

# Elevating High-Impact Practices with PebblePad

Discover how PebblePad, the Learning Journey Platform, elevates institutions' high-impact practices with this collection of inspiring case studies.



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PebblePad allows me to give every student access to high impact learning practices. Right now, the need for built-in equitable practices is paramount.

**NORMAN JONES, VICE PROVOST & DEAN,  
UNDERGRADUATE EDUCATION, OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY**



PebblePad enables our students to connect their learning experiences across their entire degree from day one through to graduation.

**GRIFFITH UNIVERSITY**



# Contents

Our Heritage, Philosophy and Values	02
Foreword	03
An Introduction to High-Impact Practices	04
Eight Key Elements of High-Impact Practices	05
Supporting High-Impact Practices with PebblePad	06

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## Case Studies

Portland State University – University Studies	08
Griffith University – Peer Mentoring Programs	10
The University of Edinburgh – Student-Led Individually-Created Courses	12
James Cook University – Multidisciplinary Projects	14
Portland State University – Dual Enrollment Program, Senior Inquiry	16

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<b>Using PebblePad to Make Practices High-Impact</b>	<b>18</b>
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## Case Studies

Northumbria University – Student-Led Undergraduate Research Module	20
Canterbury Christ Church University – Off-Campus Creative Writing	22
University of Waterloo – The Engineering Ideas Clinic	24
University of the Sunshine Coast – Transition to Practice Portfolio	26

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<b>Get in Touch</b>	<b>28</b>
---------------------	-----------

<b>Free Resources</b>	<b>29</b>
-----------------------	-----------



## ABOUT PEBBLEPAD



# Our Heritage

For the past 20 years we have shared our unique blend of technology and educational expertise to help institutions across the globe guide and develop future-ready graduates. Every day, thousands of students access our award-winning Learning Journey Platform to plan for their learning, record and reflect on their experiences, and collect, curate, share, and showcase evidence of their evolving capabilities.



# Our Philosophy

We believe that students who are encouraged to extract all they can from each and every step of their learning journey are the ones most likely to achieve success. It's why we spend our days crafting purposeful technology to help educators support, guide, and develop students – from induction to graduation, and beyond.



# Our Values

We deliver excellence in the big stuff and in the details. The PebblePad ambition is to delight and amaze. We do this through product innovation and building trust in our customer relationships. We don't put off doing something for the sake of taking an easier path. If we can push the boundaries, we push them. Customers trust us because they know we have their best interests at heart and we understand their world.



# Foreword

By Shane Sutherland, PebblePad Founder & CAO

If you are reading this as someone who is involved in the North American higher education market, I expect you may be ahead of the curve when it comes to understanding high-impact practices. If you work in higher education somewhere else on the planet, while the term may be new to you, I expect the core principles underpinning the practices will sound familiar. Established in 2008, a few years after the start of our own journey, high-impact practices were created with a fundamental and common ambition – to educate the whole student and develop graduates who can contribute to society through meaningful employment and an awareness of global issues. For me, and I expect for many others familiar with our work, it's easy to find parallels between the PebblePad ethos and the principles behind high-impact practices.

While a decade may have passed since their inception, it's clear that high-impact practices remain relevant to current practice, not only in North America but across the globe. Indeed, our recent research into trends in higher education supports this viewpoint, and highlights the fact that institutions are continually looking to bolster their learning ecology to find better ways to develop graduates who are capable of demonstrating a wide range of aptitudes, attitudes, and abilities across a variety of contexts. With the established high-impact practices spanning a diverse range of contexts, in settings on and off campus, and where the quality of the experience is key, I believe the PebblePad Learning Journey Platform is uniquely placed to support these practices.

The journey analogy is a very fitting one in the context of high-impact practices since they cover experiences from induction to graduation, and everything in between. Right from the very beginning of our own journey, PebblePad was designed to help learners plan for, make sense of, evidence, and tell their stories of learning and achievement, regardless of the context or setting. I'm very proud of the depth and breadth of practice which PebblePad supports – the terrific case studies included in this paper are a testament to its versatility. I'm also very proud of the contributions we have made in recent times through sharing our knowledge and expertise with the higher education community – and this high-impact practice publication is no exception. Enjoy.

*Shane*













With the established high-impact practices spanning a diverse range of contexts, in settings on and off campus, and where the quality of the experience is key, I believe the PebblePad Learning Journey Platform is uniquely placed to support these practices.

# An Introduction to High-Impact Practices

Driven by the recognition that today's graduates need to be responsible global citizens, aware of and respectful of other cultures, and equipped to respond to the challenges the future holds, high-impact practices offer a structure to help educators create learning experiences designed to develop the whole person and nurture graduates to become genuinely future-ready.

High-impact practices were first proposed by George Kuh, Director of the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, and the Association of American Colleges & Universities as research-based strategies for effective teaching. Kuh's research (2008) suggests that the high-impact practices (outlined below), when done well, can enhance student success, retention, and engagement.

-  First-Year Seminars & Experiences
-  Common Intellectual Experiences
-  Service Learning, Community-Based Learning
-  Diversity/Global Learning
-  Writing-Intensive Courses
-  Undergraduate Research
-  Capstone Courses & Projects
-  Learning Communities
-  Internships
-  Collaborative Assignments & Projects



## ePortfolios Become the 11th High-Impact Practice

In 2016, an 11th high-impact practice was added to the list – ePortfolios. This confirmed what we at PebblePad knew all along, that the use of ePortfolios within the curriculum can have a positive and lasting effect on student learning.

