

Teaching Portfolio

Faculty members are being held accountable, as never before, to provide clear and concise evidence of the quality of their classroom teaching. The typical curriculum vitae describes publications, research grants, and other scholarly accomplishments but says very little about teaching. Without meaningful information about what professors do in the classroom and why they do it, judging teaching performance is inadequate and does not give the teaching function its rightful value.

A teaching portfolio would enable faculty members to display their teaching accomplishments for the record. And, at the same time, it would contribute to more sound personnel decisions and to the professional development and growth of individual faculty members. Demonstrating an effective teaching philosophy is becoming more important at all institutions of higher education.

What is a teaching portfolio?

It is a factual description of a professor's teaching strengths and accomplishments. It includes documents and materials, which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance. The teaching portfolio is a compilation of information about a faculty member's teaching, made by that faculty member, often for use in consideration for tenure or promotion. It can therefore be selective, emphasizing the positive to serve as a showcase for the faculty member's achievements in teaching. So, the portfolio is not an exhaustive compilation of all of the documents and materials that bear on teaching performance. Instead, it presents selected information on teaching activities and solid evidence of their effectiveness. Just as statements in a curriculum vitae should be supported by convincing evidence (such as published articles or invitations to present a paper at an academic conference), so claims in the teaching portfolio should be supported by firm empirical evidence.

Why?

Why would faculty members want to take the time and trouble to prepare a teaching portfolio?

They might do so in order to gather and present hard evidence and specific data about their teaching effectiveness to tenure and promotion committees. Or they might do so in order to provide the needed structure for self-reflection about areas of their teaching needing improvement. Moreover, many institutions in the US use teaching portfolios in personnel decisions regarding faculty appointments.

The purposes for which professors may want to prepare a portfolio:

- a) document for themselves how their teaching has evolved over time;
- b) prepare materials about their teaching effectiveness when applying for a new position or for post-tenure review;
- c) share their expertise and experience with younger faculty members;
- d) provide teaching tips about a specific course for new or part-time faculty;
- e) seek teaching awards or grants relating to teaching;
- f) leave a written document within the department so that future generations of teachers, who will be taking over the courses of other professors, will have the benefit of their thinking and experience.

Choosing Items for the Portfolio

The portfolio is a personalized product, where no two are exactly alike. Both content and organization differ widely from one faculty member to another. Different fields and courses cater to different types of documentation. The items chosen for the portfolio depend on the teaching style of the professor, the purpose for which the portfolio is prepared, and any content requirements of a professor's department or institution.

Items That Might Be Included in a Teaching Portfolio

The following items, loosely organized into several categories, reflect teaching activities inside and outside the classroom. Although no portfolio would ever include all of these items some are relatively common to all portfolios, and others can be selected to meet your particular needs. (The selections were compiled from several sources: Anderson, 1993, pp 48-49, 83-85; Center for Excellence in Learning and Teaching, 1993; Denham et al, 1996, p 23, UMass at Amherst handbook).

Teaching Philosophy and Goals:

- Reflective essay describing teaching philosophy, goals, and methods
- Brief biographical sketch related to what has shaped your teaching

Roles and Responsibilities

- Statement of teaching roles and responsibilities
- List of courses taught, with enrollments and comment as to if new, required or elective, team-taught, etc
- Roles and activities related to advising:
 - Description of advising responsibilities, goals, and approaches
 - Number of undergraduate and graduate advisees
 - Advising materials developed for students
 - Assistance with undergraduate program
 - Assistance with planning for employment or graduate school
 - Referral to other university services

Serving on graduate examination and thesis or dissertation committees

Representative Course Material

- Syllabi
- Course descriptions with details of content, objectives, methods, and procedures for evaluating student learning
- List of texts and outside readings; rationales for selecting texts/readings
- Assignments
- Exams and quizzes, graded and ungraded
- Handouts, problem sets, lecture outlines
- Description and examples of visual materials used
- Description of use of computers or other technology in teaching

Assessment and Extent of Student learning:

- Student scores on standardized or other tests, before and after instruction
- Samples of student work, such as papers, essays, lab books, workbooks, publications, presentations, or other creative work
- Examples of graded exams from the best to the poorest students, with explanations of why the exams were so graded
- Your written feedback on student work (e.g., feedback on successive drafts of student writing)
- Information from yourself, colleagues, or others (e.g., students, parents) addressing preparation of students for advanced work
- Information from yourself, colleagues, or others (e.g., students, parents) addressing effect on students' career choices and employment

