

Designing a Teaching Portfolio

In recent years, the teaching portfolio has become an increasingly frequent topic of discussion within the academy, nationally as well as locally. Many are compelled by the logic of using teaching portfolios as a means of documenting our effectiveness as teachers. Teaching is a complex process (and skill) that requires a complex approach to accurately measuring its effectiveness; the teaching portfolio allows for that kind of complexity. Seeing the logic of a teaching portfolio, however, is often easier than setting about the task of preparing one. Accordingly, this packet has been designed to provide an annotated list of some useful readings on the topic as well as some general guidelines for getting started. Originally designed to complement an Institute seminar, these guidelines can also be used individually and in groups as the basis for discussion and self-reflection. Additional consultation on designing a portfolio is also available from the Institute (call for an appointment). Finally, as you work through these materials and the portfolio development process, remember that the teaching portfolio is just that--an ongoing process.

Reading about the Teaching Portfolio

A good place to begin your reading is with two of our most requested reprints on portfolios: Chapters 1-3 of *The Teaching Portfolio: Capturing the Scholarship in Teaching* by Russell Edgerton, Patricia Hutchings, and Kathleen Quinlan; and "Answers to Common Questions about the Teaching Portfolio," chapter 5 of Peter Seldin's *The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Improved Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions, 2nd ed.* Together, these two readings provide an overview of the teaching portfolio, its uses and benefits. In these readings you will find discussion of the format and content of portfolios, and straightforward responses to several common questions, providing guidance for individuals and departments who are beginning to use portfolios. (For several other suggested readings on teaching portfolios, see the bibliography.)

Getting Started

Planning

Before assembling your portfolio, begin planning by thinking about **purpose** and **audience**. Teachers develop portfolios for a range of purposes--job searches, departmental reviews, award nominations, and other situations--and each brings an audience with a unique set of expectations and needs. Reflecting on purpose and audience can help give shape to your portfolio.

- What is your main purpose in creating this portfolio? What basic argument about your teaching will you make, and why?
- Who are the primary readers? What do you know about their beliefs about good teaching? Are their beliefs consistent with your own?
- What types of evidence of teaching effectiveness will be most convincing to these readers? What evidence will they expect to find?

In many ways, a teaching portfolio is an argument; it is developed around the **claims** you wish to make about yourself as a teacher. One way to highlight these claims in your portfolio is to restate them in your teaching philosophy, where you will generally address questions such as:

What are the most significant claims you will make about teaching effectiveness?
Why do you believe these claims are significant?

Ultimately, however, your claims about teaching will be most convincing to readers when they are **supported by documentation** from a variety of sources--students, colleagues, and yourself. Many of the materials and data that can be used to document teaching are regularly gathered by teachers and departments, which makes constructing this section of the portfolio less daunting than it might at first seem. Useful evidence can take many forms, and needs to be carefully selected and presented for the portfolio's purpose and audience, so that it is easy to read and understand.

As you gather the data to support your claims, consider the following questions:

How are your beliefs about teaching and learning reflected in your actions as a teacher?
What evidence will show readers that your teaching reflects these beliefs?
What evidence can your students provide? Your colleagues? What evidence can you provide?
Which of the data listed above do you (or your department) regularly collect? How can you begin to collect the rest of the data you need?

Shaping and Organizing

Now you can decide how and in what order to present the data you have gathered from students, colleagues, and yourself. Again, consider the perspective of your audience and what type of evidence they will find convincing. Have you selected, organized, and presented the data in a way that brings the most compelling evidence into focus for your readers? Does each piece of evidence serve a purpose, supporting a claim you have made about your teaching?

Assessing and Refining Your Draft

Finally, when you have drafted your portfolio, think back to your analysis of the audience and purpose and consider whether your document will achieve what you set out to do. Does your portfolio give the reader a sense of who you are as a teacher? What is the most striking claim you make about your teaching in the portfolio? Will the evidence presented for this claim be convincing for this audience? Are all of the claims and evidence offered for teaching effectiveness relevant?

For Further Reading

Chism, Nancy Van Note. "Developing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement." *Essays on Teaching Excellence: Toward the Best in the Academy* 9.3 (1997-98).

Breaks down the philosophy statement into separate components. May be useful to those who are new to teaching philosophies, but its guidelines will seem too rigid for many.

Edgerton, Russell, Patricia Hutchings, and Kathleen Quinlan. *The Teaching Portfolio: Capturing the Scholarship in Teaching*. Washington, D.C.: American Association for Higher Education, 1993.

An excellent introductory discussion of the teaching portfolio and its benefits for individuals and departments. Discusses form and content. Contains several samples.

Hutchings, Pat. "Peer Review of Teaching: 'From Idea to Prototype.'" *AAHE Bulletin* 47 (November, 1994): 3-7.

A report on the progress of AAHE's project to invent and promote strategies of collegial teaching reviews. Useful in teaching portfolio construction for its emphasis on using many strategies for peer review besides classroom observation.

Seldin, Peter. "The Teaching Portfolio." *ASEE PRISM* (May/June 1995): 19-22.

A useful introduction to the portfolio concept which complements Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan very nicely. Provides a succinct summary of the portfolio's basic points.

Seldin, Peter. *The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Improved Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions, 2nd ed.* Bolton, MA: Anker (1997).

In many ways, a seminal work. A good place to get started building portfolios. Contains several sample portfolios.

Shulman, Lee S. "Displaying Teaching to a Community of Peers." An address given to the American Association of Higher Education, 1993.

Presents the idea of teaching as community property and discusses how this concept is supported by the use of peer review and teaching portfolios for evaluating teaching.

Shulman, Lee S. "A Union of Insufficiencies: Strategies for Teacher Assessment in a Period of Educational Reform." *Educational Leadership* (November, 1988): 36-41.

Discusses new ways to approach teacher assessment. Proposes that since no one test is sufficient for assessing teachers, a combination of alternative assessments be used, such as portfolios that reflect both the efforts of candidates and the advice of mentors or peers.

Shulman, Lee, and Patricia Hutchings. "Teaching as Scholarship: Reflections on a Syllabus." *From Idea to Prototype: The Peer Review of Teaching*. American Association for Higher Education.

Three exercises encourage teachers to reflect on their syllabi and articulate beliefs about teaching and learning. Useful for departments interested in developing a portfolio system.