## The **Impact** of High-Impact Practice

Kuh's research (2008)<sup>1</sup> suggests that all students benefit from engaging with at least one or two high-impact practices during their undergraduate studies, particularly related to student success, satisfaction, and retention. This is especially true for students from non-traditional or underserved backgrounds.

<sup>1</sup>Kuh, G. D. (2008). High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

# Eight Key Elements of High-Impact Practices

To effectively incorporate high-impact practices (HIPs) into your programs, Kuh and O'Donnell (2013) identified eight essential elements that serve as guiding principles. These elements ensure that HIPs are meaningful and transformational:



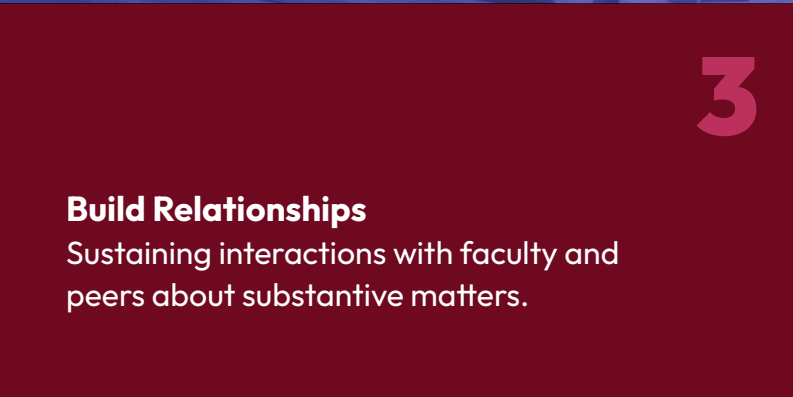
**1**

**High Performance Expectations**  
Setting performance expectations at appropriately high levels.



**2**

**Significant Effortful Engagement**  
Requiring students to invest significant time and effort over an extended period.



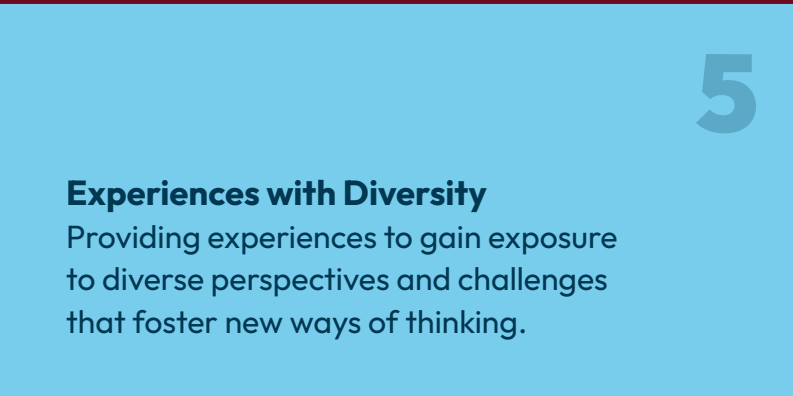
**3**

**Build Relationships**  
Sustaining interactions with faculty and peers about substantive matters.



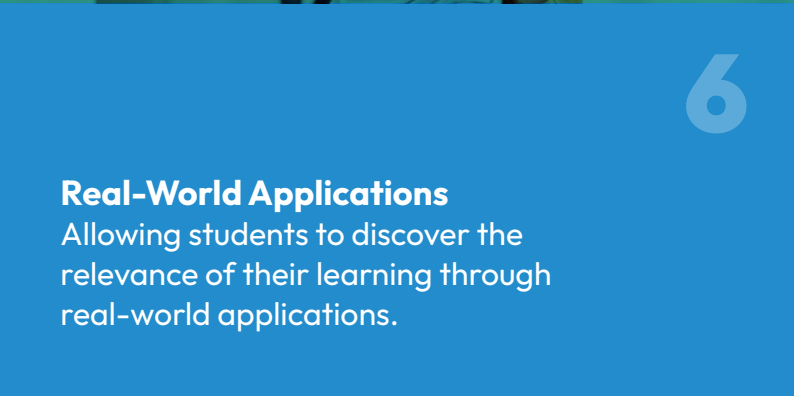
**4**

**Frequent, Constructive Feedback**  
Offering frequent, timely, and constructive feedback, such as evaluations from internship supervisors.



**5**

**Experiences with Diversity**  
Providing experiences to gain exposure to diverse perspectives and challenges that foster new ways of thinking.



**6**

**Real-World Applications**  
Allowing students to discover the relevance of their learning through real-world applications.



**7**

**Reflective Learning**  
Creating periodic, structured opportunities for students to reflect and intergrate into their learning.



