TelNet system. The support team also offered digital lesson plans. One such lesson was designed to teach the use of the main library’s digital resources and databases. Another taught students to use fonts and highlights to “mark up” and edit documents. Overall, the general teaching and student population was still in digital toddlerhood; we were not far past giving instructions on how to operate a mouse.

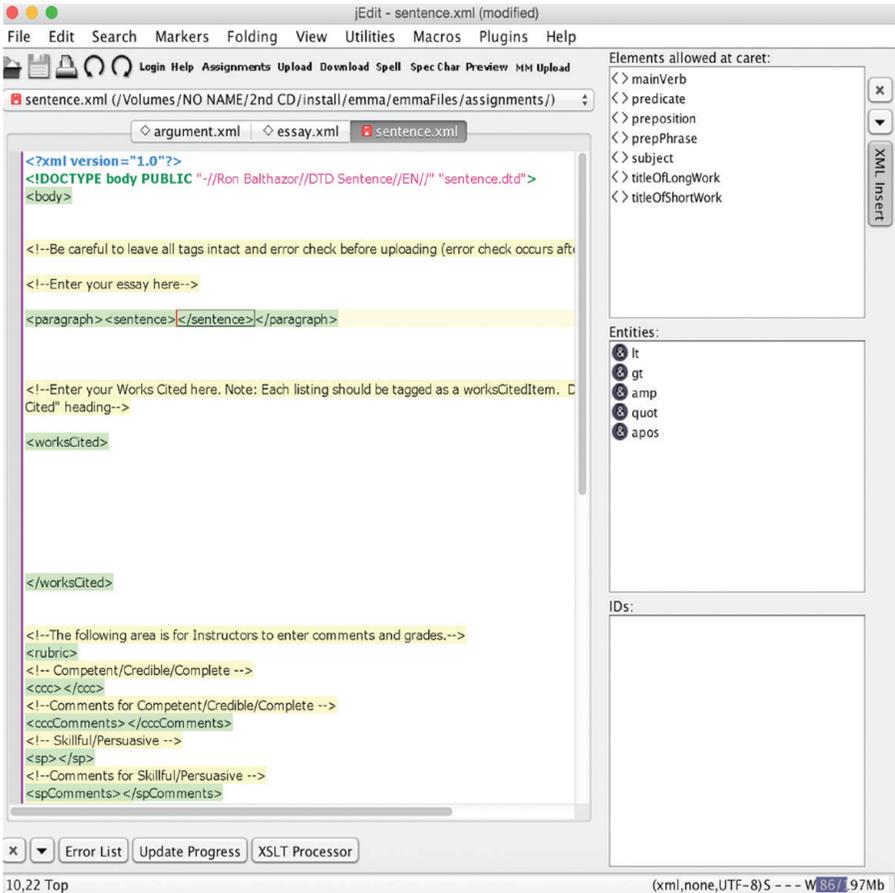


Figure 1.1. Writing in the jEdit XML Editor.

Meanwhile, over in our EMMA development camp, a lively discussion about the theory of creating and using tags defining varieties of text (DTDs or “document type definitions”) was taking place. The team discovered the jEdit text editor and saw it as a means to “increase students’ awareness of the complexities of the writing process by requiring them to identify and tag various features of their texts using XML [extensible markup language—a form of text coding]” (Balthazor et al., 2013, p. 23). jEdit, compared to the other open source text editors the group had worked with, seemed incredibly accessible. Our developers foresaw great pedagogical possibilities: students would gain new rhetorical perspectives by having to deconstruct and name the function of each of the parts of their texts as part of the composing process. The parts of students’ essays’ structure and, more importantly, the definitions of those parts would become visible. EMMA developers imagined that classes would discuss and challenge those definitions, raising students’ consciousness about the nature and structure of digital text.

Once defined and tagged, a whole set of essay “parts” could be displayed together for class examination. An instructor might, for example, collect and display for discussion a whole set of theses or topic sentences. All of this should be done instantly and without difficulty, thanks to the development team’s work.

The introduction of the jEdit version of EMMA took place over a little more than two years. In Academic Year 2003–2004 the development team ran a small test pilot with a handful of sections led by some of our most enthusiastic and tech-savvy instructors; response seemed very positive. Instructors from that pilot presented conference papers, published articles, and won awards for their innovative work teaching FYC with coding. In the following year, 2004–2005, we branched out to test run EMMA with our entire class of new teaching assistants, and this is where we encountered head winds and red flags began to appear. After a few initial EMMA training sessions, we asked for feedback. The comments, at best, damned the jEdit EMMA with faint praise, scaling up from there to annoyance, frustration, and subdued panic. For example, in one of the most positive comments, the instructor noted hopefully that “the experience itself was not, overall, particularly unpleasant. It is a logical process that, once learned, is not really a huge problem.” At the same time, the commenter noted, more negatively, “while I am commenting in jEdit, I have trouble keeping my place and properly assessing the flow of the sentence/paragraph/paper.” Another teacher frankly resisted, writing: “I honestly feel that the EMMA program is so young and so primitive that there is no way to make students and instructors use it successfully. About commenting, I hate it; it takes so long. It is almost impossible to read after a few comments in the student’s paper.” Other instructors were just panicky: “Basically, it took me an hour to enter the comments from one paper, and then I saved it to the A drive, which is apparently a cardinal sin. Miranda tried valiantly to save it, but ended up rebooting the system . . . I need to be drilled when it comes to this sort of thing. Just can’t be turned loose yet—I’m concerned: will we be doing this full-time next semester? I am concerned that it will take longer than grading on paper, & I am concerned about being expected to introduce EMMA to students.”

