



The rSmart Group®

# Client Success Story



## Kapio‘Iani Community College’s “Planful” Path Toward Authentic Online Learning

*Kapio‘Iani Community College in Hawaii needed to add new online learning opportunities for its diverse and scattered student population two years ago.*

*They found an open-source application, piloted it, and now are ready for the next phase.*

*Authentic learning is real-world learning that students demonstrate through their ePortfolios.*

### ○ Even in Paradise, Education Is Not Miraculous

Hawaii lives in dreams: It’s often called “paradise.” Mother Ocean’s easterly winds cool the islands from the tropical sun and bathe them in moisture that hydrates dense, prolific foliage. The University of Hawaii’s Kapio‘Iani Community College, on the slopes of Diamond Head on Oahu, sits comfortably in the middle of paradise.

Even in paradise, of course, education is not miraculous. Kapio‘Iani Community College (KCC) must deal with two realities that face many community colleges—a diverse student population and the need to provide education over the Internet.

KCC and Hawaii are in mid-ocean between the Americas and Asia, so they have, in addition to Native Hawaiians, students from many different cultural backgrounds. And, as a multi-island state, Hawaii requires distance education offerings. These two realities drove KCC to search for a technology solution two years ago.

### ○ But, Maybe ePortfolios Are

In a recent conversation, KCC’s vice chancellor for academic affairs, Louise Pagotto, spoke of these realities—diversity and distance. KCC needed technology that would help faculty engage the students at their current level, both in terms of learning needs and online accessibility.



Louise Pagotto

KCC believed that ePortfolios—which often include video clips, photos, drawings and other visual arts—could help students find common ground for their creativity, especially if the language spoken at home was not English. In this situation, visual communication would have advantages over text-based presentations.

Online learning allows institutions to reach students who cannot be on campus because of distance or work obligations. KCC’s leaders could see that both a learning management system (LMS) and an ePortfolio system would be helpful: The courses would be managed by the LMS, and work

archived in an ePortfolio would persist from semester to semester, thereby allowing students to keep building their store of artifacts and giving them a sense of continuity and connection to the campus.

KCC had a WebCT learning management system but needed an ePortfolio system. This set of circumstances led them to face a new challenge—how to pay for and support a new enterprise application. They already had dedicated funding and staff to support their WebCT application, so how could KCC introduce ePortfolio technology?



*Kapioʻlani Community College (KCC) must deal with two realities — a diverse student population and the need to provide education over the Internet to students on the other islands.*

*With WebCT already in place, KCC still could innovate with an open-source solution such as Sakai.*

The rSmart Group—the leader in support for open source educational software. Because the CLE is open source, KCC did not have to purchase a license for the code. Instead they could pay for just the technical services they needed for a pilot. These factors made the whole initiative possible.

## ○ “I Don’t Have the Staff for That”

The mention of open source often invokes a predictable response from technology leaders in higher education: “I don’t have the staff for that.” These leaders may well be running Linux, Apache, Tomcat, MySQL, PHP, and so on but can’t imagine open source at the application level. Yet KCC, with only 7,000 students, has managed over the past two years not only to run and support Sakai’s portfolio, but to do it well—and most recently to build on that success by planning a full-scale implementation of Sakai.

The answer, in part, was to enlist the support of Professor Judith Kirkpatrick (Language, Linguistics, and Literature). Kirkpatrick quickly became the faculty’s ePortfolio champion and leader of a pilot implementation of the Open Source Portfolio—a key set of tools in the Sakai Collaborative Learning Environment (CLE). Another part of the answer was to partner with

This was not pure chance. Two years ago, when KCC was looking for ways to improve online learning, many people on campus came up with the same suggestion—Sakai. Pagotto says, “Independently, they chose Sakai; there was a convergence. It was one of our more ‘planful’ initiatives on our campus. We usually just jump off a cliff and then say ‘Oh, no, look at those rocks.’ This time we were more thoughtful.”

KCC found a good tool in Sakai. They also found a good partner in The rSmart Group and spent two years becoming knowledgeable about ePortfolios and planning their implementation rather than jumping off a cliff.

## ○ A Taste of ePortfolios

Students today engage in a broad range of hands-on learning activities—making things, field work, service learning, internships—known as “authentic learning.” The results of such learning cannot always best be captured in traditional paper-based formats such as written text. ePortfolios offer a better way.