**8**

**Demonstration of Competence**  
Encouraging students to publicly demonstrate their competence.

# Supporting High-Impact Practices with PebblePad

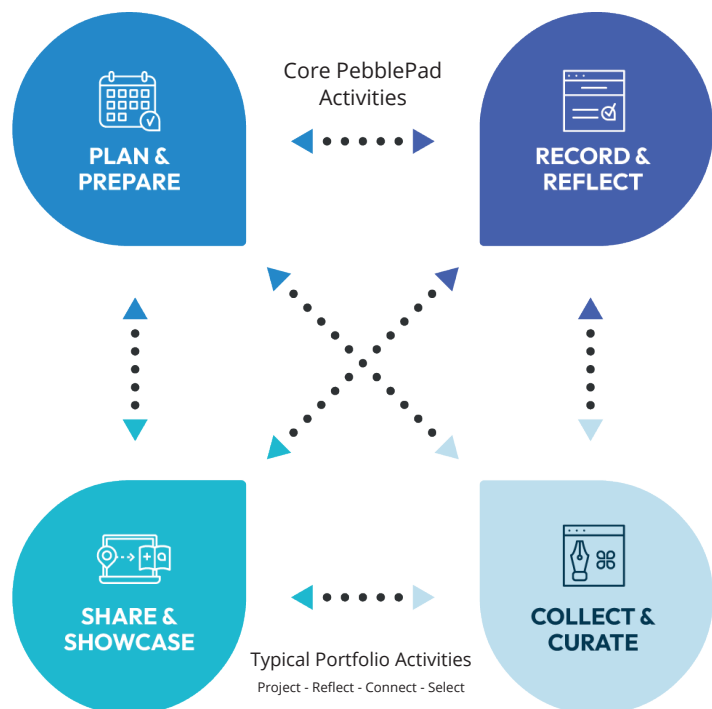
It's possible, even from the briefest explorations of high-impact practices, to draw a few broad conclusions – they are diverse, take place in a host of settings (on and off campus), and the quality of the experience is key to success. From a technology perspective, this means that any platform used to support high-impact practices has to be versatile enough to support these diverse experiences and offer support for the planning, collection, and curation of learning experiences, along with inbuilt tools for feedback, reflection, and showcasing achievement. And this is where PebblePad comes into its own. Below, you can discover more about the anatomy of our Learning Journey Platform, along with specific examples of how each of its components can be used to support high-impact practices on the opposite page.

## THE INSTITUTIONAL (EDUCATOR) SPACE

Allows educators to make use of intuitive design tools for creating, sharing, and distributing learning designs, along with a seamlessly integrated assessment engine.

CREATE & DISTRIBUTE LEARNING DESIGNS

ASSESS & FEEDBACK



## Promotes learning design that is...

- Scaffolded
- Incremental
- Iterative
- Dialogic
- Collaborative
- Visible

## Promotes learning that is...

- Developmental
- Authentic
- Purposeful
- Personal
- Evidenced
- Reflective

## COMPONENTS OF THE PEBBLEPAD LEARNING JOURNEY PLATFORM

## HOW THEY CAN BE USED TO SUPPORT HIGH-IMPACT PRACTICE

### LEARNING DESIGN



Intuitive Template and Workbook Builders allow educators to design and share frameworks for learning. From a single, reusable research template to a comprehensive internship workbook, the possibilities are endless.

### PLANNING & PREPARING



PebblePad's default action plans or customized templates and workbooks prompt the student to ask: "Where am I today? Where do I want to get to? And what are the steps (and the support needed) to get there?"

### RECORDING & REFLECTING



Students are prompted to reflect on the impact of an activity, how it connects to other experiences, and how it may inform the journey ahead. This approach ensures students become increasingly capable of articulating their abilities.

### COLLECTING & CURATING



While PebblePad is typically an institution-led initiative, students benefit from their own personal 'Asset Store', which acts as a purposeful digital repository of learning experiences, projects, and activities, and can be used in any environment (even offline through our mobile app, PebblePocket).

### SHARING & SHOWCASING



Easy-to-use tools allow students to bring together evidence of their learning journey in beautiful ePortfolios to help them showcase their talents, achievements, and experiences for review, assessment, or career application.

### ASSESSMENT & FEEDBACK



Inbuilt tools allow educators to monitor engagement, provide formative and summative feedback and assessment to help students shape their journey, and to report on and analyze the impact of the learning initiatives.

**The PebblePad Learning Journey Platform can be used to support any and every high-impact practice, offering tools to help educators support, guide, and develop students – from induction to graduation, and beyond.**



First-Year Seminars & Experiences



Common Intellectual Experiences



Service Learning, Community-Based Learning



Diversity/Global Learning



Writing-Intensive Courses



ePortfolio



Undergraduate Research



Capstone Courses & Projects



Learning Communities



Internships









Collaborative Assignments & Projects

## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

# University Studies

### High-impact practices supported:

-  Common Intellectual Experiences
-  Learning Communities
-  First-Year Seminars & Experiences
-  Writing-Intensive Courses
-  Service Learning
-  ePortfolios

**Contributor:** Dr. Annie Knepler, Portland State University (United States)

University Studies (UNST) – Portland State University’s interdisciplinary general education curriculum – spans all four years of the undergraduate experience and combines several high-impact practices at all levels of its program. Freshman Inquiry (FRINQ) forms the foundation for the UNST program and serves as part of a core curriculum that requires participation in a learning community. This year-long sequence of courses introduces first-year students to Portland State’s general education goals and to the opportunities available in university life.

In their FRINQ, students begin an ePortfolio where they make connections between their academic experiences that year and the four UNST goals: Communication & Quantitative Literacy, Critical thinking & Inquiry, Diversity & Social Justice, and Ethics, Agency & Community.

“

Students are developing the skills that allow them to continue to document and reflect upon future learning on their own.