As we moved to a program-wide introduction of the jEdit version of EMMA in 2005, we herded our instructors through the change with a number of pretty attractive carrots and one big stick. As carrots, we offered a series of concessions and adaptations to alleviate any felt or real teaching burdens. First, we expanded a voluntary program of workshops and opened a centralized help lab. We let instructors know that students struggling with coding and uploading could be outsourced to the “EMMA Lab” staff. Further, while we encouraged instructors to have students use EMMA to create documents throughout the semester, we required only a final portfolio of documents in the EMMA environment and again, instructors could refer students to the EMMA Lab for help with adding documents and images to their portfolios. We also appealed to our instructors’ better educational angels by substituting these final EMMA course portfolios for

the single, high stakes three-hour exam essay that was, at that time, determining 30% of every student's course grade, a grade based heavily on a timeworn model of "correctness." Finally, we reduced the required number of graded essays from five to four, and later down to three. The big stick we employed, since all of our teachers were either on teaching assistantships (about 75%) or were on semester-to-semester contracts at that time, was simply to make the use of EMMA a top-down requirement for the whole FYC program.

To provide a sense of the learning curve involved in the switch to EMMA's jEdit digital environment, two items come to mind. The first is the seven-point handout, "Steps for EMMA Introduction," that we used as an outline for instructors and computer support staff as they led students through the first steps of EMMA work. The handout outlined seven class meetings of introductory work and homework to accomplish the following: have students enroll in EMMA and log in, learn to navigate to course materials (syllabus, readings, and so forth), write a short response in a "journal" tool, install the text editor, tag and upload a document, access a digital portfolio template and add a document to it, tag a document for structure, insert an image into a document, and respond to a peer's work. By comparison, the tasks that then required more than two weeks of in- and out-of-class instruction and practice (plus many trips to the EMMA lab for code detangling) could now be accomplished during a fifteen-minute orientation. The second item was the handout for instructors, "How to Grade in EMMA"; it involved seventeen "easy" steps to get an essay downloaded, a *rubric* attached, comments and grades entered, and the document tagged, identified, re-uploaded, and made available in a display to the student. While we required the new teaching assistants to use this online grading interface for at least one set of essays, only a tiny group—perhaps five instructors out of 90—voluntarily used the jEdit version of EMMA to comment and grade a semester's worth of essays.

As we concluded that first year, and while students were fighting their way through tagging in code to upload documents, we made one further mistake by having all portfolios (ca. 6,000) due at the same minute on the same day. Ron Balthazor, who was in charge of the server, watched anxiously as the system hesitated, hiccupped, but never crashed. It became clear to even the most deeply committed EMMA developers that a change of direction was required. While the EMMA team had believed, along with XML promoters, that the benefits of seeing and controlling the underlying construction of text would win out over the WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get) surface of the familiar word processor's text, as program leaders later reflected, "They were wrong: students raised on Microsoft Word rebelled at the exertions required of writers working with visible XML in their texts. Furthermore, the visible XML tags continued to work against what is probably the most important process to writing instruction: revision" (Balthazor, et al., 2013, p. 25). A fortuitous switch to the Open Office word processing program, similar to MS Word and providing a familiar-looking writing environment for our students, came on the heels of the first year's broad experiment.

EMMA would consistently evolve from that point on towards a simpler and more accessible user interface.

### The Return of the Word Processor

OpenOffice offered the power of XML (which operated in the background of the word processor), retained many of the sophisticated display possibilities that we had with jEdit-created XML, and allowed for text creation and markup in an environment that was much friendlier. Open Document Format (ODF), an international standard for word processing documents, gave us a common ground for document creation and exchange that added no additional fees for students, as OpenOffice is free. For a time, we offered our students a portable version of OpenOffice on CDs and thumb drives (Figure 1.2). This put the focus back on writing and less on the technology of markup.



