

## CHAPTER ONE

# AN INTRODUCTION TO THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO

An important and welcome change is taking place on college and university campuses: teaching is being taken more seriously. Interest has mushroomed rapidly in recent years, burrowing into all areas of the country. Institutions are moving from lip-service endorsements of the importance of teaching to concerted and sustained efforts to evaluate and reward it. As for faculty, they are being held accountable as never before to provide solid evidence of the quality and effectiveness of their instruction.

The familiar professorial paradox is crumbling on many campuses. Traditionally, college professors were hired to teach but rewarded for research. Although this is still true in many institutions, especially those with strong graduate schools, it has been largely swept away on campuses stressing undergraduate education. Today, teaching may still be in second place in the race with research, but the gap is slowly closing.

What is behind this new emphasis on teaching? The growing number of students and parents facing rapidly escalating tuition bills has led to pointed questions about the quality of teaching and played a part. So have the rapid changes in educational technology, which have forever altered concepts of teaching and learning. But perhaps the most compelling force behind the demands for teaching accountability is the unrelenting budgetary squeeze that legislatures and institutional governing boards face. It has pressed colleges and universities hard to take a much closer look at each professor's teaching effectiveness.

Unfortunately, factual information on teaching performance is often skimpy at best. The typical curriculum vitae lists publications, research grants, publications, and conference presentations but says almost nothing about teaching. It offers little factual information about what the person does as a teacher, why he or she does it in that way, or how well he or she does it. Evaluating teaching performance in the absence of factual information is very difficult. Rewarding it is also very difficult, as is improving it.

Is there a way for colleges and universities to respond simultaneously to the movement to take teaching seriously and to the pressures to improve systems of teaching accountability? The answer is yes. A solution can be found by turning to the teaching portfolio, an approach increasingly recognized and respected. Although reliable numbers are hard to come by, estimates are that as many as twenty-five hundred colleges and universities in the United States and Canada (where it is called a teaching dossier) are using or experimenting with portfolios—a stunning jump from the ten institutions thought to be using portfolios in 1990.

### WHAT IS A TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

A teaching portfolio is a factual description of a professor's teaching strengths and accomplishments. It includes documents and materials that collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance. The portfolio is to teaching what lists of publications, grants, and honors are to research and scholarship. As such, it allows faculty members to display their teaching accomplishments for examination by others. And in the process, it contributes to both sounder tenure and promotion decisions and the professional development of individual faculty members. As a result, it provides a strong signal that teaching is an institutional priority.

The teaching portfolio is not an exhaustive compilation of all the documents and materials that bear on teaching performance. Instead, it culls from the record selected information on teaching activities and solid evidence of their effectiveness. Just as in a curriculum vitae, all claims in the portfolio should be supported by firm empirical evidence. Selectivity is important because the portfolio should not be considered a huge repository of indiscriminate

documentation. Rather, it should be seen as a judicious, critical, purposeful analysis of performance, evidence, and goals.

The portfolio permits faculty to describe the unique circumstances of their courses and general approaches to teaching, explain their use of specific strategies and methods, and provide convincing evidence that they are effective. We interpret the word *teaching* here to signify all professional activity that provides direct support for student learning. That includes not only traditional classroom and laboratory teaching, but also instruction of online courses, and small-group settings, one-to-one teacher-student interactions, student advising, and the scholarship of teaching and communication of its results.

Why should a skeptical professor spend valuable time preparing a portfolio? Because it makes good sense to document teaching activities with the same care and accuracy as he or she uses to document research and scholarship. Portfolios are a step toward a more public, professional view of teaching and reflect teaching as a scholarly activity.

The logic behind portfolios is straightforward. Earlier assessment methods such as student ratings or peer observation were like flashlights: they illuminated only the teaching skills and abilities that fell within their beams and therefore shed light on only a small part of a professor's classroom performance. With portfolios, the flashlight is replaced by a searchlight. Its beam discloses the broad range of teaching skills, abilities, attitudes, philosophies, and methodologies.

## PORTFOLIO USES

Faculty members are busy, even harried, individuals. Here are some reasons they should want to take the time and trouble to prepare a teaching portfolio:

- Graduate students are preparing portfolios to bolster their credentials as they enter the job market.
- Professors are preparing portfolios to take on the road as they seek a different teaching position.
- Some institutions are requiring portfolios from finalists for teaching positions.