Each FRINQ is focused around a theme, with this one being the city of Portland itself, and throughout the year the city becomes a site for research, discovery, and inquiry. The theme of place serves as a touchstone for learning, which helps students to consider the diversity of people's experiences in the city. Learning is scaffolded throughout the year so while students are building their knowledge of the city, they are also developing the skills that will allow them to continue to document and reflect upon future learning on their own.

After several experiences with city programs and locations, in spring term students collaborate with Portland State's Learning Garden Laboratory (LGL), an urban farm that supports academic and community-based learning through garden education. As part of this community-engaged work, students write regularly and communicate in various formats. For example, they create zines (small magazines) and factsheets that relate to the work of LGL, developing, researching, and writing about a topic that interests them.

Combining the strengths of writing-intensive and learning community high-impact practices helps students reflect on a community-based experience. By displaying their work in their ePortfolios, students consider the audience for their work who may be mentors, advisors, or potential employers.

Students add their body of work to their ePortfolios, which they begin at the start of their first year. The students also add photos or other media elements to help their audience visualize their experience. Their ePortfolios include ongoing reflections on each of the four UNST goals, alongside examples of their work that connects these goals and a reflection for each term.






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Collection over time is a key element of this learning process – PebblePad provides opportunities for students to make connections between a variety of educational experiences.

## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

# Peer Mentoring Programs

### High-impact practices supported:

-  Learning Community
-  First-Year Seminars & Experiences
-  ePortfolios

**Contributor:** Rhys Cooper, Griffith University (Australia)

The Mentoring and Orientation Hub (MOH) at Griffith University runs a wide range of peer support programs, aimed at improving students' feelings of belonging, social connection, academic achievement, and likelihood of retention. Being able to support students at key points of transition in the student lifecycle is especially important for learners from lower socio-economic status backgrounds, first-in-family, and mature-aged students. These mentoring programs align with ideas of learning communities, in that students are working together towards a common goal and building relationships with peers through shared experiences.

Students can take on a leadership role either as a Volunteer Mentor (mentoring incoming students to the university) or as a Senior Mentor (mentoring new Volunteer Mentors), and are responsible for supporting the community within peer mentoring programs. While Griffith runs a range of these programs, one of the most comprehensive is the Peer Welcome Program.

“

PebblePad is used to evaluate key data, such as mentor feedback and student attendance, and a PebblePad workbook provides a 'one-stop shop' for Volunteer Mentors, providing the information they need for engaging with the mentees.

Volunteer Mentors welcome commencing students at orientation and at periods over the following six weeks, communicating weekly via email as well as in face-to-face meetings. They support commencing students by facilitating discussions around lectures, planning for assignments, socializing and making friends, and understanding university systems and processes – essentially things that new students are typically concerned about. These are planned around the weeks as a ‘just in time’ service, and the program applies equally to online students as well as on-campus students. Senior Mentors – students who have volunteered their mentoring services in the past and have proven to be committed and effective in those roles – are hired to coordinate, guide, and support the Volunteer Mentors.

The MOH team employs PebblePad to recruit, train, and support peer mentors from a variety of disciplines operating in a range of different mentoring programs. Peer programs are coordinated centrally, but embedded and run locally within four Academic Groups – Arts, Education & Law, Sciences, Health, and the Griffith Business School. In this way, the mentoring program designs are modified to best suit the discipline area and cohort groups. The programs need to be easily scalable (cohort intakes can range from 450 to over 2,000) and easily modifiable to suit these differing groups and needs.



PebblePad is also used to evaluate key data from the programs, such as mentor feedback and student attendance figures. A PebblePad workbook provides a ‘one-stop shop’ for the Volunteer Mentors, providing them with the information, essential materials, and schedule they need for engaging with mentees. Usefully, PebblePad provides space for recording engagement data, offering the ability to note any concerns or problems that students may wish to speak to a Senior Mentor about, as well as a space to reflect on their mentoring experience and skills development. The Senior Mentors monitor the Volunteer Mentors’ workbooks via an ATLAS workspace. In addition to supporting their peers, Senior Mentors and Volunteer Mentors develop Graduate Attributes and transferrable skills through the program and use of the workbooks.

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PebblePad provides [Griffith University] with the sort of administrative underpinning and support that the mentors running these programs require.



## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

# Student-Led Individually-Created Courses

### High-impact practices supported:



Service Learning



ePortfolios



Undergraduate Research

**Contributors:** Dr. Gavin McCabe & Dr. Simon Riley, University of Edinburgh (United Kingdom)

The University of Edinburgh has undertaken an ambitious piece of work to systematically engage students as partners and co-creators in the curriculum design process. This is being driven by Student-Led Individually-Created Courses (SLICCs)<sup>1</sup> where students are able to gain credit for self-initiated, independently-led, and self-directed learning. These courses provide a flexible reflective learning and assessment framework to scaffold experiential learning.

The course can take place at or away from home, and often involves working across academic fields or disciplines. The SLICC framework is used in many ways, both by individual academic departments tailored to their discipline and centrally as an offering to all students. The centrally-run SLICCs are generally undertaken by students during the summer vacation after their first or second year.



Students make use of a PebblePad workbook to submit a proposal to undertake a SLICC. Once approved, students compile an ePortfolio of evidence which is centered around a reflective, ongoing blog for the duration of the course.

SLICCs give students the opportunity to choose their own learning experience and create their own course that they plan, propose, carry out, reflect on, and evaluate. SLICC experiences can take on a wide variety of forms including but not restricted to:

- work placements & internships
- academic summer studentships
- expeditions & cultural exchanges
- service learning or volunteering
- self-directed research.