*Figure 1.2. Media for delivering OpenOffice EMMA.*

While OpenOffice allowed for a more familiar composing and revision environment, it too had drawbacks. Most obvious was the negative effect on presentation. Electronic texts have the advantage of being at once working documents and published ones. This is particularly true of the electronic portfolio, whose status as multimodal composition makes liberal use of the Web's spatial and visual affordances. Like all word processors, OpenOffice inserted extra, hidden codes that made control of the virtual page difficult. This Introductory Reflective essay to Charlotte Byram's portfolio in 2008–2009, where text and comic are spaced perfectly within the browser, is the exception that proves the rule (Figure 1.3). Most products appeared much less polished, sometimes even sloppy in presentation.

Speaking of others' opinions: editing! Editing is both the playtime of an author and the sword with which to stab her. Allow me to explain. I love to edit papers, my own and other writers'. I enjoy spell-checking, grammar-correcting, and critically analyzing sentences for flow and fluency (although I have been informed that I am far too picky about the way a sentence feels . . . I suppose I cannot really argue against that assessment). Additionally, I am much better at editing other authors' papers than my own, because I am not clouded by my biases, connotations, my head of what I tend to leave out trains of thought, that the Reader already differences between Northern and Southern personalities in the first and not-included-in-this-working of "On a Relationship." Sorry.) On the other hand, I am not as good at dealing with people editing my own work. Of course, I realize the importance of peer editing, and indeed, am grateful for it, but still... peer editing recalls the fact that no matter how clever, insightful, witty, somber, concise, or impressive I believe myself to be, I am still subject to the reality of the Reader. So, it keeps me humble, when I would like to think highly of myself. Understanding this importance, experience has taught me that as a deadline approaches, my best

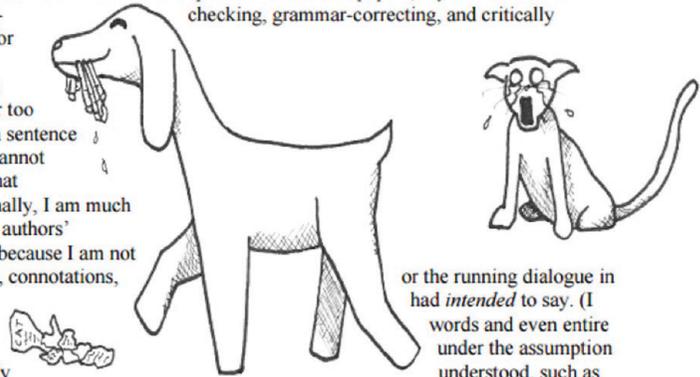


Figure 1.3. Charlotte Byram's introductory reflective essay.

As a result, teachers were asked to be lenient about formatting issues when grading capstone portfolios—in the browser, line spacing could vary, lineation could be ragged, and images moved out of place—and so we found ourselves in the uncomfortable position of accepting less professional productions than we would have liked. Some students resorted to using PDF documents, but these had to be downloaded before being read and evaluated, which added a burdensome amount of time for graders, each of whom assessed two classes of portfolios for each one they taught: for an instructor who taught four classes per semester, that could mean as many as 160 portfolios during the ten-day grading period at the end of a semester. In a program of this size and considering the working conditions under which U.S. composition instructors labor,<sup>2</sup> every technological choice has magnified consequences. Another drawback of PDF documents, discussed more fully below, is the inability to extract marked-up data from those documents for research and program assessment.

2. The "CCCC Statement on Working Conditions for Non-Tenure-Track Writing Faculty" (2016) notes the increasing numbers of non-tenure track faculty generally, and in composition classrooms in particular, in its call for changes to a variety of "practices and situations affecting NTT faculty and their efforts." The outcry in response to Arizona State University's 2014 effort to increase NTT composition instructors' course loads to 5/5 without increased compensation brought national attention to the widespread problem of workload and compensation for NTT composition faculty (see Flaherty, 2015).

## Migrating to the Web

Because the lifespan of a technology generation is brief, EMMA would soon undergo another sea change. As wikis, Google Docs, and similar applications invited us all to move more and more of our work to the web-browser, EMMA, too, began moving the creation, sharing, marking, and evaluation of student-generated work to the Web. At the time of writing, most student work, including portfolio work, is submitted through a browser-based word processor (a customized version of the open-source CKEditor). Instructors and students can make comments on documents and provide feedback in the form of clickable markup tags (for example, “comma splice”). In the document, when students hover over text that has been tagged, they can see a brief description of the tag and have the option to click a link that provides additional feedback (see Figure 1.4).

