Precis for
Making Connections with ePortfolio
Integrative Learning Project at LaGuardia Community College

How can students integrate their learning across classes? What role can digital tools play in this process? What does it mean to undertake such a project at an urban community college, with a student body overwhelmingly immigrant, female, and economically disadvantaged? LaGuardia Community College is asking these questions through an Electronic Student Portfolio project that links to broad First Year initiatives and a college-wide assessment plan.

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Application for the Carnegie-AAC&U Program on Integrative Learning
LaGuardia Community College, CUNY

Summary: How can students play a more active and central role in integrating their learning across classes and over the course of their education? What role can collaborative digital tools play in facilitating and advancing this process? What does it mean to undertake such a project at a large urban community college, with a student body that is overwhelmingly immigrant, female, and economically disadvantaged? LaGuardia Community College of City University of New York (CUNY) is asking these questions as it launches a far-reaching Electronic Student Portfolio project that links to interdisciplinary faculty development, institution-wide First Year initiatives, and the implementation of a college-wide program assessment plan. Participation in the *Integrative Learning : Opportunities to Connect* project will help connect LaGuardia's program with some of the best thinking in higher education, advancing our learning and deepening the impact of our work.

Background: Founded in 1970 as the 17th campus and the "experimental college" of City University of New York, LaGuardia Community College of the City University of New York is located in an industrial neighborhood in western Queens, the most ethnically diverse census district in the nation. Serving approximately 12,000 matriculated students and 28,000 continuing education students, LaGuardia offers liberal arts curricula; developmental education and transfer preparation; and career education in fields from Travel & Tourism to Nursing. Helping students become full participants in the city's economic and civic life, the College educates New Yorkers from all backgrounds, ages and means. Approximately 65 percent of LaGuardia students are female; more than 2/3 are immigrants; and more than 3/4 are students of color.

As the swell of new immigration has reshaped New York City and Queens has become the Lower East Side of the 21st Century, LaGuardia has been transformed. At last count, this year's LaGuardia students come from 158 different countries—from Columbia, Brazil, Zimbabwe, Pakistan, Rumania, and Thailand—and speak 108 different first languages. The institutional mission revolves around meeting the needs of this incredible student body. In addition to our international connection, LaGuardia is a historically Black college and a Hispanic-serving institution, and ranks third in the nation in graduating Latino students. LaGuardia treasures its diversity, and recognizes that it translates into a campus of students who have been traditionally underserved by the educational system. In many cases, this leads to significant under-

preparation in key academic areas. In 2002, for example, 90 percent of entering students required at least one developmental skills course in reading, writing or mathematics.

Since the mid-1980s, LaGuardia has been known as a national leader in the development of interdisciplinary learning communities, designed to help students deepen their learning while developing academic skills and stronger ties with the college. In recent years, LaGuardia's heritage of classroom innovation has been reinvigorated. *Designed for Learning*, an innovative, pedagogy-centered program that helps faculty rethink classroom practice as they integrate new digital learning resources, has had a broad impact, involving large numbers of full-time and part-time faculty across the college. Recent evaluators' findings show that *Designed for Learning* is having a deep impact on classroom practice and student learning, including a significant deepening of student engagement as measured by the Community College Study of Student Engagement. Meanwhile, a new LaGuardia Center for Teaching & Learning hosts and connects *Designed for Learning* with growing number of interdisciplinary faculty development seminar, focusing on topics from *Experiential Education* and *Critical Thinking Across the Curriculum* to *Looking with MoMA*, a collaboration with LaGuardia's temporary neighbor, the Museum of Modern Art. A *First Year Experience* program, linking learning communities to a range of co-curricular activities (including mentoring, a Common Reading, and Opening Sessions for New Students), won LaGuardia recognition in 2003 as an Institution of Excellence in the First Year Experience from the National Center on the First Year of College. Building upon the accomplishments of these programs, LaGuardia's Electronic Student Portfolio (or ePortfolio) initiative seeks to extend their effectiveness and better develop new tools to serve the needs of LaGuardia students. The Integrative Learning Project will help strengthen the intellectual foundation for this effort.

ePortfolio at LaGuardia: Over the next three years, LaGuardia seeks to include all of the College's matriculated students in a process of creating individual ePortfolios, multimedia collections of their work from their first semester to graduation. The ePortfolio will serve as a locus for collecting and showcasing student work for potential transfer or future employment. It will also serve as a mechanism for college-wide program assessment. The ePortfolio is a vehicle for strengthening integration and reflection, and for making the process of student learning more visible across departments and disciplines.

In Fall 2001 LaGuardia was awarded a five-year grant from the US Department of Education to test the use of ePortfolio at LaGuardia. Guided by the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning, a faculty research team explored the use of portfolios in higher education by studying the literature, examining web sites, doing site visits, and attending conferences. In

2002-2003, twenty pilot faculty began using a provisional ePortfolio system with several hundred students. In 2003-4, forty faculty are moving forward with the project, integrating ePortfolio into a new learning community structure the First Year Experience Academies, which will eventually expand to serve all incoming LaGuardia students,.