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- Portfolios are being used to determine winners of an institution's teacher of the year award or for merit pay consideration.
- Professors nearing retirement are preparing portfolios in order to leave a written legacy so that faculty members taking over their position will have the benefit of their experience.
- Portfolios are used to provide evidence in applications for grants or release time.
- Institutions are asking faculty to prepare portfolios so they can provide data on their performance to persons and organizations operating off campus, such as government agencies, boards of trustees, alumni, the general public, and advocacy groups.

By far, though, the two most often cited reasons for preparing teaching portfolios are to provide evidence for use in personnel decisions and to improve teaching performance.

### PERSONNEL DECISIONS

Providing a rational and equitable basis for promotion and tenure decisions is a central reason for preparing a teaching portfolio. In today's climate of greater accountability, colleges and universities are increasingly looking to portfolios as a rich way to get at the complexity and individuality of teaching. The portfolio provides evaluators with hard-to-ignore information on what individual professors do as teachers, why they do it, how they do it, and the outcome of what they do. And by so doing, it avoids looking at teaching as a derivative of student ratings.

Some argue that professors should be given unrestricted freedom to select the items that best reflect their performance. That approach works well if the portfolio is developed for improvement, but not if it is developed for personnel decisions such as tenure or promotion. Because each portfolio is unique, the lack of standardization makes comparability very difficult for faculty members from different teaching contexts.

One answer is to require that portfolios being used for personnel decisions such as tenure or promotion include certain items, along with those chosen specifically by the professor. Mandated items might include summaries of student evaluations,

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classroom observation reports, representative course materials, and a reflective statement describing the professor's teaching philosophy and methodologies. The professor would then choose which additional items to include in the portfolio.

If certain items in the portfolio are standardized, comparison of teaching performance (three finalists from different disciplines competing for university teacher of the year, for example) becomes possible.

Because they are based on triangulation of data, portfolios provide evaluators with solid evidence from an array of different sources. This material enables them to better recognize and evaluate the effectiveness of faculty members as teachers inside and outside of the classroom.

The contents page prepared for personnel decisions (that is, evaluations) might include the following entries:

*Teaching Portfolio*  
*Name of Faculty Member*  
*Department/College*  
*Date*

#### Table of Contents

1. Teaching Responsibilities
2. Teaching Philosophy
3. Teaching Methodologies
4. Student Evaluations for Multiple Courses (summative questions)
5. Classroom Observations
6. Review of Teaching Materials
7. Representative Course Syllabi
8. New Instructional Initiatives
9. Evidence of Student Learning
10. Statement by the Department Chair Assessing the Professor's Teaching Contribution to the Department
11. Teaching Awards
12. Teaching Goals
13. Appendices

When portfolios are submitted for personnel decisions, the focus should be on evidence that documents the professor's best

work as a teacher and demonstrates that significant student learning (cognitive or affective) has taken place. The faculty member's achievements, awards, and successes are the focus. Self-criticism is a key component in a portfolio developed for teaching improvement, but it does not make much sense to include for those who are being considered for promotion or tenure.

It is important to keep in mind that use of the portfolio for personnel decisions is only occasional. Its primary purpose is to improve performance.

### IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

There is no better reason to prepare a portfolio than to improve performance. Faculty are hired by institutions in expectation of first-class performance. To help them hone their performance is nothing less than an extension of this expectation. It is in the very process of reflecting on their work and creating their collection of documents and materials that professors are stimulated to reconsider policies and activities, rethink strategies and methodologies, revise priorities, and plan for the future.

A portfolio is a valuable aid in professional development for three important reasons: (1) the level of personal investment in time, energy, and commitment is high (since faculty prepare their own portfolios), and that is a necessary condition for change; (2) preparation of the portfolio stirs many professors to reflect on their teaching in an insightful, refocused way; and (3) it is grounded in discipline-based pedagogy, that is, the focus is on teaching a particular subject to a particular group of students at a particular time in a particular institution.

Do teaching portfolios actually improve faculty performance? For most faculty, teaching portfolios actually improve their performance. Experience suggests that if a professor is motivated to improve, knows how to improve, or knows where to go for help, improvement is quite likely.