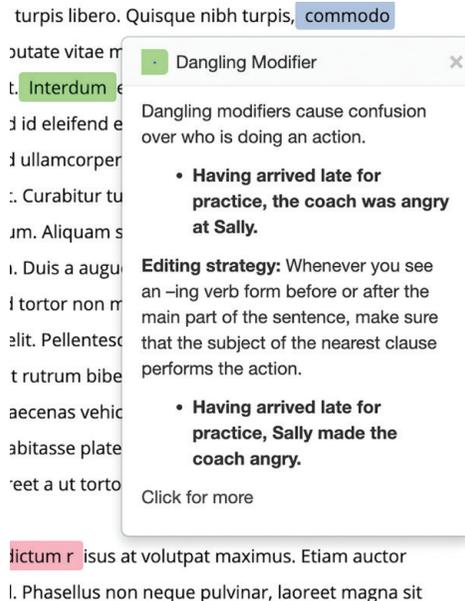


Figure 1.4. Student view of markup tag in EMMA.

We also have continued to develop tools for building multimodal texts and to provide tools for students to make choices about the appearance of their texts, encouraging them to think of themselves as writer/designers. These design options are particularly visible in the portfolios that students create as their final project in the semester.

## Moving Outward: The Writing Certificate Program

While the first-year composition program at UGA provided students with a strong foundation based in best practices for writing instruction and EMMA facilitated

a process and portfolio-based approach, there were indications that we were not building on that base as effectively as we should in order to give students consistent *scaffolding* and support for writing development across the curriculum. In 2003 and 2005, UGA participated in the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE), which surveys first-year students and seniors about their academic experiences. Responses to the NSSE showed that seniors felt they had not been asked to write very much beyond their first-year composition coursework and, yet, they felt that writing “clearly and effectively” was a crucial skill.

In 2007, a Writing Task Force was convened that developed a comprehensive plan for addressing concerns among faculty and administration about the amount and quality of writing done by undergraduate students. One of the key pieces of that plan was the interdisciplinary Writing Certificate Program (WCP), instituted at UGA in academic year 2008–2009. The WCP offers a way for students to develop their writing skills by taking a writing intensive program of coursework culminating in a capstone ePortfolio that showcases their work in the program and reflects on their writing experiences and accomplishments. Students in the program are required to take at least one course that is explicitly devoted to the subject of writing, the aim being to give them a foundation in how to approach writing in terms of process, rhetorical strategies, and working with peers to give and receive feedback during the development of projects. Students can select this course from a list that includes such approved writing courses as Advanced Composition, Technical and Professional Communication, Creative Writing, or Writing for the Web.

The rest of the coursework can be a mix of other writing courses, undergraduate research experiences, and writing intensive courses, such as those offered in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences’ Writing Intensive Program, or any course that has been approved for credit and carries a “W” suffix in the university’s curriculum system. These courses are meant to help students learn about the research and writing practices in specific disciplines and a large part of a student’s coursework for the program may take the form of writing intensive courses in their major field. The director of the program may also approve courses for certificate credit on a case-by-case basis by reviewing the syllabus and assignments and using the definition of writing intensive developed for the “W” suffix as a guide. For a course to have a “W” suffix in the university’s curriculum system, it must demonstrate that

1. Writing is an ongoing activity throughout the course and is part of the process of learning content;
2. Writing assignments take a variety of forms appropriate to the course and the discipline; and
3. Students learn to write effectively by having opportunities to receive feedback from their instructors and peers in order to revise their writing as it progresses through a series of stages. (“W” Suffix)

Finally, WCP students take a one-hour ePortfolio Workshop, in which they compose the capstone portfolio. This course not only serves as the “exit” requirement for the certificate, but it also provides one final writing intensive experience for students. The portfolio itself must include one (or more) sample(s) of work from each course being counted for certificate credit, along with critical *reflection* on the work that describes and analyzes the ways in which portfolio *artifacts* demonstrate particular writing skills and/or how those skills have developed through the student’s writing intensive courses and experiences. In that regard, the WCP capstone ePortfolio is similar to the FYC final course ePortfolio: both are meant to *showcase* writing done for the course or program and to demonstrate an ability to reflect critically on that work and the student’s development as a writer.

Because the WCP is housed in the English Department and directed by an English Department faculty member with a specialization in rhetoric and composition, there is a strong cohesion between the ePortfolios for both programs. The FYC portfolio and rubric have strongly informed the pedagogical approach to the capstone workshop course and the assessment of the WCP portfolios (see Appendices A–C). The workshop’s syllabus evokes the vocabulary of the FYC rubric and course goals, emphasizing coherence and engagement with process and reflection.

## So What?

Looking back over EMMA’s development over more than a decade, we feel strongly that the most important outcome has been the incorporation of electronic writing portfolios into the curriculum as a capstone project for both FYC and the WCP. In many ways, the advent and success of the portfolio programs at the University of Georgia have rested on the ever-increasing simplicity and flexibility of EMMA, the home-grown tool through which those portfolios are constructed. At the same time, the pedagogical imperatives that governed EMMA’s development are also evident in the shape of its electronic portfolios.

