Preparing
A Teaching Portfolio

A Guidebook
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What is a Teaching Portfolio?

It is a factual description of a professor's teaching accomplishments supported by relevant data and analyzed by the professor to show the thinking process behind the artifacts. Most portfolios are NOT collections of everything that the professor has done in the way of teaching over his or her entire career. Rather they are selected samples that illustrate how that individual's teaching is carried out in the various venues in which teaching occurs. Edgerton, Hutchings and Quinlan (1991) describe portfolios as follows:

1. Portfolios provide documented evidence of teaching that is connected to the specifics and contexts of what is being taught.

2. They go beyond exclusive reliance on student ratings because they include a range of evidence from a variety of sources such as syllabi, samples of student work, self-reflections, reports on classroom research, and faculty development efforts.

3. In the process of selecting and organizing their portfolio material, faculty think hard about their teaching, a practice which is likely to lead to improvement in practice.

4. In deciding what should go into a portfolio and how it should be evaluated, institutions necessarily must address the question of what is effective teaching and what standards should drive campus teaching practice.

5. Portfolios are a step toward a more public, professional view of teaching. They reflect teaching as a scholarly activity.

Steps for Compiling a Teaching Portfolio

Seldin (1993) suggests following the six steps below when creating a portfolio:

1. Clarify teaching responsibilities.
    *   Start with an understanding of the role the professor is expected to play in the department with regard to its various functions. This will help the professor determine what kinds of specifics need to be documented.

2. Select items for the portfolio.
    *   Based on the teaching responsibilities noted in step 1, the professor would select information relevant to those responsibilities rather than gathering every piece of data that can be found.

3. Prepare statements on each item
    *   The professor prepares statements on each item that show their relation to the overall responsibilities and how they reflect his or her status as a teacher.

4. Arrange the items in order
    *   The order might be in terms of importance to that professor's responsibilities. It might be chronological to show growth over time. It might be categories of types of teaching responsibilities to show breadth. The order should reflect the purpose of the evaluation.

5. Compile the supporting data

individual courses or in general through activities to enhance teaching skills or background knowledge.

- Descriptions of instructional innovations attempted and evaluations of their effectiveness.

- Descriptions of non-traditional teaching settings, such as work with laboratory assistants, special help sessions, work with students during office hours, out of classroom contact of all kinds with students.

- Descriptions of activities involving the supervision of graduate students and undergraduate honors thesis students, including names and completion dates, works in progress, and an indication of your general approach to such supervision.

- A personal statement describing teaching goals for the next five years.

Material from Others

- Student course evaluation data, including present and former students, majors and non-majors, graduates and undergraduates, assistants and mentorees, whatever groups constitute the individual's typical constituencies.

- Statements from colleagues who have observed the individual in the classroom or who have taught students in subsequent courses. If such data are not available, there may be alternative sources of similar information. For example, if the individual has been a guest lecturer in another instructor's course, that could be a source of evaluation. Or if the individual has presented workshops for colleagues either locally or elsewhere, participants could be asked to evaluate the presenter.

- Evaluations from other faculty in team taught courses.

- Documentation of teaching development activities, such as attendance at conferences or workshops on teaching either locally or at professional conferences.

- Statements from colleagues who have reviewed the professor's teaching materials, such as course syllabi, assignments, testing and grading practices. Data can be solicited from outside reviewers on these documents by inviting review from others teaching similar material at similar institutions.

- Honors or other recognition such as a distinguished teaching award or nomination for such an award.

Products of Teaching

- Samples of student work along with the professor's feedback to show the range of student performance and how the instructor has dealt with it.

- Student journals compiled during the semester and reflecting student growth in a wide range of areas.

- A record of students who succeed in advanced study in the field or who become majors in the field and reflect back on the instructor's influence.

- Testimonials from the employers of former students.

- Student scores on class examinations, departmental exams, national certification exams.

Some Items that Occasionally Appear

- Descriptions of curricular revisions, including new course projects, materials, and class assignments.

- Self-evaluation of teaching-related activities.

- Contributions to, or editing of a professional journal on teaching in the discipline.

- Service on professional society committees or University committees dealing with curriculum or teaching issues.

- A statement by the department chair assessing the professor's teaching contributions to the department.

- Invitations to present at national conferences on the individual's teaching.

- A videotape of a typical class session.

- Participation in off-campus activities related to teaching in the discipline, such as working with local community groups in educational campaigns.

- Evidence of help given to colleagues leading to improvement of their teaching.

- Descriptions of how non-traditional materials are used in teaching.

- Statements from alumni.

**As noted earlier, not all these items would be appropriate for every portfolio. These lists are provided merely as stimulation for the professor's own thinking.