When used for improvement purposes, the portfolio contains no mandated items. Instead, it contains only items chosen by the professor working in collaboration with a consultant/mentor.

The contents page in a portfolio for improvement might have the following entries:

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the portfolio contains items chosen by the consultant/mentor. Improvement might have

### *Teaching Portfolio*

*Name of Faculty Member*

*Department/College*

*Date*

#### Table of Contents

1. Teaching Responsibilities
2. Teaching Philosophy
3. Teaching Objectives, Strategies, Methodologies
4. Description of Teaching Materials (Syllabi, Handouts, Assignments)
5. Efforts to Improve Teaching
  - Curricular Revisions
  - Teaching Conferences and Workshops Attended
  - Innovations in Teaching
6. Student Ratings on Diagnostic Questions
7. Evidence of Student Learning
8. Teaching Goals (Short and Long Term)
9. Appendices

The improvement portfolio provides a record of performance that details progress and setbacks, successes and disappointments in a framework of honest and thoughtful information analyzed and examined in a timely way. The goal is to establish a baseline of information and then progress through stages of experimentation and development until enhancement of teaching performance becomes evident through assessment.

Sometimes a professor will decide to prepare a teaching portfolio that focuses on a single course rather than an array of courses. The goal is to improve his or her teaching of that particular course by helping the faculty member (1) articulate a teaching philosophy for that particular course; (2) describe, analyze, and evaluate course materials, methods, and outcomes; (4) study student and peer evaluations; and (5) formulate an action plan for improvement.

Whether improvement actually takes place depends on the information included in the portfolio. It will not be successful unless the teaching elements to be strengthened are singled out. If the portfolio is to stimulate improvement in teaching performance, it must have multiple items, and the data must be detailed, thoughtful, and diagnostic.





## CHAPTER TWO

# CHOOSING ITEMS FOR THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO

The items chosen for the portfolio are based on a combination of availability of supporting materials, the nature of the portfolio, the faculty position, the discipline, and the importance assigned by the faculty member to different items (see the sample portfolios in Part Three). Differences in portfolio content and organization should be encouraged to the extent that they are allowed by the department and the college or university.

Since the teaching portfolio is a highly personalized product, no two are alike. The information revealed in the narrative and documented in the appendix bears a unique stamp that personalizes the portfolio.

Nevertheless, given the nearly universal need in faculty evaluation today that professors document their teaching, the list in this chapter should be helpful. It does not comprise items a professor must include. Rather, it includes many possibilities from which the faculty member can select those that are relevant to his or her purpose and particular academic situation. Also, there may be some items not included in this chapter that are particularly relevant to an individual professor and can be selected for his or her portfolio.

Although this is not an exhaustive list, it illustrates the range of items that might be selected to evidence teaching style and effectiveness. Of course, no single item in the portfolio is capable of providing a comprehensive view of the faculty member's

teaching performance. Rather, the reader's impression of that performance comes from a summative review of all of the items in the portfolio.

The portfolio takes a broader view of teaching than the traditional curriculum vitae compiled by faculty to document their achievements because it integrates the values of the faculty member with those of the discipline, the department, and the institution. That is accomplished by work samples and reflective commentary that speak to an integration of values.

A word of caution: all college and university professors have seen poor student work dressed in fancy covers. The point of the teaching portfolio is not a fancy cover. Instead, it is the thoughtful, integrated compilation of documents and materials that make the best case for the professor's effectiveness. The portfolio typically contains a narrative that provides rich details on a professor's teaching activities, initiatives, accomplishments, and goals, as well as thoughtful reflection on his or her performance. The appendices provide evidence that supports the narrative section.

Based on an examination of more than one thousand portfolios prepared by professors in institutions representing all sectors of higher education, we can say with confidence that certain items turn up in portfolios with much more frequency than others. They fall into three broad categories: material from oneself, material from others, and products of teaching and student learning.

### MATERIAL FROM ONESELF

Faculty generally find that gathering materials from themselves is easy because they write their own statements of responsibilities, philosophy, methodologies, syllabi, and goals.

### STATEMENT OF TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

This statement should include course titles, catalogue numbers, average enrollments, and an indication of whether the course is graduate or undergraduate, required or elective. A chart or table is a useful way to present the information.