The pedagogical advantages offered by electronic portfolios include support for synthesizing or linking together academic experiences; encouragement of reflection and meta-cognition as well as the ability to foster multimodal composition to an extent not possible in other, especially print, formats. Within the broad range of purposes for electronic portfolios, first-year composition ePortfolios fulfill several functions: as constructs “published” on the Web, albeit to a carefully limited audience, they are “showcase” portfolios; but given the position of these portfolio authors within the entire university structure, this function is less important than others. Since the ePortfolio functions as the FYC Program’s capstone project, assessment is an important driver for the program. The FYC ePortfolio, substituting for the traditional final exam, counts for 30% of a student’s final grade. Because the program conducts embedded program assessment at the portfolio-grading level, the assessment also works at the program level, a connec-

tion Carpenter and Labissiere (this collection) explore further in their research on reliability and comparability in ePortfolio assessment. Finally, the FYC portfolio is structured to encourage reflection and demonstration of learning. The portfolio's landing page is a biography accompanied by an image of the student's choice; the task of composing and designing the landing page allows students to take ownership of and personalize their work. The next item is an introductory reflective essay, which extends and supplants the "introductory letter" of early portfolios. This assignment asks students to at once reflect on and present, in a thesis-driven manner, the "take-away" that they want the assessor to focus on in evaluating their portfolios. The showcase function of the ePortfolios is communicated through two revised essays from the course (which are presented as "best products") and a "wild card," the student's rhetorical choice to round out their image as a writer within the portfolio. The ePortfolio's function as a record of students' learning is communicated through two process exhibits responsive to their understanding of the writing process: the first is a demonstration of and reflection on the student's revision process, the second a demonstration of their peer revision process. As Polly et al. (this collection) likewise observe from a programmatic perspective, in a concrete sense, the portfolio's structure scaffolds desired pedagogical outcomes, in the case of our FYC courses by making revision and peer review central to the writing classroom. Both process pieces and the introductory essay also encourage reflection in action. The FYC ePortfolio's basic structure is shared by the WCP capstone portfolios. WCP ePortfolios also include a biography, an introductory reflective essay, various revised pieces, and "wild cards"—which, in the case of the capstone WCP portfolio, are artifacts that were produced outside the WCP curriculum, but that students may desire to include in the portfolio as demonstrations of writing skills or accomplishments (e.g., publications).

The second takeaway from our extended collaborative project is the value of program longevity and personal cooperation for ePortfolio programs over an entire institution. The long tenure of ePortfolios in the University of Georgia First-year Composition Program and then the Writing Certificate Program has created a certain degree of continuity in a university where, for purely contingent, historical reasons, writing programs have grown up in isolation from one another, and for financial and political reasons, they lack any good political or financial reason to try to merge with one another. On an institutional level, the consistent ePortfolio pedagogy across programs provides a suitable scaffold for future efforts to unite writing initiatives across the university. The use of EMMA by both the first-year composition and writing certificate programs has been a connecting thread that has had a significant impact on both the capstone workshop and the capstone portfolios themselves. Because the WCP uses EMMA as its ePortfolio platform and as its LMS for the ePortfolio Workshop, the emphasis remains on the writing process and peer review, both of which EMMA supports and facilitates extremely effectively. However, the final product of the workshop—the capstone ePortfolio itself—is constrained by the format of the

EMMA portfolio tool, which was built more for the FYC portfolios and does not provide the multitude of options for organization, navigation, and multimodality that would be more ideal for capstone portfolios that include a wide variety and large number of artifacts created in many different courses and for many different rhetorical purposes. This constraint results in more homogeneous and, perhaps, less truly “electronic” portfolios in that they do not allow for the exploitation of the digital medium described by Yancey (2004), in which ePortfolio composers draw on such digital affordances as “text boxes, hyperlinking, visuals, audio texts, and design elements” to create a “Web-sensible” reading experience (pp. 745-746). And, ideally, the capstone portfolios should at least allow for the option of public presentation, an option precluded by EMMA’s institutional login and course enrollment requirements.

Within the Writing Certificate Program, many students view their capstone portfolios as a collection of showcase writing samples, even if the portfolio is oriented around a reflective analysis of process and development, which means that they see the portfolio not only as an academic requirement, but also as a professional tool, functioning similarly to career development learning ePortfolios (Polly et al., this collection). The workshop asks students to, once again, put their rhetorical understanding to use as they establish purpose(s), audience(s), ethos, and context(s) for the portfolio and, often, they identify a primary audience outside the walls of academia. This decision can create a dissonance between the portfolio concept and the portfolio reality that will likely guide next steps in the development of EMMA as we consider a widening interest in portfolios campus-wide. Concomitantly, given the growth of research on transfer and writing skills development over the past two decades (see Bergmann & Zepernick, 2007; DePalma, 2015; Donahue, 2012; Foerstsich, 1995; Hagemann, 1995; Reiff & Bawarshi, 2011; Wardle, 2004, 2007; Yancey et al., 2014.), it would be salutary to project backwards from the curricular endpoints in programs using (or considering incorporating) ePortfolios at UGA—be that the Writing Certificate Program, engineering, education, or the law school—to consider ways in which the goals, constitution, and assessment of writing ePortfolios could be adjusted to foster better transfer of writing content knowledge (i.e., understanding various rhetorical situations, writing processes, the role of peer review) as our students move through the curriculum.