These courses require students to devote significant effort in proposing their own version of a SLICC, specifically articulating how they will meet the five generic learning outcomes, which are aligned with the University's institutional Graduate Attributes. A PebblePad workbook shared through ATLAS is used to submit a proposal to undertake a SLICC. Once approved, students compile a ePortfolio of evidence, which is centered around a reflective, ongoing blog for the duration of the course.

Students receive feedback in PebblePad from their SLICCs tutor at specific key points in the course, beginning with the proposal. An interim report must be submitted and tutor feedback on this needs to be considered by the student when compiling the final report along with a self-assessment.

In keeping with Kuh's research (2008)<sup>2</sup>, early indications from the University of Edinburgh's radical approach suggest that SLICCs are a suitable and relevant way of engaging students from non-traditional backgrounds (Speirs, McCabe & Riley, 2017)<sup>3</sup>. Involving these students in the co-creation of a credit-bearing course can boost their confidence, strengthen and make explicit their Graduate Attributes, and increase their self-awareness. SLICCs are broadening the scope of what is considered to be 'curricular' and bring what was previously co- and extra-curricular into credit-bearing provision. The SLICC's Resource Pack below contains a detailed overview<sup>4</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> [www.slicc.ed.ac.uk](http://www.slicc.ed.ac.uk)

<sup>2</sup> Kuh, G. D. (2008). High-impact educational practices: What they are, who has access to them, and why they matter. Washington, DC: Association of American Colleges and Universities.

<sup>3</sup> Speirs, N.M., Riley, S.C., and McCabe, G. (2017). Student-led, individually-created courses: using structured reflection within experiential learning to enable widening participation students' transitions through and beyond higher education. *Journal of Perspectives in Applied Academic Practice* 5, 51-57.

<sup>4</sup> <https://edin.ac/sliccs-resource-pack>

## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

# Multidisciplinary Projects

### High-impact practices supported:



Collaborative Assignments & Projects



ePortfolios



Service Learning



Capstone Courses & Projects

**Contributor:** Assoc. Prof. Laurie Murphy, James Cook University (Australia)

Being able to work effectively in a team and collaborate with peers and stakeholders is a key employability skill. An employability strand is integrated into the Bachelor of Business degree at James Cook University with both Workplace Integrated Learning (WIL) experiences and PebblePad-based assessment embedded throughout the course. The aim of this strand is to develop students' professional and personal skills, problem-solving, and critical thinking to prepare them for roles in commerce and business.

In the first year, students are provided with a skills ePortfolio workbook in PebblePad to help them connect assessment to transferable skills throughout their degree and to encourage them to save assessment pieces as assets. The third year of the program has a WIL focus and one of the third-year subjects includes a collaborative project.



Students are provided with a skills ePortfolio workbook in PebblePad to help them connect assessment to transferable skills throughout their degree and to encourage them to save 'learning assets' for assessment.

Through this subject, students have the opportunity to gain valuable industry experience while developing new perspectives and teamwork skills. In the Multidisciplinary Project, student teams work on an identified real problem for an industry partner. The industry partners may include a not-for-profit organization, a local government body, or a local business. Projects are authentic and the outcomes likely to have a real-world impact on the local community.

In one recent project, students worked with State government to develop a communication strategy. This was to engage and inform local residents about the planning and construction of a new sports stadium, taking into consideration potential barriers and negative perceptions around issues such as transport and parking.

Students are required to work in cross-disciplinary teams and are brought together from specializations in business, accounting, tourism, marketing, and IT, taking an approach to the complex industry problem where each participant will contribute their discipline perspective and skills. This simulates a workplace scenario of being on a project team with people from different backgrounds, skills, and perspectives, giving them an understanding of how different disciplinary viewpoints can contribute to finding effective solutions.



The student experience is enriched by documenting and demonstrating work-based competencies developed throughout the task. PebblePad provides a space for students to plan and add evidence of their participation in the project, as well as the mechanism for the final showcase. Students initially complete a resume/skills ePortfolio that provides evidence of skills needed for their specific role in the project team. The project proposal is completed in a workbook and meeting agenda and minutes templates are used to manage team meetings. The final outcome is presented to the industry partner in the form of an ePortfolio and a short presentation. A customized template is used by students to reflect on working in a multidisciplinary team.



Projects are authentic and the outcomes likely to have a real-world impact on the local community. PebblePad provides a space for students to plan and add evidence of their participation in the project, as well as be the mechanism for the final showcase.

## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

# Dual Enrollment Program, Senior Inquiry

### High-impact practices supported:



Diversity/Global Learning



ePortfolios

**Contributor:** Sonja Taylor, Portland State University (United States)

Many institutions now emphasize courses and programs that educate the whole person and help students explore cultures, life experiences, and worldviews different from their own. The high-impact practice of Diversity/Global Learning often explores “difficult differences” such as racial, ethnic, and gender inequality, or continuing struggles around the globe for human rights, freedom, and power in a myriad of settings.

In the United States, there is increased attention to dual-credit courses – learning environments in which high school students can earn both high school and college credit. Senior Inquiry is a dual-credit, year-long interdisciplinary program aimed at preparing students for undergraduate coursework as they transition from school to university, and is offered in partnerships between Portland State University (PSU) and selected high schools.