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## TEACHING PHILOSOPHY

The focus here is on the philosophy of teaching and learning that drives the professor's classroom performance. Following are some guiding questions to consider as prompts when preparing this section: What do I believe about the role of the teacher? What do I believe about the role of the student? Why do I teach? What does good teaching mean to me? What can my students expect from me?

## TEACHING METHODOLOGIES

This section addresses the professor's strategies and methodologies.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Why do I choose the teaching strategies and methods that I use? How would I describe my particular teaching style? What do I do in the classroom and outside it? How do I assess student learning? What kind of feedback do I give to students?

## DESCRIPTION OF TEACHING MATERIALS

Samples of teaching materials are placed in the appendix, but the highlights are included in the narrative, and the two are cross-referenced. Course and instructional materials could include applications of computer technology, study guides, case studies, handouts, and manuals.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* How do these materials enhance my teaching? In what ways have they changed in recent years? How do I know these changes are for the better? What kind of student feedback do I have about the effectiveness of these teaching materials?

## CURRICULAR REVISIONS

This section concerns new or revised courses, material, and assignments.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Have I introduced new applications of technology? Changed course objectives? Used new material? Added (or dropped) guest speakers? Field trips? Laboratory work? Have I developed a new course? Revised a course? Team-taught a course?

## INSTRUCTIONAL INNOVATIONS

Highlighted here are the new and different pedagogical innovations the professor uses to enhance teaching and student learning.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* What new approaches have I introduced in teaching my courses? Which ones worked well? Why were they successful? Which didn't work well? Why didn't they work? How could they be changed so they would be more successful next time?

## REPRESENTATIVE COURSE SYLLABI

Samples of syllabi are placed in the appendix, but highlights appear in the narrative, and the two are cross-referenced.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* What does this syllabus say about my teaching and learning beliefs? What do I want it to say? What does it say about the course and my way of teaching it? Is it a learning-centered syllabus? Does it detail course content and objectives, teaching methodology, readings, and homework assignments in the way I want it to?

## DOCUMENTATION OF TEACHING IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Improvement efforts and professional development activities are highlighted here. Samples of certificates of attendance can be placed in an appendix file, but reference is made to them in the narrative, and the two are cross-referenced.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Which faculty development workshops and conferences have I attended? How am I applying what I learned from those programs? What specific steps have I taken to improve my teaching? How have I responded to suggestions for improvement that have come from students?

## TEACHING GOALS—SHORT AND LONG TERM

This section of the portfolio asks professors to look ahead and identify some short- and long-term teaching goals. It forces them to crystallize their thinking about possible projects and activities that would continue their development as a teacher.

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*Guiding questions as prompts:* What teaching goals have I been unable to attain in the past that I would like to pursue now? Why are they important to me? How can my department or institution help me achieve those goals? What kind of resource help (people? money? space? time?) do I need to achieve those goals?

### MATERIAL FROM OTHERS

Materials from others are trickier to produce than materials from oneself because they comprise student evaluation and classroom observation reports—feedback that varies in availability and utility.

### STUDENT COURSE EVALUATIONS

Student course or teaching evaluation data, especially those that produce an overall rating of effectiveness or satisfaction, are placed in the narrative section of the portfolio. As in other sections of the portfolio, all claims must be supported by evidence in the appendix. Student course evaluation data are often presented in a chart or table that shows the course title and catalogue number, number of students, mean score, and, if available, the department or collegewide mean score on each question.

When the portfolio is used for promotion or tenure, it is especially important to provide ratings on each of the questions that the institution's personnel committees consider to be pivotal.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Are all claims made in the narrative about student ratings supported by evidence in the appendix? Are there any special circumstances that are affected the ratings? Is the vast majority of the student feedback current or from the recent past (three to five years)? Are student evaluation data included from each class that is regularly taught? Are data from all pivotal questions included?

### COLLEAGUE REVIEW OF TEACHING MATERIALS

Excerpts from reports reviewing such pedagogical supports as course syllabi, assignments, reading lists, tests, and PowerPoint slides are placed in the narrative file and cross-referenced to the complete report in the appendix file.

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*Guiding questions as prompts:* Are excerpts included in the narrative that tie in with my teaching philosophy or methodology? What do these teaching aids say about my teaching and learning beliefs? What is significant about each? In specific terms, how do they help students learn?