The final programmatic advantage offered by the University of Georgia ePortfolio programs is the ongoing potential for research and assessment. Even before the institution of ePortfolios as a program-wide requirement, EMMA functioned as a standing database under IRB permission. The rich cache of essays and portfolios has provided opportunities for studies of citation practices (Barratt et al., 2009) revision (Desmet et al., 2008), and program assessment (Desmet et al., 2009). For the FYC Program, the EMMA portfolios also provide a platform for embedded assessment on an ongoing basis, conducted through a web-based rating of learning objectives as part of regular portfolio grading.

## Now What?

The current state of the university brings with it new opportunities and new challenges. First, the challenges. As with any software program, EMMA has to be periodically rewritten from the ground up, updated regularly, and adapted to conform to changing institutional policies, all with no additional funds. Both within institutions and on a national level, monies for digital humanities projects are generally directed toward start-up efforts. In 2011, we began the process of completely rewriting the EMMA code to update to the Symphony framework. The rebuild offered an opportunity to train new developers and reevaluate the whole web application to ensure we had forward-looking and *standards-based* code. In 2015, a change in policy within the College of Arts and Sciences at UGA involved phasing out departmental servers and consolidation of all websites centrally under the auspices of the College. This moment was nearly a breaking point for EMMA. The developers had attempted to establish a partnership with a hosting company that was providing EMMA access to other institutions, but that agreement would have involved a small cost to students, and UGA's Legal Department ruled that because EMMA was developed with University of Georgia funding, students could not be charged for using it. After negotiating with the College, the developer was able to move EMMA to the cloud for an amount of money that the Department of English could afford.

One of the great advantages of this long-term project is also its greatest liability. EMMA is the product of a small group of people working together for over a decade, and now we are faced with some changes and challenges that will influence and shape EMMA's future. In August 2018, our esteemed FYC Director and co-author of this article unexpectedly passed away. Christy was a champion for EMMA, and the loss of her leadership left much up in the air about the future and direction of the program. Deb Miller, another co-author of this article and Associate Director of FYC, retired in October 2019, and Ron Balthazor, our lead developer, in May 2020. Our small EMMA team is getting even smaller, so our plan moving forward is to likewise shape EMMA into a smaller project.

After a series of pilots of other digital platforms, we are now working on developing a version of the EMMA program, for now dubbed "Emma Lite," that allows us to keep some of the essential functionality for how we teach writing. We plan to integrate Emma Lite with UGA's online learning management system, which eases many of our concerns about security. Large-scale LMSs have many capabilities, but we found during pilots that one of the main limitations of the university's system was that sharing and marking up documents was onerous. Our plans are thus to start small so that Emma Lite will first be simply a tool for students to share their documents with each other and get feedback from their peers and their instructors.

Beyond that, much is still up in the air regarding the future of portfolios at UGA and Emma Lite's capabilities. We often refer to the "three Ps" of writing pedagogy upon which EMMA was built: process writing, peer review, and portfolios. Emma Lite will allow us to maintain the first two "Ps." Yet the third, portfolios,

remains critical as a measure of assessment for the Writing Certificate Program. In the last three years, all degree and certificate granting programs at UGA have been required to develop assessment plans based on measurable student learning outcomes. For the WCP, that data comes almost exclusively from assessment of the capstone portfolios by faculty using a rubric developed from an Inter/National Coalition for ePortfolio Research-supported comparative portfolio study. In the experience of the WCP, portfolios have proven to provide quality measurable data in support of program outcomes. At this point, we don't know what role portfolios will play in the FYC Program moving forward, but we do know that technology and pedagogy will continue to inform and revise each other in both the FYC and Writing Certificate Programs.

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## Appendix A: First-year Composition Essay Rubric

Student's Name \_\_\_\_\_ Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Paper # \_\_\_\_\_ Special Assignment Requirements: \_\_\_\_\_

### Competent/Credible/Complete

If you meet these first three standards, you are writing competently and you will earn a grade of “C.” (70–79)

#### 1. Unity

- Contains a center of gravity, a unifying and controlling purpose, a thesis or claim, which is maintained throughout the paper.
- Organizes writing around a thesis or according to the organizational requirements of the particular assignment (e.g., summary, narrative, argument, analysis, description, etc.)

#### 2. Evidence/Development

- Develops appropriate, logical, and relevant supporting detail and/or evidence.
- Includes more specific, concrete evidence (or details) than opinion or abstract, general commentary.