KCC is known for its Culinary Arts program, where students prepare actual dishes in a “kitchen-lab.” How could students capture, step-by-step, this sumptuous process? Photos, of course. And where to put those photos for review, comment, and assessment? In an electronic portfolio that includes pictures.

Pagotto points out, “For culinary students, it makes so much sense to be able to go to an employer and say ‘Here’s what I can do; here’s what I have done.’” In fact, sending an application to an employer along with the URL for the portfolio of photos is a good way to increase the likelihood of getting an interview. “You can describe your dishes all you want,” Pagotto says, “But if you can show them the presentation in a way that’s easily accessible for the employer without lugging around a big book of pictures, it just makes a whole lot of sense.”



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## ○ One Professor's Testimony

Culinary Arts is an example of a learning program brought to life by a new learning environment. Regarding the value of the rSmart Sakai CLE's portfolio tool, KCC's Chef Instructor Frank Leake says:

*"It has become a great reflective tool for students, a great journal. All of their assignments are now plugged into the portfolio. Every assignment. Even their final exam. Everything is put into portfolio... They like the idea of having a place to put all their assignments. They have total access during the course and after the course."*

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"After the course" showcases a key difference from learning management systems that manage courses but do not manage student work over a larger span of time. ePortfolios allow students to own their work and access it throughout their entire college career. Having this body of work allows them to see their own growth.

Because of faculty like Chef Instructor Leake, "the word is getting around very

rapidly," says KCC technology trainer Mel Inatsuka. "In the workshops I teach, more faculty are participating. We are looking forward to being involved more in portfolios." Professor Leake says use of portfolios has "increased 10-fold since the beginning."

## ○ Based on the Evidence, the Decision Is Sakai

Over the course of two years, KCC saw how well the ePortfolio tools within Sakai worked. They also gained an understanding of the value of open source in education and developed a strong partnership with rSmart. Now KCC is making another big move. "We've been subscribers to WebCT from the initial launch, but we're winding up our contract and we'll be going with Sakai," says Pagotto.

Sakai, supported by the Sakai Foundation and used by nearly two hundred campuses world wide, is a fully functional LMS that includes the Open Source Portfolio. Behind Sakai is not only the Foundation but also a world-wide community of developers.

## ○ A Surprise: Faculty Believe They Become Better Teachers

As implementation of the rSmart Sakai CLE portfolio began two years ago, the hope was to improve student performance. But, something remarkable happened on the way to ePortfolios: In addition to student engagement in ePortfolios, faculty using portfolios were "transformed as teachers," says Vice Chancellor Pagotto. "Very significant is what happens to the teacher in the classroom."

Professor Leake agrees:

*"Two things I've seen as outcomes. One, the student comes out of the class more prepared. But, for me personally, it's made me a better teacher. It's given me a different awareness... When you go back and re-view in a journal and see the progress—that gives me an insight into what to do next... I go in and change assignments. It's made an amazing difference in how I approach the classroom."*

Using portfolios is "transformative" at KCC, says Pagotto. Two faculty members using portfolios with Native Hawaiian students have "changed what they do in the classroom as educators. It's not just about 'here's a repository for your assignments.' Faculty change what they do in the classroom because ePortfolios give you ways to get into deeper knowledge, in that meta-cognition, so they have been transformed as teachers."



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- Faculty members own their LMS-based course. Students own their ePortfolio-based work that was produced in that course. There is a certain balance in having both faculty members and students owning a part of the course. This balance captures the emerging view of higher education where students are independent, active learning agents and faculty assist them in creating high quality, disciplinary content.

As KCC points out, ePortfolios are a transformative technology when used in conjunction with a learning management system.

Now, with the two-year pilot behind them, Kapiolani Community College has set the stage for a full deployment of Sakai. Many faculty members are familiar with using the previous technology, WebCT, and are on board to move to Sakai for managing their courses. Other KCC faculty have pioneered the use of the ePortfolio tools in Sakai. Both of these groups will participate in the campus-wide Sakai rollout for online learning and for their classroom-based courses.

How does Chef Instructor Leake feel about this move to Sakai? "If you had asked me that 10 years ago or five years ago, I would have said 'Oh no, another change.'" But, now, he's comfortable with ePortfolio tools and is eager for more: "We'll have a test site up," he says. "I'll take whatever I'm doing now and elevate it to another level."

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