#### CLASSROOM OBSERVATION BY FACULTY COLLEAGUES OR ADMINISTRATORS

Excerpts from observation reports are placed in the narrative section and are cross-referenced to the complete report, located in the appendix file.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Is the observation report dated and signed by the observer? Are any excerpts included in the narrative that tie in with my philosophy of teaching or pedagogical methodology? Did any special circumstances (for example, room too noisy, too large, too small, too cold, too hot) interfere with teaching and learning during the observation?

#### DOCUMENTATION OF TEACHING IMPROVEMENT ACTIVITIES

Improvement efforts and professional development activities are highlighted here. Samples of certificates of attendance can be placed in an appendix, with reference made to them in the narrative, and the two are cross-referenced.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Which faculty development seminars or workshops have I attended? How am I applying what I learned from those programs in my teaching? What evidence do I have of growth or change in my teaching? How have I responded to students' suggestions for improvement?

#### TEACHING HONORS AND OTHER RECOGNITION

This section of the portfolio focuses on teaching honors or other recognition from colleagues, students, administrators, or alumni, such as a distinguished teaching award, student advising award, or teacher of the year designation. Certificates of achievement, award

letters, and photographs documenting the teaching recognition should be placed in the appendix.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Which teaching honors or other recognition have I won? Who selected me for this achievement? Have peers, students, or alumni? On what basis was I selected? Have there been setbacks or disappointments that later served as the foundation of any of these honors?

### PRODUCTS OF GOOD TEACHING AND STUDENT LEARNING

The most difficult area to address is the products of student learning—an assessment of what and how students have learned. Examinations, written reports, laboratory notebooks, fieldwork reports, and student presentations at conferences can constitute compelling evidence of student learning. But documenting this information in a thoughtful and systematic way can be a difficult task.

### A RECORD OF STUDENTS WHO SUCCEEDED IN ADVANCED STUDY IN THE FIELD

This section of the portfolio is a list of students who have gone on to success in higher-level courses or are now employed in the field.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Which of my recent students have gone on to advanced study in my discipline? Which are employed in the field? Do I have evidence of my influence on student career choice or graduate school admission? Have I helped any students secure employment?

### STUDENT SCORES ON EXAMINATIONS BEFORE AND AFTER THE COURSE

Highlighted here are the student test scores on examinations. The focus is not on the performance of an individual student but rather the performance of an entire class.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Are all claims of student learning in the narrative supported by evidence in the appendix? Are the data showing test score differences in examinations from

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### SUCCESSIVE DRAFTS OF STUDENT PAPERS

In this section, highlights of successive drafts of student papers showing improvement as a result of the faculty member's comments and guidance are included in the narrative and are cross-referenced to the full work located in the appendix.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* Have I included my written comments suggesting how samples of student work might be improved, along with the student work itself? Does it reflect graded student work that represents different levels of quality: excellent, good, average, poor? Do the graded student assignments reflect my efforts to direct development of critical thinking skills or written communication skills?

### STUDENT PUBLICATIONS OR CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS PREPARED UNDER THE DIRECTION OF THE FACULTY MEMBER

Especially relevant to faculty who teach on the graduate level, this section is often presented as a list of student publications and conference presentations prepared under the guidance and direction of the professor.

*Guiding questions as prompts:* What was my role with each student listed: to provide direction or support or to serve as a coauthor or copresenter? Have I included appropriate citations in the narrative and appropriate evidence in the appendix file?

### THE APPENDIX

The material in the appendix needs careful attention to be sure that all statements of accomplishment in the narrative are adequately supported. That said, it is best not to engage in overkill.

Just as information in the narrative part of the portfolio should be selective, so too the appendix files should consist of judiciously chosen evidence that adequately supports the narrative section of



the portfolio. If the appendix contains nonprint media or items that do not fit within the portfolio three-ring binder—videotapes, photographs, or CDs, for example—the professor may briefly discuss such materials in the narrative and make them available for review in a designated location.

Rather than offer a separate, isolated commentary for each appendix, the vast majority of professors weave references within the narrative portion of their portfolio (for example, "See Appendix A for the original student evaluation summary sheets"). This approach strengthens coherence and ties together the narrative and the appendix files.

