

Evaluation of Teaching – Teaching Portfolios

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A teaching portfolio is a collection of creative works assembled by someone to display his or her teaching strengths. As such, it reflects individual creativity and growth. One might choose to assemble a portfolio as a dossier of professional accomplishments collected over the length of one's teaching tenure. On the other hand, one might elect to see it as a personal record of self assessment and growth. A teaching portfolio might even document how students assess what is taught as a means of feedback and comparison, or help integrate efforts at teaching with research and service. Whatever the intended purpose, a teaching portfolio aligns teaching philosophy with teaching practice.

Teaching portfolios are an undeniably popular device for showcasing one's accomplishments in the teaching profession, with a focus on instructional values, pedagogy, and assessment strategies. Although assembling a teaching portfolio for posterity is an option with benefits in and of themselves, it has become quite common to address its contents to a more contemporary and collegial audience, such as peers seeking to emulate success or superiors evaluating the proponent's development. In that sense, the most effective teaching portfolios are likely to be clear, logical, and convincing collections of work replete with appendixes as necessary to highlight both the depth and scope of the individual's work.

Once assembled, a teaching portfolio can provide utility in multiple ways. It could be used to assess a new course, especially when there is little historical record or precedent against which to otherwise judge. Or, if a teacher sought to expand his or her purview into uncharted academic territory, a portfolio could become a tool to help develop new material by documenting material, methods and ideas to sustain or improve. Portfolios can even generate interest at the program or departmental level in novel ways to evaluate teaching effectiveness, thus inspiring or contributing to the growth of fellow teaching professionals as an added benefit.

For people actively engaged in teaching and seeking to advance in their chosen field, portfolios can be invaluable as a means to help secure a promotion or tenured position. Those who are finishing a teaching apprenticeship may likewise recognize a portfolio's utility via the hiring process. Whichever the case, portfolios become portable summaries to advocate one's teaching strengths and styles for an audience who may never have had the opportunity to witness the author practice in front of a classroom.

Academic departments in which teaching portfolios enjoy widespread subscription can benefit from numerous other benefits. For example, they may inspire an open and on-going dialogue about teaching among colleagues. These same people might begin to use portfolios of their own or develop inspiration taken from shared ideas and methods as

these are evaluated and compared. Such consequences might reasonably be expected to lead to a growth in both critical and creative thinking, and foster a developmental atmosphere that benefits the junior and the senior faculty member alike.

In order to build a portfolio and secure benefits such as providing an opportunity for personal and professional reflection, recognizing scholarship, enhanced awareness of effective teaching methods and strategies, and promoting a professional dialogue, it is important to be mindful of what to include in a teaching portfolio. Most literature on the topic suggests one begin with a teaching statement that describes one's philosophy, strategy and objectives, and links them to a personal statement describing one's future goals, be they long term or short. Then, have the actual documentation follow.

For most portfolios, that documentation would include evidence of the course or courses one taught with the corresponding responsibilities, size of enrollment, student population (graduate, undergraduate, *et cetera*), or whatever else might serve to help describe one's audience. A syllabus with lesson objectives, methods and procedures could further refine the scope of what is, or was, taught. And finally, including samples of test and / or quizzes (either graded or ungraded), problem sets or student projects could effectively show student participation and teaching outcomes. Note that all of the above suggestions document teaching in a static form. Evolving portfolios are augmenting these ideas with digitized offerings on portable media that one can access on demand, such as DVDs and Podcasts.

Teaching portfolios serve a variety of functions and can take an array of forms limited only by the bounds of one's imagination. However one's teaching effectiveness is summarized, and to whomever the portfolio is addressed, however, what ultimately matters most is that a collection demonstrates personal growth, professional contributions or activity, and student learning. With these basic ideas in mind, philosophy and practice will align and lay the foundation for continued professional excellence.

Controversial aspects: Although teaching portfolios have been characterized in this review and elsewhere as an ideal tool for professional growth, not every discipline in academia is interested in the same evaluation and no single format is a panacea for the challenges to individual development. In some circles, growth (and presumably therefore, achievement) is demonstrated primarily by publishing or amassing hefty research grants, for example, as these touchstones of success may hold greater significance to performance evaluators than any student testing mechanism or feedback. Therefore, teachers must determine for themselves whether creating or maintaining a portfolio is a worthwhile endeavor despite the arguments above, because time spent tending one may come at the expense of other more "profitable" deeds. Likewise, if a portfolio is nothing more than a haven for all past effort without a trace of purposeful intent or logical sequencing, then it is unlikely to be seen by anyone as an ostensible collection of good teaching. Instead, such portfolios merely become a collection of teaching – nothing more. As such, it would fail to move the reader with persuasive evidence that development and growth have occurred, and that the nature and quality of the purported good teaching is undeniable.