Specifically helpful in furthering PSU’s pedagogical goals are the privacy of the student spaces and the ability for learners to take their PebblePad account with them post-graduation.

Through the program's learning goals, students confront different cultures and life experiences and are exposed to alternative worldviews. The program offers various year-long themes to frame learning. In this case study, the focus is on the theme of race and social justice, in which students learn about, analyze, and deeply question social and economic systems that perpetuate various inequalities. This knowledge can help students to move past stereotypes and appreciate the experience of people in other groups more deeply.

The theme has a pointed focus on student opportunities for personal reflection on their own social position and opportunities to continuously challenge their own thinking. A different PebblePad workbook per quarter guides students through the process of understanding self, challenging ideas related to culture, equity, and access, and imagining and articulating concepts and actions that may change these inequities.

Students regularly contribute to their 'Learning Journey Blog' regarding their own shifting perspectives on race and social justice, then share this with and receive comments from their peers about their ongoing development around an intercultural competency mindset.

The final assessment is an ePortfolio that focuses on capturing and reflecting on the learning journey across the year-long experience and aligns with the four goals of the program:

- Communication & Quantitative Literacy
- Critical Thinking & Inquiry
- Diversity & Social Justice
- Ethics, Agency & Community.



The ability to allow students to archive, reflect on, and arrange 'learning assets', make use of tags to collate evidence of learning, practice digital literacy in private spaces – and merge those skills with existing skillsets – all support learning design that is focused on the student experience.

“

## Offer opportunities for students to reflect on the people they are becoming

Our Learning Journey Platform is, and always has been, reflective by default. And while PebblePad offers students an assortment of useful tools to help them record any and every curricular, extra- and co-curricular learning activity, it goes beyond simply recording disparate activities. In PebblePad, students are prompted to reflect on the impact of an activity, how it connects to other experiences, and how it may inform the journey ahead.

COMMENTS      FEEDBACK      CAPABILITY INFO

**Exemplary**  
I have created several storyboards which have been used in the production process

You changed **Level 1** to **Level 3**

**You changed Level 1 to Level 3**  
at 14:40, 09-Oct-2023

I've started to feel more comfortable using computers. I still get stressed, but now I'm able to calm myself down and work things out more easily. I've also started to experiment past the very basic tools.

Not at all confident    1    2    3    4    5    Exceeds expectations

DIGITAL PROFICIENCY - RATING HISTORY

“

We create PebblePad workbooks to help students be better prepared to reflect, gather their resources, and curate their work at the end of the program.

“

## Provide students with frequent, rich formative feedback

We believe that supporting students on their personal learning journeys should be the ambition of every institution. But we understand that for those involved in supporting student development, it can present challenges – especially for large cohorts. That’s why PebblePad delivers tools to help educators easily create frameworks and resources for learning, monitor engagement, and provide formative and summative feedback and assessment to help students shape their learning journey.

The image shows a digital interface for PebblePad. At the top, there are three tabs: 'COMMENTS', 'FEEDBACK', and 'CAPABILITY INFO'. Below the 'COMMENTS' tab, there is a comment from Penny Walton, dated 13:19, 16-Oct-2023, on the topic 'Your digital confidence'. The comment reads: 'Cassie, I'm delighted to see you're feeling more confident in your use of technology. Staying calm when things go wrong is a huge step in developing your resilience. Please continue to tell me if you begin to feel overwhelmed and together we'll create strategies to help you cope.' Below this, there is a reply from Cassie Hill, dated 13:24, 16-Oct-2023, which says: 'Thank you Penny, your support so far has been amazing and I know it's helped me build my confidence.' At the bottom right of the comment area, there is a blue button that says 'Add comment'. In the background, a woman with glasses is holding a tablet displaying the same interface.

“

The goal-setting and reflective practice facilitated by PebblePad made students more responsible for their own skill development.



## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

# Student-Led Undergraduate Research Module

High-impact practices supported:



Undergraduate Research



ePortfolios

**Contributors:** Dr. Kate Black, Newcastle Business School (United Kingdom)  
Patrick Viney, Northumbria University (United Kingdom)

Newcastle Business School (NBS) at Northumbria University has a global reputation for delivering some of the best business management education in the UK. NBS helps and enables individuals achieve their full leadership, management, and career potential through research-rich, business-relevant, and academic education. All undergraduates have an opportunity to experience research, demonstrating a thorough commitment to the value of research activities at all levels.

Each year, over 800 final-year undergraduates undertake an NBS dissertation module, which is supported by over 100 academic staff. The aim of the module is to equip students with the skills to investigate a student-identified business problem or issue and in doing so, prepare them for the world of work when they graduate. Skills such as time management, ethical collection and analysis of data, communication skills, innovation, and creativity are all developed while completing the dissertation module.



With such large numbers of students, the paper-based allocation process was cumbersome and time consuming. Using PebblePad to administer this process has saved significant amounts of time – instead of 2-3 weeks, the process is now completed in a single day.

This student-led research module lasts for a period of six or more months and it is vital that every student has a dissertation supervisor with the requisite experience and background to ensure the student has the best chance of succeeding. Over the period of the module, the supervisor provides relevant guidance, support, and advice and ensures the focus of the research is achievable and appropriate to the student's future employment needs.