#### 3. Presentation and Design

- Follows SMH guidelines for Standard English grammar, punctuation, usage, and documentation.

- Meets your teacher's (or the MLAs) and the First-year Composition program's requirements for length and/or format.

### Skillful/Persuasive

If you meet all of the competency standards above and, in addition, achieve coherence and exhibit audience awareness, you are writing skillfully and you will earn a grade of "B." (80–89)

#### 4. Coherence

- Uses words and sentences, rhythm and phrasing, variations and transitions, concreteness, and specificity to *reveal and emphasize the relationship* between evidence and thesis.
- Explains how, why, or in what way the evidence/detail provided supports the claim/ point /thesis/topic ideas.
- Incorporates evidence from outside sources smoothly, appropriately, and responsibly.

#### 5. Audience Awareness

- Demonstrates a sense that the writer knows what s/he's doing and is addressing real people.
- Reflects a respect for values that influence ethos (e.g., common ground, trustworthiness, careful research).

### Distinctive

If you meet all of the competency standards, achieve coherence and exhibit audience awareness, and, in addition, demonstrate a mastery of one or more features of superior writing, you are writing *distinctively* and you will earn a grade of "A." (90–100)

### Distinction

- Your writing stands out because of one or more of the following characteristics: complexity, originality, seamless coherence, extraordinary control, sophistication in thought, recognizable voice, compelling purpose, imagination, insight, thoroughness, and/or depth.

Essay Grade \_\_\_\_\_ +/- Points for special assignment requirements \_\_\_\_\_ =

### Ineffective

If your paper does not meet competency standards, either because you have minor problems in all three competence areas (1–3 above) or major problems in one or two competence areas, you will earn a grade of "D" (60–69) or "F" (<60), and you should schedule a conference with your teacher.

## Appendix B: FYC Portfolio Grading Rubric

### Biography and Image

- Is present and complete;
  - Is carefully proofread and edited, with very few errors of a grammatical, mechanical, or typographic nature.  
[CCC] \_\_\_\_\_
  - Shows clear and appropriate awareness of audience;
  - Gives a coherent picture of the writer.  
[SP] \_\_\_\_\_
  - Is distinctive for its:
    - imaginative quality;
    - extraordinary and effective care in craftsmanship and presentation;
    - prose style;
    - compelling authorial voice;
    - persuasive argumentation.
- [DIST] \_\_\_\_\_

### Introductory Reflective Essay

- Is present and complete;
  - Makes a clear and complete statement about the writer's ethos, development, and/or skill set that is more than an autobiographical narrative or list of exhibits (unity-thesis);
  - Offers a clear rationale for the choice of exhibits and their order (unity-organization);
  - Explains the role of each exhibit in the overall portfolio and in proving the thesis (evidence);
  - Is carefully proofread and edited, with very few errors of a grammatical, mechanical, or typographic nature.  
[CCC] \_\_\_\_\_
  - Offers a strong, and vivid understanding of the writer and writing (audience awareness);
  - Is particularly persuasive about how exhibits contribute to the whole portfolio (coherence).  
[SP] \_\_\_\_\_
  - Is distinctive for its:
    - imaginative quality;
    - extraordinary and effective care in craftsmanship and presentation;
    - prose style;
    - compelling authorial voice;
    - persuasive argumentation.
- [DIST] \_\_\_\_\_

## Two Revised Class Essays

- Are present and complete;
- At a minimum, meet the FYC Rubric qualifications for CCC;
- Are carefully proofread and edited, with very few errors of a grammatical, mechanical, or typographic nature.  
[CCC] \_\_\_\_\_
- At a minimum, meet the FYC Rubric qualifications for SP.  
[SP] \_\_\_\_\_
- At a minimum, meet the FYC Rubric qualifications for a DIST or a “high” SP that shows extraordinary thoughtfulness and care.  
[DIST] \_\_\_\_\_

## Exhibit of Composing and/or Revision Process

- Is present and complete;
- Offers a clear and complete statement about and/or example of the composing and/or revision process (unity);
- Supports that thesis with specific examples (evidence);
- Presents the examples in a logical manner (unity-organization);
- Is carefully written, edited, and proofread, with essentially no distracting errors of a grammatical, mechanical, or typographic nature.  
[CCC] \_\_\_\_\_
- Offers strong and vivid examples of the writer and writing (audience awareness);
- Is particularly persuasive about how the examples support the thesis (coherence);  
[SP] \_\_\_\_\_
- Is distinctive for its:
  - imaginative quality;
  - extraordinary and effective care in craftsmanship and presentation;
  - prose style;
  - compelling authorial voice;
  - persuasive argumentation.[DIST] \_\_\_\_\_

## Exhibit of Peer Review Process

- Is present and complete;
- Offers a clear exhibit of a peer review (unity);
- Arranges one or more examples of peer review in a logical manner (unity-organization);
- Is carefully presented so that both the original and comments are easily seen. Errors in grammar or spelling don’t interfere with conveying comments (presentation & design).