Connecting ePortfolio to Assessment and Institutional Change: The First Year Academies will encompass four thematically-linked courses (New Student Seminar, a Basic Skills course, and an Introductory Course in the major in the first semester; and Gateway to the Workplace, an experiential learning course, in the second). Students will select one of four academies (Technology, Business, Liberal Arts, or Allied Health and Sciences) and take courses designed by faculty to reflect the themes of that Academy. The Academies will connect with current First Year Experience co-curricular activities, provide students with a more cohesive academic experience, and allow basic- skills students to move more quickly toward substantial engagement with content courses.

ePortfolio will be an integral element of the Academy structure, supporting students and faculty as they make connections between classes. Faculty in each Academy course will have students deposit a piece of work into their ePortfolio. During a weekly Academy tutorial hour, students will be trained how to use the ePortfolio software and get help from the Center's ePortfolio Consultants as they build websites where they can make visible what they have learned, across their careers at the college.

In 2002, College governance passed a new program assessment plan that incorporated ePortfolios. As outlined in the plan, students will build upon the work they do in the Academies adding to their ePortfolios in selected portfolio-intensive and capstone courses in their majors. Selecting examples of their work that demonstrate their learning, students will use rubrics for LaGuardia's seven core competencies to reflect on their learning and growth and the connections between different areas of their college experience. Faculty teams will review ePortfolios as part of the program assessment process and develop college-wide strategies for improving student learning.

Connecting with Integrative Learning: Taking part in the Integrative Learning initiative will enrich the intellectual context of the ePortfolio project, and its connection to the Academies and the assessment process. The meetings, workshops, on-line conversation will provide the LaGuardia Integrative Learning team with a unique opportunity to learn from the best thinking in the field. And the funds provided will be for used to bring in consultants and speakers and to

support trips to appropriate conferences to enrich the learning of the broader cohort of LaGuardia faculty and administrators engaged in this effort, and to generate college-wide conversation of integrative learning. Our research, our public forums, and our engagement with the field will focus on an interlocking set of issues related to the ePortfolio project:

◊ How can ePortfolio help students focus on their learning? How can it be best used to make connections across courses and co-curricular activities? What approaches will encourage students to be more reflective about their learning?

◊ What assessment strategies are most appropriate to wholistic learning? How do we move beyond fragmented testing? What models and tools will enable faculty and students to dialog about a more integrated approach?

◊ What does it mean to do ePortfolio in the context of an urban community college, with a student body that is overwhelmingly immigrant, female, and economically disadvantaged? What challenges will LaGuardia students confront in this process? What special resources will they bring to the process? How can we use ePortfolio to help students tell powerful stories about their lives? What stories will they chose to tell? How can we integrate those stories into a broad process of cultural learning, at the college and beyond?

◊ How can we best balance the expressive and student-centered aspects of ePortfolio with the college's goal of improved assessment? Will these twin program goals reinforce each other, or conflict? What approaches will best help us meet both goals?

◊ How can faculty work together across programs and departments to support creation of a wholistic ePortfolio? What kind of training and support will they need? How do we help them use the ePortfolio as an opportunity to learn more about the kinds of learning taking place across the College?

◊ How can LaGuardia rethink its structure to support the ePortfolio work of 12,000 students? How do we need to do to make the project sustainable? What kinds of opportunities will the project open up for LaGuardia to move forward as a learning institution?

Contributing to the Conversation: LaGuardia's team will bring an important perspective to the Integrative Learning initiative.   Most ePortfolio projects in higher education are based in small, liberal arts colleges, many of them private. Introducing ePortfolio and emphasizing integrative approaches at an urban community college is ambitious and challenging, and will provide many learning opportunities for observers at LaGuardia and across the initiative. LaGuardia's history of interdisciplinary learning communities will add to the expertise LaGuardia will share. And while the diversity of LaGuardia's student body is unusually rich, more and more institutions of higher learning are grappling with the implications and the opportunities presented by a rapidly changing student population. LaGuardia's participation will help underscore the importance of and model approaches to these issues in the integrative learning conversation.

Sustainability: The linked ePortfolio and Academy are high profile, institutionally transformative projects that are highlighted in the College Strategic Plan.   They are already supported by major grants and substantial institutional funding.   Funding from Carnegie will enhance this process, but will not be required for its on-going growth and progress.

Dissemination: The ePortfolio and Academy projects will be showcased in many venues, including major national conferences and CUNY-wide initiatives. EPortfolio has already drawn national attention with presentations at such conferences as the American Association for Higher Education and the Conference on College Composition and Communication, and through presentations at the national conference of the Visible Knowledge Project, a Carnegie affiliate exploring the linkage of digital learning tools and the scholarship of teaching. Three national presentations are planned for the coming year; journal articles and the possibility of offering a national ePortfolio institute at some point in the future are being considered.