More Details on Components of a Portfolio

Statement of Teaching Philosophy and Reflective Practice

The purpose of this statement of philosophy is to describe the individual's general approach to teaching and learning and their changes in response to changing conditions. It could include:

- How the individual views the teacher's role in a range of teaching situations and in general.

- How the teaching methods typically used reflect that interpretation of the teacher's role.

- How the teaching methods have been modified in response to changes in students, course materials, the instructor's situation, curriculum changes, and other mitigating factors.

Centra (1993) reported a study on portfolios and found that the teacher's reflections on some key areas were helpful to evaluators. The six areas he recommends commenting on are:

- questions of student motivation and how to influence it.

- the goals of instruction, both for individual courses and in general.

- the development of rapport with students as a group and individually.

- the assessment of various teaching strategies as they related to the instructional goals.

- the role of disciplinary knowledge in teaching and how students learn the discipline.

- recent innovations in the content of the field and their effects on teaching.

Below we have included an example of comments given by an instructor from the study just cited:

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Commitment to Teaching (motivational skill):

My commitment to teaching is demonstrated by a variety of behaviors in and
outside of the classroom. I teach five sections of a course that requires a
term paper. It is a freshmen course, and many students were either
immobilized by the assignment or had an extremely high level of anxiety about
it. Indeed, many of them lacked adequate skills in preparing and writing term
papers. Therefore, I scheduled term paper workshop sessions on a different
weekday for any students who desired extra time with me to help them prepare
an "excellent" or A-type term paper. This appeals to most students,
especially those who feel unsure and unconfident. For the past two semesters,
more than half of the students enrolled in those sections have attended more
than three sessions each semester. The outcome of my efforts and the
students' labor has been a productive one. The total caliber of term papers
has improved, and I am greatly pleased that the extra time on my part has
been beneficial to all - student and teacher alike.  (From Centra, 1993, pg.
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by students who were in general satisfied with the course, and what kind were made by those who were dissatisfied. One can
also sort comments according to overall student GPA or expected grade in the course or major status. This analysis of written comments sometimes helps to explain certain comments or to mitigate the effects of particularly strong negative comments, which might be confided to a small subset of a course. (See Figure 2)

Figure 1: Bar Graph of CIS Averages

Written Comments Analysis Grid

Instructor _____   - Negative Comments   Course _____
Semester: Spring '02   + Positive Comments   No. Students: __50_____

   Rating of   Subject
    Course

In providing this type of evaluation data, peers should follow some basic guidelines as noted below:

- Prior to observing the class, the colleague should discuss with the professor the purposes of the course and the reasons behind the instructional choices the professor has made. The peer may also wish to receive some background on where the session to be observed fits into the overall course picture. This information places the class in context and facilitates evaluation of the session. For example, if the peer knows that this is a class period early in the discussion of a topic, he or she should expect more student clarification questions and a more basic level of content. Sessions later in the sequence should be pitched at a higher level and involve students more in analysis and other higher cognitive activities.

- It is advisable to observe more than one class session if possible. If that is not possible, a post-observation interview with the instructor about how typical the session was of the course and the instructor's thinking as the session progressed would help place the activities of the day in perspective.

- It is preferable to be specific in comments or to back up general comments with examples. For this reason, the observer should record his or her impressions as soon as possible after the observation and should have used a format for observing that would facilitate noting instances and key points.

- Peer observers should be aware that their own expertise will provide them a head start in understanding the class activities in comparison to the students in the class. Something that seems extremely clear to the colleague might not be clear to the students. In addition the peer's own teaching style should not be used as the standard against which all other instruction is measured; there should be a recognition of the validity of diverse styles. The focus should be on whether or not the style used is helping the students learn.

Hart (1987) has recommended that colleague observations focus on six interrelated categories, to which we are adding this first one in the list:

- *The cognitive dimension* (the organization of the learning setting to achieve a variety of levels of complexity of learning, the use of questions and activities to stimulate deeper analysis of the subject or a more thorough understanding of the basics, the level at which the class is directed and its appropriateness for the students)

- *The socio-political dimension* (the apportioning of roles within the class and their interaction, the use of authority, directions, commands, invitations, judgments, rewards and threats, the building or maintenance of rapport)

- *The classroom structure and procedures* (instructional methods and materials used, their purposes and effectiveness)

- *The curricular context* (the relationships between this class and the course as a whole, this course and the curriculum as a whole, this content and the notions of education in general and the field in particular)

- *The effects of teaching* (how well students are learning as indicated by questions, activities, general attention level, specific assessments during class time, and the use of that information in redirecting the teaching from moment to moment)

- *The rhetorical dimension* (the use of language, organization, forms such as expository, argumentative, persuasive, etc., sharing of talk-time, turn-taking)

- *The physical-temporal dimension* (time of day, room size and shape, physical comforts aspects, seating, visibility, acoustics, and how the instructor is aware of them and compensating for them)

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