Which sorts of evidence might go into the appendices depends on the requirements of the department and the institution, as well as the personal preferences of the professor and the purpose for which he or she is preparing the portfolio. But many of the following items are often included:

- Student ratings of instruction
- Syllabi
- Classroom observation reports
- Samples of graded student work
- Invitations to speak at a conference or another institution on teaching one's discipline
- Copies of course assignments, study guides, exams, and reading lists
- Record of student scores on tests
- Examples of your contribution to curriculum design and course development
- Confirmation of your participation in teaching improvement activities
- Teaching awards and other recognition of your teaching accomplishments

The appendices must be of manageable size if they are to be read. For most professors, six to ten categories of items are sufficient.

A word of caution: sometimes faculty who are preparing teaching portfolios fall into the trap of permitting the appendix files—the supporting documents—to determine the portfolio narrative. In this case, the tail wags the dog. Should that occur,

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professors may find themselves focusing on a shopping list of possible portfolio items, determining which are easily obtainable, and then creating the reflective section of their portfolios around the evidence they have at hand. The result is that they end up focusing on the what rather than the why. A far better approach is to:

1. Reflect on your underlying teaching philosophy.
2. Describe the strategies and methodologies that flow from that reflection (why you do what you do).
3. Select documents and materials that provide the hard evidence of your teaching activities and accomplishments.

### THE MECHANICS

We have visited several hundred colleges and universities of differing sizes and missions to talk with faculty groups and administrators about the portfolio and its place in the evaluation of teaching. In the course of our discussions, questions about portfolio length and preparation time have come up repeatedly. Our answers to them follow.

#### TYPICAL PORTFOLIO LENGTH

The typical teaching portfolio is a narrative of approximately eight to twelve double-spaced pages, followed by a series of tabbed appendix files that provide documentation for the claims made in the narrative. Information in both the narrative and the appendices should be carefully selected for relevance and cohesiveness with the other information in the portfolio.

Although disciplines and institutional requirements differ, professors often allocate pages to specific topics as follows:

Material from oneself	Three to five pages
Material from others	Three to four pages
Products of good teaching and student learning	Two to three pages
<hr/> Total	<hr/> Eight to twelve pages

Some institutions put a ceiling on the number of pages in order to prevent data overkill in the portfolio. Others distribute a three-ring binder of perhaps two inches and insist that they will read only information housed in that binder for tenure or promotion decisions.

#### PORTFOLIO PREPARATION TIME

How long does it take to prepare a teaching portfolio? The answer is, it depends. Professors who prepare an annual report probably already have a good deal of the necessary material on hand. For example, they probably have a list of their teaching responsibilities, copies of syllabi, and student rating data. In this case, preparation of the portfolio will probably take between ten and twelve hours spread over a number of days.

But if the professor does not prepare an annual report (or does one but has misplaced it), the needed documents and materials are likely to be scattered and less organized. In that case, it will probably take between fifteen and eighteen hours, spread over a number of days, to put together the portfolio.



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## CHAPTER THREE

# PREPARING THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO

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Three crucial cornerstones are the keys to the success of the teaching portfolio: the need to discuss expectations, getting started with portfolios, and gaining acceptance of the concept.

## THE NEED TO DISCUSS EXPECTATIONS

The teaching portfolio will have value only when personnel decision makers and faculty members learn to trust the approach. Crucial to the development of trust is the periodic exchange of views between the department chair and professor about teaching responsibilities, ancillary duties, and specific items for the portfolio. This discussion should address expectations and specifics of what and how to report teaching performance. Otherwise there is a danger that the chair may erroneously conclude that the data submitted overlook areas of prime concern and may even cover up areas of suspected weakness. Such possible misunderstanding is largely eliminated by open discussion.

Since there is no guarantee that the current department chair will be in that position when the faculty member is being considered for tenure or promotion, it is a good idea to also talk with recently tenured faculty and to respected, older, straight-shooting professors who can give solid, realistic advice.

The topics of conversation with the chair and with others are the same:

- What do the department and the institution expect of faculty in terms of teaching?

- What evidence of successful performance—both quantity and quality—is considered appropriate?
- How much evidence is enough?
- What are appropriate and effective ways to report the evidence?

Expectations are of great importance even in the case of a portfolio created for improvement and personal growth instead of personnel decisions. Departments and institutions have their own formulas for the evidence of teaching performance they seek in determining teaching effectiveness. They give differing levels of importance to student ratings, syllabi, curricular developments, philosophy, methodology, student learning, and other sources of information that might be included in a portfolio. Those differing levels of importance are why it is essential for professors to know accurately the relative importance given to the items that might be included in their portfolio.