Recommendations: If one does decide to undertake the production and maintenance of a teaching portfolio, ensure it articulates a personal teaching philosophy first and

foremost. Evidence gathered should support the reasoned thinking the philosophy expresses. Organize the evidence and reflect upon it. Then share your product and revise it as necessary. A teaching philosophy will invariably evolve with experience, but one can shape that process by occasionally revisiting questions such as why one teaches, how one teaches, and why one teaches as one does. As a result, one's teaching portfolio will be a tangible manifestation of one's professional goals, ideals and competence.

Finally, a portfolio should be lucid and cogent, although it is difficult to recommend limitations. A reasonable balance that keeps a portfolio simple but complete suggests including a cover page and table of contents, followed by a summary statement related such things as demonstrating concern for students, one's ability to broaden perspectives, innovation, inspiration, teaching techniques, and concern for colleagues. These will set the stage for aforementioned teaching philosophy statement. Finally, a well rounded portfolio will introduce its more functional aspects, such as one's curriculum vita and portfolio appendices (documenting actual course material, student ratings, teaching products, *et cetera*). With all of this in mind, a teaching portfolio anyone would be proud to share is but at one's fingertips.

References

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Zayani, M. (2001). The teaching portfolio: Toward an alternative outcomes assessment. *Research and Teaching in Developmental Education*, 18(1), 58-64.

Zeichner, K., & Wray, S. (2001). The teaching portfolio in U.S. teacher education programs: What we know and what we need to know. *Teaching and Teacher Education*, 17(5), 613-621.

Annotated readings:

Breault, R. A. (2004). Dissonant Themes in Pre-service Portfolio Development. *Teaching and Teacher Education: An International Journal of Research and Studies*, 20(8), 847-859.

The role of perception and assumption were studied by identifying the inconsistency between university faculty and student teachers' expectations and use of portfolios. The study found that dissonance was prominent in four main areas: purpose, value, perception, and context. Among the factors contributing to the dissonance were lack of clarity of stated purpose for the portfolio, the student teaching environment, and uncertainty between formative and summative nature of the assessment.

Centra, J. (2000) Evaluating the Teaching Portfolio: A Role for Colleagues. *New Directions for Teaching and Learning*, 83, 87-93.

Although the teaching portfolio has been promoted as a vehicle for collecting and documenting information about an individual's teaching performance, the problem of how best to assess the information has not yet been addressed adequately. This chapter describes how one group, a teacher's colleagues, can provide valid assessments of portfolios and similar self-reported information on teaching.

Holland, M and Lindsey, C. (2004) Creating an Electronic Portfolio as an Aid to Student Teaching and Job Interviews. *The Delta Kappa Gamma Bulletin*, Spring, 39-41. This article describes how technology has opened doors to greater development of personal portfolios. Most accreditation agencies encourage teacher training institutions to make use of electronic portfolios to meet requirements for field experiences, student teaching, job interviews, and first year of employment. The author details how artifacts, rubrics, lesson plans, and reflection statements can become part of an electronic portfolio.

Sidell, N. (2003) The Course Portfolio: A Valuable Teaching Tool. *Journal of Teaching in Social Work*, Vol. 23, 91-106.

Faculty-developed course portfolios are useful tools that can improve teaching and enhance the learning experience for students. A course portfolio allows reflection of

what is taught and learned in a class, by way of instructor self-reflection and analysis of the course's unfolding. Course portfolios, their elements and a rationale for adopting this technique are described. An example of a course portfolio is summarized. Benefits include a greater understanding of student learning as it occurs and an objectifying of learning outcomes.

Tigelaar, D., Dolmans, D., Ineke, H., Wolfhagen, P., and van der Vleuten, C. (2005) Quality issues in judging portfolios: implications for organizing teaching portfolio assessment procedures. *Studies in Higher Education Vol. 30*, 595–610.

This article addresses the choice of the most appropriate procedure for the assessment of portfolios used in teacher and lecturer assessment. A characteristic of modern assessment modes, including portfolios, is that the information they provide is often qualitative and derived from different contexts. Unambiguous, objective rating of portfolios is difficult to achieve, because the richness and uniqueness of the contents of the portfolio necessitate interpretation and taking account of the context before judgment can be passed. From this it follows that the traditional approaches and criteria for evaluating quality are no longer appropriate.

Tigelaar, D., Dolmans, D., de Grave, W., Ineke, H., Wolfhagen, P., and van der Vleuten, C., (2006) Participants' Opinions on the Usefulness of a Teaching Portfolio. *Medical Education, 40*, 371–378.

The potential benefits of the portfolio are favorably affected by ensuring a balanced portfolio structure and including effective social interactions within the portfolio process. A good combination of a balanced structure and effective social interactions is difficult to achieve. What this study adds is the suggestion that portfolio structure should not be overly restrictive and directive. Portfolio protocols should be adaptable to learners' personal needs and preferences.

Wolfe, K. (1996) Developing an Effective Teaching Portfolio. *Educational Leadership*, 34-37.

When carefully conceived, portfolios can significantly advance a teacher's professional growth. They can also ensure that evidence of exemplary teaching doesn't vanish without a trace. Therefore, a teaching portfolio should be more than a miscellaneous collection of artifacts or an extended list of professional activities.