## Assertion – Factors Affecting MIS Use

Factors that facilitated familiarity with the performance of Teaching Associates during their field placements, such as small program size and ability to engage in frequent interpersonal communication, decreased the perceived need for a centralized management information system.

This assertion examines the issues encountered while employing Open Portfolio as a medium for management of the feedback and evaluation of Teaching Associates. The evidence for this assertion included the examination of the use of the student teaching evaluation data by the Teacher Education Faculty and its relationship to the size of the faculty member’s program. The University Supervisors’ perceived strengths and weaknesses of the system as a mechanism for providing feedback to Teaching Associates’ lesson plans were also explored.

### Preference for Interpersonal Communication

The Open Portfolio Toolkit replaced the previous paper-based system that was used to evaluate Teaching Associates during their field experiences. In order to access this data, faculty would have to access the Open Portfolio tool. During the pilot the researcher handled all account requests. There were few requests from faculty requesting access to the student teaching evaluations during that fall semester. This initial observation suggested that faculty members did not often utilize this source of data. This hypothesis was supported by data obtained during interviews with the teacher education faculty. Participant 5 described what she perceived as the attitude of faculty members towards evaluating the student teaching process.

You know the unfortunate thing is that faculty are very busy and they get to the point where it’s the end of the semester and these students have done well and there are no complaints. “It’s a pass/fail class and I think I know the student so why would I spend time going in and looking at them. (Participant 5, personal communication, September 23 2003)

Participant 1 mentioned that she thought that interesting information could be gained from the tool. She had not used the tool for any analytical purposes because she was not in the habit of using the field evaluations. The data sources she primarily employed as a measure of students’ performance were not yet integrated into Open Portfolio. The following excerpt is from an interview with Participant 1 where she describes the ways in which she assesses the performance of Teaching Associates in her program. The field evaluations discussed in the following quote refer to the student teaching evaluations completed by Supervising Teachers.

Researcher: Have you ever used the field evaluations in the past?

Participant 1: No, I haven’t. I’ve relied more on the actual feedback and emails from the Supervising Teacher. These are people that I know. Most of the CIs, I knew them when I was a teacher in the area. If there were something I needed to know about they would let me know. I think for me the biggest thing is that I am just not in the habit of using it. I think because I know these people because our communication has been more person-to-person. Their observations are paper, hard copy observations; that’s the information that I am accustomed to dealing with as opposed to the information that is currently in Open Portfolio.

Researcher: The observations. Would you say that is the key data source you probably pay attention to?

Participant 1: If you mean right now, yes. I’m getting those observations from the Supervising Teacher on a weekly basis and I read them. So I can tell a lot from that. What the Supervising Teacher is seeing, what the university supervisor is seeing.

Researcher: So you like formative feedback on the day-to-day classes? [This] is the most important to get a pulse on how the students are doing?

Participant 1: Yes. And like I said at this point I think this is largely a question of habit. I have not been accustomed to getting this kind of information on Open Portfolio and it takes a jump. (Participant 1, personal communication, September 15 2003)

Participant 1 had worked in local school systems for fourteen years before joining the faculty at the Eastern School. Because of the small number of students participating in student teaching at a given time and her strong professional relationship with the Supervising Teachers in the local schools, she had access to much more detailed performance data on her students than that available through the student evaluation form. Participant 1 also had the fewest number of Teaching Associates during student teaching.

Participant 6 noted that he did not use these evaluations in the past because he could get a richer picture of a student’s performance through conversations with University Supervisors. He indicated that he knew his students well enough that the evaluation would not add anything new. Participant 6 had weekly meetings with his University Supervisors to discuss student progress. Participant 6 noted that as the size of his program increased it had become harder to keep track of students. He noted that he had begun looking up evaluations during the 2003 field placement.

Several University Supervisors commented on ways in which use of Open Portfolio affected their duties. Four University Supervisors, out of a total of six that registered comments, expressed displeasure at some of the required uses of the tool. This displeasure stemmed from the required use of the tool for provision of feedback to Teaching Associates on their lesson plans. University Supervisors did not object to giving feedback to Teaching Associates. Rather, their comments indicated that they found this part of their position rewarding. Verbal communication was an important part of the feedback process for some University Supervisors. For two of the University Supervisors, documenting of feedback through Open Portfolio became a redundant process.

I DID meet with my students on a regular basis - typically once a week even if it was just to stick my head in the door and ask how it was going.  In this way we were able to talk about concerns with the lessons face-to-face, which I actually prefer. (US2, personal communication, January 6, 2004)

I just found myself "transcribing" the conversations with the TA's onto Open Portfolio to meet this [giving feedback] requirement. So, in my situation it was redundant to me but that's because I kept in close contact with my TA's and we communicated often by email and phone in addition to meetings (US5, personal communication, January 23, 2004).

The other two University Supervisors felt that the number of times they were required to give feedback to Teaching Associates’ lesson plans yielded diminishing returns. These University Supervisors differed from the previously mentioned ones, in that the issues they had with the use of Open Portfolio dealt with the total number of responses that were expected rather than the medium with which they provided feedback.

### Difficulty of Interpersonal Communication Increases Use

Evidence from the participants suggested that the size of the program may have had an effect on the willingness of a faculty member to make use of the evaluation data due to the increased difficulty in maintaining individual relationships. Table 8 provides an overview of the different participants and the number of students that they worked with during the field placement, in addition to other faculty members in their program. When looking at which faculty made use of the student teaching evaluations it appears that the faculty members dealing with larger numbers of students were more likely to use the evaluations.

Table 8

Faculty use of student teaching evaluations versus program size

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Use of Student Artifacts | Use of Student Evaluation | # of Student Teachers |
| Participant 1 | Y | N | 8 |
| Participant 5 | Y | N | 13 |
| Participant 6 | Y | N | 13 |
| Participant 4 | Y | Y | 24 |
| Participant 8 | Y | Y | 50 |
| Participant 9 | Y | Y | 70 |

All six University Supervisors that provided comments about Open Portfolio and the effect it has had on their responsibilities mentioned the data storage capabilities of the system as being advantageous.

OPENPORTFOLIO WORKED VERY WELL- GREAT PLACE FOR RECORD KEEPING AND TRACKING PROGRESS. (US1, personal communication, January 6, 2004)

It was extremely useful to have all of their lessons and responses in one electronic, paperless space. (US3, personal communication, January 6, 2004)

The record of student work on Open Portfolio was beneficial to me in that it kept all submitted lesson plans in one place for me to view and review.  I didn't have to keep paper copies of all lesson plans and my responses to them in increasingly thick file folders, as I had in the previous two years.  In posting the lessons and lesson responses, the students and I could access the information - and check on changes to it - when it was convenient for us rather than always having to meet to exchange information. (US2, personal communication, January 6, 2004)

I found it helpful to view lessons online and add feedback. (US4, personal communication, January 22, 2004)

For those supervisors with conflicting schedules and time constraints, I think that the open portfolio is much more beneficial. (US5, personal communication, January 23, 2004)

I do see the need to a place to collect some of the TAs' work. It a good way to collect documents and show a student's progress. It's hard to coordinate schedules, so I don't see any other way of putting my hands on a lesson plan and responding to it. (US6, personal communication, February 10, 2004)

### Summary

The evidence presented for this assertion demonstrated that both faculty and University Supervisors preferred to employ interpersonal communication when feasible. As the feasibility of using interpersonal communication decreased, the use of information management systems became more desirable.