LaGuardia's Integrative Learning Team: LaGuardia is proposing to involve an unusual, six-person team in the Integrative Learning Project. This team incorporates the faculty leaders and Center for Teaching and Learning staff responsible for designing and leading the ePortfolio initiative, and the academic executive, Dean Paul Arcario, most responsible for guiding its work. This team works together closely on the project, addressing the pedagogical, technological, institutional and faculty development issues related to its progress. We will are pleased to guarantee that three members of the team will attend the program's conferences and workshops; if additional member wish to attend, LaGuardia will cover any additional costs. The six members of the team are:

- ◊   Dr. Paul Arcario, Dean for Academic Affairs, who generated the initial idea for ePortfolios, the Academies, and the Center for Teaching and Learning.
- ◊   Prof. J. Elizabeth Clark, English, Faculty Coordinator for the First Year Experience.
- ◊   Prof. Maureen Doyle, Natural and Applied Sciences, chair of the ePortfolio Faculty Research Team and co-Director of the ePortfolio project.
- ◊   Dr. Bret Eynon, historian, Director of the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning and the national co-director of the Visible Knowledge Project.
- ◊   Prof. Nancy Gross, English as a Second Language, and coordinator of the ePortfolio project in ESL clusters.
- ◊   Nakiso Maodza, Director of the ePortfolio project for the Center for Teaching and Learning.

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Summary Bios

<u>Dr. Paul Arcario</u> is Dean for Academic Affairs. Formerly the Chair of the English as a Second Language department, he has for the past five years had overall responsibility for curriculum and pedagogy in the Division for Academic Affairs, and in that capacity provides guidance for the College's ePortfolio, outcomes assessment, and First Year Experience programs.

<u>Prof. J. Elizabeth Clark</u> joined the college in 2000. An Associate Professor in the English Department, Clark joined the ePortfolio Initiative in 2001 as a member of the Faculty Research Team exploring promising practices from around the country. The coordinator for the College's First Year Experience initiative, Clark continued with the Initiative by participating in the 2002-2003 pilot year. Starting in 2003, Clark has been co-leading a faculty development process in which faculty teaching as part of the First Year Experience have been receiving specialized training in ePortfolio development.

<u>Prof. Maureen E. Doyle</u> is an Associate Professor in the Natural and Applied Sciences Department. She has been teaching at the college since 1987. Maureen joined the ePortfolio Initiative in Fall 2001 as chair of the Faculty Research Team. In September 2002, Maureen assumed the work of co-directing the ePortfolio Initiative. Maureen leads the faculty development process, helping faculty incorporate ePortfolio development across the curriculum.

<u>Dr. Bret Eynon</u> is a historian and educator, and serves as the Director of the LaGuardia Center for Teaching and Learning. As one of the founders of CUNY's American Social History Project, he helped create acclaimed ASHP texts and videos and faculty development programs. In April 2000, Eynon took a position as Director of the new LaGuardia Center for Teaching & Learning. On the advisory board of the *Oral History Review,* the CUNY Institute for Dominican Studies and the Library of Congress' American Memory Project, Eynon serves as national co-director (with Prof. Randy Bass of Georgetown) of the Visible Knowledge Project, a network of faculty from 18 universities engaged in scholarship of teaching projects. His publications include *Who Built America? Working People & The Nation's Economy, Politics, Culture & Society* and (with Randy Bass) *Intentional Media: The Crossroads Conversations on Learning and Technology in Culture and History Classrooms.* He recently co-authored a cover article for *Change* magazine, "Face of the Future: Engaging Diversity at LaGuardia Community College."

<u>Prof. Nancy Gross</u> has been at the college for over 20 years. She teaches in the English as a Second Language (Academic) Department. Nancy joined the ePortfolio Initiative in 2002, as a member of the pilot year using ePortfolio in her ESL classes. She has developed a variety of "pre-ePortfolio activities" to assist students in getting started using ePortfolios. During 2003-2004, Nancy is a faculty leader in the college's First Year Experience/ePortfolio faculty development program as well as leading a faculty development program, which will be linking ePortfolios to ESL learning communities.

<u>Nakiso Maodza,</u> Director Of ePortfolio. Beginning in August, 2003, Nakiso Maodza joined the Center for Teaching and Learning to help lead the new ePortfolio initiative at LaGuardia. Nakiso comes to LaGuardia after working in both the dot com world and non-profit arena. He has spent the last two years working as an Adjunct Professor at Parson's School of Design and is currently at New York City College of Technology where he currently teaches Introductory Multimedia classes. Nakiso is a programmer, activist, interactive multimedia engineer, photographer, and filmmaker. He has been involved with the Internet since early nineties, building sites for Lynx and NSCA Mosaic and building MOO's and MUD's. Originally from Harare, Zimbabwe, Nakiso moved to New York in 1993 to attend Vassar College, where he graduated with a Science Technology and Society degree with a Philosophy minor. He recently completed his Master's degree at the Interactive Telecommunications program at NYU. His thesis work involved building robotic androids that interact with their owner and act as his agent in gathering information.