### GETTING STARTED WITH PORTFOLIOS

Perhaps the best way to get started is for a group of faculty to develop general standards of good teaching. They should have enough flexibility to accommodate diverse approaches to teaching. The following guidelines should be helpful:

- Obtain public, top-level administrative support for the portfolio concept and an institutional commitment to provide the necessary resources to launch the program successfully.
- Start small.
- Involve the institution's (or department's) most respected faculty members from the start.
- Rely on faculty volunteers; do not force anyone to participate.
- Keep everyone—faculty and academic administrators—informed about what is going on every step of the way.
- Field-test the portfolio process.
- Permit room for individual differences in portfolios. Styles of teaching differ. So do the disciplines.

It is important to allow a year, or even two years, for the process of acceptance and implementation. During this period, draft

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portfolios should be carefully prepared, freely discussed, and modified as needed. All details of the portfolio program need not be in place before implementation. Start the program incrementally, and be flexible to modification as it develops. But remember that the quest for perfection is endless. Don't stall the portfolio program in an endless search for the perfect approach. The goal is improvement, not perfection.

### GAINING ACCEPTANCE OF THE CONCEPT

To say that the teaching portfolio approach is useful is one thing, but to get the approach off the ground is quite another. Some professors automatically resist by evoking various academic traditions. They say that faculty are not comfortable as self-promoters and have neither the time nor the desire to keep a record of their teaching achievements. But in truth, the world of college and university teaching is undergoing considerable change. In an age of accountability and tight budgets, the portfolio is an instrument focused on effective teaching. Professors need to produce better evidence of their teaching effectiveness and must do so in a clear and persuasive way for third-party inspection.

*Caution:* Not only do some professors decline to embrace the portfolio concept, but some administrators do so as well. At some institutions, administrators are immediately negative at the sight of strangers bearing new ideas, and the portfolio is no exception. People being people, some operate comfortably in well-worn grooves and resist almost any change. Others resist out of an unspoken fear that somehow they are threatened.

If the teaching portfolio approach is ultimately to be embraced, an institutional climate of acceptance must first be created. How can that be done? The following guidelines should be helpful:

- The portfolio concept must be presented in a candid, complete, and clear way to every faculty member and academic administrator.
- Professors must have a significant hand in both the development and the operation of the portfolio program. They must feel, with justification, that they own the program.

- The portfolio approach must not be forced on anyone. It is much better to start with faculty volunteers.
- The primary purpose of the portfolio program should be to improve the quality of teaching, and its approach should be positive rather than punitive.
- The institution's most respected professors should be involved from the onset. That means the best teachers, because their participation attracts other faculty to the program. It also means admired teachers who are also prominent researchers; their participation will signal both the value of portfolios and their willingness to go public with the scholarship of their teaching.
- The portfolio should be field-tested on a handful of respected professors. The fact that faculty leaders are willing to try the approach will not be lost on others.
- If portfolios are to be used for tenure and promotion purposes or to determine teaching awards, all professors must know the performance standards by which their portfolios will be judged. Specifically, they must know what constitutes exemplary, satisfactory, and unsatisfactory performance.
- The portfolio program must recognize the teaching responsibilities of each faculty member and any special circumstances or conditions in effect when he or she was hired.
- Room must be allowed for individual differences in portfolios as long as those differences can be tolerated by the institution. Styles of teaching differ. So do disciplines and career points. The documents and materials in the portfolio of a professor of organic chemistry with twenty-five years of teaching experience will be different from those of a professor of organizational behavior with five years of teaching experience.
- Encourage collaboration. A portfolio mentor (coach) from the same discipline can provide special insights and understandings, as well as departmental practices, in dealing with portfolios. On the other hand, a mentor from a different discipline can often help clarify the institution's viewpoint, that is, the big picture. That can be significant since portfolios submitted for personnel decisions will be read by faculty from other disciplines.



- The portfolio should include only selective information. It is not an exhaustive compilation of all of the documents and materials that bear on individual teaching performance. Instead, it presents selected information on teaching accomplishments and activities. But in the process, it also addresses the why of teaching, not just the what.

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