- [CCC] \_\_\_\_\_
- Shows a strong, and vivid understanding of the writer and commentary (audience awareness);
  - Is persuasive because comments show a clear understanding and response to the work (coherence).
- [SP] \_\_\_\_\_
- Is distinctive for its:
  - imaginative quality;
  - extraordinary and effective care in craftsmanship and presentation;
  - prose style;
  - compelling authorial voice;
  - persuasive argumentation.
- [DIST] \_\_\_\_\_

### Wild Card

- Is present and complete;
  - Fits into the portfolio as a whole in a logical way that is described in the introductory reflective essay;
  - Is carefully written, edited, and proofread, with few errors of a grammatical, mechanical, or typographic nature that distract from the purpose of the exhibit.
- [CCC] \_\_\_\_\_
- Offers a strong and vivid understanding of the writer and writing (audience awareness).
- [SP] \_\_\_\_\_
- Is distinctive for its:
  - imaginative quality;
  - extraordinary and effective care in craftsmanship and presentation;
  - prose style;
  - compelling authorial voice;
  - persuasive argumentation.
- [DIST] \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Writing Certificate Program Capstone ePortfolio Workshop Syllabus

ENGL 4834: E-Portfolio Workshop 2016–17

### Required Text

*Portfolio Keeping: A Guide for Students, Third Edition* (Reynolds and Davis).  
Bedford/St. Martin's. ISBN: 978-1-4576-3285-3

## Course Description

This course fulfills the capstone requirement for the University of Georgia Writing Certificate Program. Students will work with the instructor and one another in a workshop setting to construct the portfolio by composing, revising, and editing selected work produced in courses taken for the certificate program.

A capstone writing portfolio involves looking backward and forward as well as at the present moment. In this course, we will focus on constructing a cohesive story about your development as a writer, looking at the writing intensive program of coursework you have taken for the certificate, other writing experiences you have had during your undergraduate career, and your on-going professional goals. We want to think about how to make your skills as a writer clearly “visible” through showcase pieces, but also to help readers of your portfolio see how you think and work as a writer. The reflective components you will create to tell that “story.” Reflection is the key to the portfolio, especially in a capstone portfolio that represents many semesters of coursework and a wide variety of artifacts and will unify them into a coherent and unified composition.

The goals of the workshop are to help you:

- understand the different rhetorical purposes and educational/professional functions of e-portfolios
- understand the nature of reflection for formative assessment and personal/professional development in electronic portfolios
- understand and practice principles of good e-portfolio design
- develop and publish an e-portfolio as an exit requirement for the Writing Certificate Program
- understand and engage in composing, peer review, revision, and editing practices in the develop of an e-portfolio

## Course Requirements and Grading

### *Participation and Workshopping (50%)*

Because of the workshop nature of this course, each student’s success in this course is dependent on responsible cooperation and collaboration with other students in the course. I expect everyone to participate fully and have all work ready when it is due.

### *Final E-Portfolio (50%)*

A complete, coherent, polished, and refined electronic portfolio will be the final product for this course. *One sample of writing from each course that counts for credit for the Writing Certificate must be included in the portfolio, and the portfolio must be framed by a reflective “introduction” that critically analyzes your own development as a writer through the courses you’ve taken for the WCP.* You may also

include other pieces of writing done outside the certificate coursework if they serve a clear purpose in your portfolio.

### Attendance

We'll run this class as a hybrid online and face-to-face class. During weeks scheduled for peer review of artifacts, we will not meet as a class, but you will be required to post your review feedback and any other materials by class time on those weeks. If you are unable to post an online assignment by the due date, please let me know as soon as possible. You must be able to provide acceptable documentation to support any legitimate circumstances that interfere with your timely submission of assigned work or scheduled meetings. If you miss more than three online assignments or class meetings before the withdrawal deadline, you may be dropped from the course. If you are in your final semester, being dropped from the workshop means you will be ineligible to receive the Writing Certificate.

### Academic Honesty

All academic work must meet the standards contained in "A Culture of Honesty." All students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards. Please refer to <http://www.uga.edu/honesty> for further information.

Students will collaborate in a workshop setting and engage with one another in the peer review process, but the contents of each student's e-portfolio must be his/her own work. If you choose to include a project that was written collaboratively in your portfolio, you must obtain written permission from your collaborators on the project to do so. I expect you to be ethical in your representation of your own and others' contributions to any collaborative work and peer review contributions.

### Access Policy

Students who require reasonable accommodations in order to fully participate in course activities or meet course requirements should contact the instructor during regular office hours or by appointment to discuss those needs and make specific arrangements. Make sure you review the resources available to you and register with UGA's Disability Resource Center.