For staff, the logistical issues managing such large numbers of students – as well as the tutors providing support – are significant. The previous paper-based allocation process used up until 2015 was cumbersome and time consuming, relying on the knowledge of the lead tutors to allocate each student to the most appropriate supervisor. Using PebblePad to administer this process has saved significant amounts of time – instead of 2-3 weeks, the process is now completed in a single day through ATLAS.

This means the dissertation process can get underway much sooner than was previously possible. In a workbook, each student provides a detailed proposal and selects the main management area of the research from a drop-down list. This information can then be reported upon once all submissions are received and is used to match each student to a suitable tutor.

After a supervision meeting, students use PebblePad to summarize agreed action plans before the supervisor signs off on them. Supervisors can quickly provide rich feedback on dissertation drafts with students able to view it in one easy-to-access place. This helps the student refer back to previous comments from their supervisor and develop their research approach over the extended period of the six-month long module.

Dr. Kate Black, Associate Professor at Newcastle Business School, says this process of supporting students helps them become better organized, and therefore able to plot a successful pathway through the research process.



“

Supervisors can quickly provide rich feedback on dissertation drafts with students able to view it in one easy-to-access place.

## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

# Off-Campus Creative Writing

High-impact practices supported:



Writing-Intensive Courses



ePortfolios

**Contributor:** Dr. Sonia Overall, Canterbury Christ Church University (United Kingdom)

Kuh's (2008) research into high-impact practices states that students benefit from developing meaningful relationships with others involved in their studies. However, this can be a substantial challenge if students are at a distance to the university and only attend sporadically for residential. Because distance learning can feel isolating, student motivation can become an issue and create difficulties monitoring engagement. For the senior lecturer leading the MA in Creative Writing program at Canterbury Christ Church University, such challenges are exacerbated by the way the subject is traditionally taught – through workshops where students peer review each other's work, building trust and sharing creative writing in progress.

A single year-long workbook was designed to support learners studying at a distance, providing date-released module materials and spaces for them to post work in progress for formative tutor feedback. 'Learning Mentors' and their students can communicate immediately from the start of the course, building and enhancing the tutor/student relationship and contributing to students feeling supported and encouraged, even when studying at a distance.



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For writing-intensive courses to be effective, particularly those using the online environment, the focus needs to be on quality rather than quantity of writing. Curriculum designers need to consider the literacy load that can be placed upon students working online (Griffin 2018)<sup>1</sup>. Sonia Overall, Senior Lecturer in Creative Writing at Canterbury Christ Church University, advises that with writing-intensive courses, it is important to design tasks that require ‘on the page thinking’ with course workbook exercises designed to support this ethos.

Students are also encouraged to spend time learning away from the screen, engaging in sensory, ambulatory, or place-based writing activities that can enhance the quality of student work. Modules in the PebblePad workbooks also contain ‘scaffolded’ weekly sessions designed to replicate the feel of seminars, integrating:

- mini-lectures/slides and related reading materials
- set tasks to respond to
- regular writing exercises with text boxes for sharing extracts with the Learning Mentor
- a link to a peer discussion thread related to the topic
- optional additional tasks.



Each module has a designated ‘draft reading window’ during which students can paste a draft assignment extract into their workbook for frequent formative feedback.

Students have responded positively to the idea that they ‘own’ their learning content and can take their workbooks with them once the course is completed by creating a free PebblePad Alumni account.



Modules in the PebblePad workbooks contain ‘scaffolded’ weekly sessions designed to replicate the feel of seminars.

<sup>1</sup>Griffin, J. (2018). Writing Intensive Classes In: K. Linder. & C. Mattison Hayes, eds., High Impact Practices in Online Education, 1st ed., Stirling, VA: Stylus Publishing. pp. 55-69.

## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

# The Engineering Ideas Clinic

High-impact practices supported:



Internships



ePortfolios



Undergraduate Research

**Contributor:** Chris Rennick, University of Waterloo (Canada)

Internships are an increasingly common form of experiential learning, providing students with direct experience in a work setting – usually related to their career interests – while offering them the benefit of supervision and coaching from professionals in the field. All engineering programs at the University of Waterloo have a mandatory co-op component with students alternating between work terms and academic terms from first year to fourth year. Students need to complete five work terms over the course of the degree. For each work term, students must secure four-month employment in a related field where they are paid as employees of that company.

Students go through a competitive interview process with employers in order to be matched to a job. As part of this process, they can choose to apply to the Engineering Ideas Clinic, a program-wide initiative at the university which seeks to engage undergraduate students in hands-on engineering design experiences and authentic research activities.

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The Ideas Clinic uses two custom-built PebblePad workbooks to support students throughout their internship. The first is structured around three core ‘planning and evaluation’ milestones in the internship and the second is used as an ongoing ‘weekly worklog’.

The clinic employs several full-time engineering co-op students each term, supporting them to become accustomed to the professional engineering work environment while beginning to learn what the role entails. Work-place supervisors, in this case instructional staff employed by the Ideas Clinic, provide regular meaningful support to students for the duration of the internship.

The clinic uses two PebblePad workbooks to support students throughout their internship. The first workbook features three milestones:

**Milestone 1:** Students have to show evidence of completing their start of term training along with a statement of interests and personal development goals.

**Milestone 2:** Midway through the internship, students submit progress updates on their personal goals and meet with their supervisor as part of their mid-term evaluation.

**Milestone 3:** At the end of the internship, students submit a final progress update on their goals for the work term, reflecting on the whole experience and again meeting with their supervisor as part of the end of term evaluation.

