After a year of using Google Sites for undergraduate e-portfolios (particularly in the BIS 499 “Portfolio Capstone” course), many instructors noticed a set of problems that repeatedly emerged with this tool: students mistranslated instructions when initially setting up sites; final portfolios were missing key elements; radical discontinuities across student work made assessment more difficult; and a considerable amount of class time was spent on Google Sites trouble-shooting, not only placing demands on students and instructors, but also straining the resources of Learning Technologies staff who were continually called upon to assist in setting up and then supporting students with e-portfolio updates.

Looking for a simpler way to integrate Google Sites into courses, I worked with Ian Porter to develop a “public template” that all students could adopt with the click of a single button. Any instructor can do this, allowing their class to start with a standard (yet custom-tailored) site featuring all instructions, assignments, webpages and documents needed for the quarter, significantly reducing incidents of mistranslation. From this starting template, students are still able to modify and personalize their individual e-portfolios; but in circumventing those messy first step(s), we’ve eliminated countless hours of set-up and trouble-shooting over the quarter.

Since adopting this standard instructor template, I’ve expanded the use of Google Sites in other classes with complex, quarter-long projects that include “scaffolded” research assignments, community service activities, and final reflections where students integrate their learning experiences with instructor or peer feedback from across the quarter. The template for my course on “Environmental Ethics” is one such example: https://sites.google.com/a/uw.edu/bis-356-ethics-environment-final-project/ During the SoTL I will demonstrate this process on my laptop (and on a poster) for any instructors who might wish to adopt the approach.