Descriptions and Evaluations of Teaching

- Summarized student evaluations of your teaching, including response rate, students' written comments, and overall ratings
- Results of interviews with students after they have completed a course • Letters from students and alumni
- Videotape of you teaching a class
- Statements from colleagues about your:
 - Mastery and selection of course content
 - Suitability of course objectives, both in terms of student and departmental needs
 - Suitability of course materials for achieving course objectives
 - Suitability of specific teaching and assessment methods for achieving course objectives
 - Commitment to teaching as evidenced by expressed concern for student learning
 - Commitment to and support of departmental instructional efforts
 - Willingness to work with others on instructional issues

Ability to teach concepts (such as writing or critical thinking) in a way that allows students to use them in other courses

- Letter from head or chair describing your teaching performance

Course and Curriculum Development

- Designing new courses or development of sequence of courses
- Designing interdisciplinary or collaborative courses or teaching projects
- Administering a multi-section course
- Working on curriculum revision or development
- Obtaining funds or equipment for teaching labs or programs

Activities to Improve Your and Others' Instruction

- Having colleagues observe your classes
- Serving as a team teacher or guest teacher
- Participating in seminars or professional meetings on teaching
- Conducting classroom research projects
- Using new methods of teaching, assessing learning, grading
- Using innovative audiovisual materials, computers, or other technology
- Assisting colleagues by conducting seminars or facilitating workshops on effective instructional methods
- Preparing a textbook or software for a course
- Mentoring other teachers or teaching assistants

Contributions to Institution or Profession

- Participating in local, state, regional, or national activities of organizations related to teaching and learning.
- Publishing articles in educational journals.
- Developing student assistantship or internship program; arranging and supervising internships
- Participating in school-college partnerships to connect and improve learning across educational sectors

Honors or Recognitions

- Teaching awards from department/school/university
- Teaching awards from profession
- Invitations, based on your teaching reputation, to consult, give workshops, write articles, etc
- Requests for advice on teaching by committees or other organized groups

How much information should be included:

Experience suggests that a selective document of eight to ten pages plus supporting appendix materials is sufficient for the vast majority of faculty members. Being selective does not mean constructing a biased picture of one's teaching but rather providing a fair and accurate representation of it.

Appendices

Just as information in the narrative part of the portfolio should be selective, the appendices as well should consist of chosen evidence that adequately supports the narrative section of the portfolio. Should the portfolio require additional appendix space-for supplemental descriptions, hard copy disks, or audio or video tapes, for example-then the professor may briefly discuss such materials in the narrative and make them available for review upon request.

Rather than offer a separate, isolated commentary for each appendix item, many professors weave references to appendices within unified essays.

The appendices must be of manageable size if they are to be read. Millis (1995) encourages faculty to organize their appendices with two directives in mind: integrity and lucidity. By integrity, she means that certain key items, such as syllabi and student ratings, are expected and must be included to support the validity of the portfolio. These key supporting documents must be presented in a manner that reflects a discernable pattern, such as all evaluations for one course for the past three years or all syllabi for all courses taught for the past two years. Further, says Millis, a key test of the lucidity of the appendices is if they are clear to potential readers, especially those outside of the department or discipline.

A Typical Table of Contents

A table of contents identifies the major headings of the portfolio (as suggested in Peter Seldin's book, 1991). When the purpose is to *improve teaching*, a typical table of contents would look like this:

TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Faculty Member's Name

Department/College

Institution

Date Table of Contents

1. Teaching Responsibilities
2. Statement of Teaching Philosophy
3. Teaching Methodology, Strategies, Objectives
4. Description of Course Materials (Syllabi, Handouts, Assignments)
5. Efforts to Improve Teaching
 - a) Conferences/Workshops Attended

- b) Curricular Revisions
- c) Innovations in Teaching
- 6. Student Ratings on Diagnostic Questions
- 7. Products of Teaching (Evidence of Student Learning)
- 8. Teaching Goals: Short- and Long-Term
- 9. Appendices

While a typical table of contents for a portfolio prepared for *evaluation purposes* might include the following entries:

TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Faculty Member's Name

Department/College

Institution

Date Table of Contents

- 1. Teaching Responsibilities
- 2. Statement of Teaching Philosophy
- 3. Teaching Methods, Strategies, Objectives
- 4. Student Ratings on Summative Questions
- 5. Colleague Evaluations From Those Who Have Observed Classroom Teaching or Reviewed Teaching Materials
- 6. Statement by the Department Chair Assessing the Professor's Teaching Contribution
- 7. Detailed, Representative Course Syllabi
- 8. Products of Teaching (Evidence of Student Learning)
- 9. Teaching Awards and Recognition
- 10. Teaching Goals: Short- Term and Long-Term
- 11. Appendices

References:

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