The second PebblePad workbook is a 'weekly worklog' documenting the projects students worked on that week, their progress, road-blocks encountered, decisions made, and research performed. Each weekly worklog ends with a prompt encouraging students to plan what they are going to work on the following week. These weekly logs take the form of a heavily modified 'What? So what? Now what?' format, and are a useful means of keeping students on track with their projects and connected with their supervisor.



“

Students appreciated the weekly check-ins, and both students and supervisors found the self-documenting nature of the weekly worklogs very helpful at the end of the term when trying to summarize their work.



## CASE STUDY OVERVIEW

# Transition to Practice Portfolio

### High-impact practices supported:



Capstone Courses & Projects



ePortfolios

**Contributor:** Dr. Anita Hamilton, University of the Sunshine Coast (Australia)

Capstone projects or units require integration, critical analysis, and application of learning that combined, enable students to show the breadth and depth of their learning across an entire program. At the University of the Sunshine Coast, the Occupational Therapy team was prompted to take a 'whole program approach' to ePortfolios when transitioning from paper-based portfolios. The team designed a capstone ePortfolio project for the students to undertake in their final year, in which they produce a 'Transition to Practice Portfolio'.

A key feature of this project is how the course embeds the building of the graduate's ePortfolio throughout the degree, commencing in week two of the first year of study. However, it soon became apparent to the team that an ePortfolio is not just a product, but a complex process.

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The assessment tasks and workbooks are designed to nurture and guide students to start by 'learning privately' (shared with few) early in their degree and build their confidence to 'learn out-loud' (shared more widely and open to scrutiny) as they complete the 'Transition to Practice' component of their ePortfolio.<sup>1</sup>

When designing its ePortfolio approach, the team began by mapping professional competencies across the curriculum and building a 'Competency Tracking Workbook'. This process enables students to understand how the curriculum supports their learning journey and enhances their confidence and readiness to enter practice. In the final semester of the program, students use the Competency Tracking Workbook to guide them as they provide evidence that demonstrates how they have achieved competence against the Australian Occupational Therapy Competency Standards and the university's Graduate Skills and Qualities. The evidence is constructed in a format that addresses key selection criteria for a job application. Students integrate their Competency Tracking Workbook into their final assessment piece, the 'Transition to Practice Portfolio', containing the following components:



- Professional Statement that integrates personal and professional values and goals in the context of contemporary practice and career goals, plus a Curriculum Vitae summary with a downloadable PDF version of their full CV.
- Demonstration of competence in the Australian Occupational Therapy Competency Standards (2018).
- A Continuing Professional Development Plan for the final semester of the degree with links to the reflections from class workshops.
- A Continuing Professional Development Plan for the graduate year.

The use of PebblePad allows students to see how the planning for and tracking of their skills development and competency feeds into the curation and showcasing elements of a final ePortfolio – and provides a secure place in which to keep everything together to help in the job preparation process.



Students integrate their Competency Tracking Workbook into their final assessment piece, the 'Transition to Practice Portfolio'.

<sup>1</sup> Hamilton, A. L., Trahar, P., Hansen, A., Hume, S. & English, N. (2018). "calling up: A whole program approach to ePortfolio as process and product. PebbleBash-2018 "Scaling Up" December 10-12, 2018, Grange Cleveland Winery, Lancefield, Vic. Australia.



# An expert team you can depend on



[hello@pebblepad.com](mailto:hello@pebblepad.com)



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## Get in Touch

There are many things that make PebblePad unique. Not least the fact that it's a platform designed by educators for educators. Indeed, the PebblePad team is bursting to the seams with innovators and practitioners, all of whom learnt their craft in teaching roles. If you want to talk to a team who really understands your world, get in touch.

## PebblePad North America

+1 (833) 364-0939

## PebblePad North America Customer Support

+1 (833) 364-5992

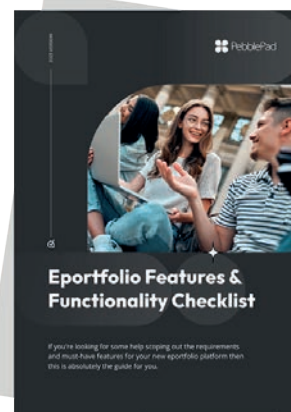
# Free Resources

If you enjoyed this publication, you'll be pleased to hear we've made more free resources available. This is part of our ambition to help institutions develop learner-centered pedagogies articulated through thoughtful learning, assessment, and curriculum design. Below you'll find a few examples of content we've recently shared.

## EPORTFOLIO FEATURES & FUNCTIONALITY CHECKLIST

Our ultimate guide to the PebblePad suite of features and tools, organized by learning and assessment ambitions and by our powerful, customisable tools. If you're looking for help scoping out the requirements and must-have features for your new ePortfolio platform, this is the guide for you.

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## MAKING THE CASE

### Adding value at every step of the journey

Combining data insights and real-life examples of practice, this guide illustrates how PebblePad can help institutions achieve a positive financial ROI and meaningful student success.

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We are the creators of PebblePad, the award-winning Learning Journey Platform. As a company, we've spent the past 20 years blazing a trail in the learning, ePortfolio and assessment space. Our mission is simple – to help learners shape and share their unique skills and attributes in an ever more competitive world.

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**We help institutions support students at every stage of their unique learning journeys.**

