UNIVERSITY OF PITTSBURGH  
CENTER FOR INSTRUCTIONAL DEVELOPMENT AND DISTANCE EDUCATION  

Teaching Portfolios

What is a Teaching Portfolio?

A teaching portfolio is, in the most fundamental sense, "a record that documents your work as a teacher." Although there is no single way to organize your portfolio, you should tailor your teaching portfolio to fit your particular goals as an instructor. Some experts define them as a simple "summary of your accomplishments as a teacher." Others view portfolios as reflective tools for the self-improvement of teaching. Both professionally and personally, teaching portfolios are increasingly recognized as important records of a university teaching career. Today, they are significant components of the hiring and tenure process, course revision, and individual teaching growth.

This essay will introduce the important issues to consider as you create your teaching portfolio:

- Why are they important?
- What are their central components?
- What accounts for their effectiveness?

Why are they important?

Creating (and maintaining) teaching portfolios is important for the following reasons:

1. A portfolio can expedite the job search: Today, department search committees expect to see ample evidence of an applicant's teaching abilities in order to better guide their hiring decisions. As universities scrutinize an applicant's teaching record more and more, the portfolio assumes great importance in the academic job hunt.

2. A portfolio can facilitate acquiring tenure, facing an annual review, or gaining a promotion: Even after you have landed that academic job, your teaching portfolio will continue to carry weight in professional matters. Committees will again expect to see a record of your teaching abilities when it is time for promotion decisions or annual reviews.

3. A portfolio can facilitate self-evaluation: Keeping a record of your teaching will help you, for instance, reflect on what has "worked" and what has not. It will help you identify areas in your teaching where you can improve.

4. A portfolio can promote an attitude of teaching excellence within your department: Maintaining a portfolio and encouraging your colleagues to do the same will foster an environment where talking and reflecting about best practices becomes part of daily life in your department.
5. A portfolio can provide evidence if your credibility is challenged: In case there is ever an instance when a student or faculty member criticizes you, an up-to-date portfolio can help you defend yourself.

What do I include?

There is no fixed list of items your teaching portfolio must include. Your goals should dictate the content. Generally 7-10 pages, most teaching portfolios contain a teaching philosophy, courses taught, teaching goals, sample syllabi and assignments, and evidence for teaching effectiveness.

As you begin to organize your portfolio, you might keep the following guidelines in mind:

1. Teaching responsibilities: Include information about the courses you have taught, committee work you have done, and student supervision you have provided. This will present a concrete illustration of your professional activities.
2. Teaching philosophy: Define how you approach teaching--highlighting your goals and methods. (For an introduction to writing a teaching philosophy statement, see "Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement," Center for Teaching Excellence, Iowa State University).
3. Evidence for teaching effectiveness: Such documentation might include student evaluations, peer review and observation, discussion of faculty development activities or workshop participation, student written work with your comments, and student grade reports.

Other contents could include the following:

1. Syllabi
2. Teaching awards
3. Any research/publications regarding teaching
4. Participation in curriculum design
5. Discussion of what you have done to improve your teaching over time
6. A videotape of a lecture or discussion
7. A plan for future improvement
8. A Curriculum Vitae

Regardless of what you choose to emphasize, your teaching portfolio should convey a personal portrait, which will reflectively chronicle your development and highlight where you plan to go in the future.

How should a portfolio look?

Your teaching portfolio must be an accessible document. It should not be too long, deadened by sloppy prose, or contain poorly organized documentation. Rather, your teaching portfolio should be to the point, well written, and well organized. Busy committee members, who are likely to be the ones evaluating your portfolio, will expect a strong presentation.
The portfolio should be organized concisely, with each section flowing smoothly into the next. For instance, if your aim is to create a document for the hiring, promotion/tenure, or retention processes, you could organize your portfolio as follows:

1. Your teaching philosophy
2. Course syllabi
3. Summaries of students' evaluations
4. Chair's assessment of your teaching contribution

Be sure to spend considerable time writing and rewriting concise and illuminating descriptions for each section. Finally, your portfolio's centerpieces (such as your teaching philosophy) should be especially well conceived and thoroughly planned.

Finally, be sure to seek the advice of your colleagues, your department chair, and a learning designer. You should consider their recommendations closely.

**What are the characteristics of good teaching portfolios?**

If your aim is to document teaching effectiveness, a good portfolio should answer the following questions:

1. Do I exhibit a thorough knowledge of the content being taught? This should be reflected in the course materials you include, as well as in student evaluations and peer review documentation.
2. Do I employ effective instructional design principles? Do I choose the best methods with which to teach? These questions should be addressed in your teaching philosophy statement and in your course materials.
3. Do I demonstrate my effectiveness as a teacher? Your student evaluations and peer review documents are key here. Hiring and promotion/tenure committees, for instance, look closely at these examples.
4. Do I show that I am active as a member of my department? Here, you should highlight your roles as committee member, student advisor, and colleague.
5. Do I demonstrate that I am engaged with instructional design and the scholarship of teaching and learning? Your teaching philosophy, for instance, should highlight self-conscious reflection as an instructor and a desire to innovate.
6. Based on this portfolio, would I hire/promote me?

If reflection and self-improvement are the express reasons for creating a teaching portfolio, you might ask these questions:

1. Does my teaching portfolio contain the information I need in order for me to explore my concerns about teaching?
2. Does the portfolio show connections between goals and practices? (Do I practice what I preach?)
3. Am I reflective?
4. Does my teaching portfolio show improvement over time?
5. Did making the portfolio provide new ways to think about my teaching? Any new realizations?

In conclusion, The American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) reminds you that your teaching portfolio should be all of the following:

1. Structured: Your presentation should be creative, yet complete, well written, and well organized.
2. Representative: It should represent the scope of your teaching experiences.
3. Selective: Keep it between 7 and 10 pages. Do not "overload" your portfolio; keep it concise.

**Where can I get more information?**

- "Teaching Portfolios," from the Grayson H. Walker Teaching Resource Center at University of Tennessee at Chattanooga provides guidelines, references and examples.
- The Centre for Learning and Professional Development University of Adelaide offers a 16-page booklet titled "Developing Your Teaching Portfolio.
- "The Teaching Portfolio" by Hannelore B. Rodriguez-Farrar from The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University provides information on both the format and process of developing a portfolio.
- "Designing a Teaching Portfolio(PDF)" from the Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence at Penn State University includes information on planning and organizing a portfolio. "Teaching Portfolios," from The University of Georgia explains the purpose and suggests documents to include in a teaching portfolio.