

Preparing A Teaching Portfolio

A Guidebook

Prepared by

The Division of Instructional Innovation & Assessment (DIIA)

The University of Texas at Austin

Karron G. Lewis, Ph.D.

kglewis@austin.utexas.edu

512-232-1776

What is a Teaching Portfolio?

It is a factual description of a professor's teaching accomplishments supported by relevant data and analyzed by the professor to show the thinking process behind the artifacts. Most portfolios are NOT collections of everything that the professor has done in the way of teaching over his or her entire career. Rather they are selected samples that illustrate how that individual's teaching is carried out in the various venues in which teaching occurs. Edgerton, Hutchings and Quinlan (1991) describe portfolios as follows:

1. Portfolios provide documented evidence of teaching that is connected to the specifics and contexts of what is being taught.
2. They go beyond exclusive reliance on student ratings because they include a range of evidence from a variety of sources such as syllabi, samples of student work, self-reflections, reports on classroom research, and faculty development efforts.
3. In the process of selecting and organizing their portfolio material, faculty think hard about their teaching, a practice which is likely to lead to improvement in practice.
4. In deciding what should go into a portfolio and how it should be evaluated, institutions necessarily must address the question of what is effective teaching and what standards should drive campus teaching practice.
5. Portfolios are a step toward a more public, professional view of teaching. They reflect teaching as a scholarly activity.

Steps for Compiling a Teaching Portfolio

Seldin (1993) suggests following the six steps below when creating a portfolio:

- 1. Clarify teaching responsibilities.**
 - Start with an understanding of the role the professor is expected to play in the department with regard to its various functions. This will help the professor determine what kinds of specifics need to be documented.
- 2. Select items for the Portfolio.**
 - Based on the teaching responsibilities noted in step 1, the professor would select information relevant to those responsibilities rather than gathering every piece of data that can be found.
- 3. Prepare statements on each item.**
 - The professor prepares statements on each item that show their relation to the overall responsibilities and how they reflect his or her status as a teacher.
- 4. Arrange the items in order.**
 - The order might be in terms of importance to that professor's responsibilities. It might be chronological to show growth over time. It might be categories of types of teaching responsibilities to show breadth. The order should reflect the purpose of the evaluation.
- 5. Compile the supporting data.**
 - Evidence relating to the statements on each item should be gathered to support conclusions drawn. This evidence is best placed in an appendix.

6. Incorporate the Portfolio into the curriculum vitae.

- Since the portfolio is about only one aspect of the professor's responsibilities, it needs to be viewed in the total context for the most accurate interpretation.

What Kinds of Material can be Put into a Portfolio?

Edgerton, Hutchings and Quinlan (1991) drew from a study at Stanford to identify four domains a portfolio might address.

They are:

- *Course planning and preparation*, represented by syllabi, handouts, lecture notes, etc.
- *Actual teaching presentation*, represented by comments from observers, written comments from student evaluations, or tapes of actual class sessions.
- *Evaluating students and giving feedback*, represented by evaluation assignments and students' graded work along with a brief discussion by the instructor about how feedback was given.
- *Currency in the field*, represented by changes in the courses as new developments in the field arise, currency of reading materials assigned or drawn on for course presentations, attendance at professional conferences that resulted in changes in content or methods of teaching.

The lists below are from Seldin (1993) and by no means intended to be exhaustive of the possibilities. Note that Seldin indicates that there should be multiple sources of information on the same observation, known as triangulation of data. By providing several perspectives of the same event or course, the professor is able to give a clearer picture of the teaching than could be achieved with one source only. What is shown below is not intended to be a checklist of everything that should be included in a portfolio; the list is merely suggestive of what might be included.

Material from Oneself

- A statement of teaching philosophy reflecting the individual's view of the teacher's role and how the individual's activities fit with that philosophy.
- Statement of teaching responsibilities, including course titles, numbers, enrollments and student demographics, a brief description of the way each course was taught and how the courses fit into the overall mission of the department.
- Representative course syllabi detailing course content and assignments, teaching methods, readings, homework assignments and evaluation activities, possibly highlighting how courses have changed over the years in response to student feedback or instructor growth.
- Description of steps taken to improve teaching, either through the improvement of

Preparing a Teaching Portfolio

individual courses or in general through activities to enhance teaching skills or background knowledge.

- Descriptions of instructional innovations attempted and evaluations of their effectiveness.
- Descriptions of non-traditional teaching settings, such as work with laboratory assistants, special help sessions, work with students during office hours, out of classroom contact of all kinds with students.
- Descriptions of activities involving the supervision of graduate students and undergraduate honors thesis students, including names and completion dates, works in progress, and an indication of your general approach to such supervision.
- A personal statement describing teaching goals for the next five years.

Material from Others

- Student course evaluation data, including present and former students, majors and non-majors, graduates and undergraduates, assistants and mentorees, whatever groups constitute the individual's typical constituencies.
- Statements from colleagues who have observed the individual in the classroom or who have taught students in subsequent courses. If such data are not available, there may be alternative sources of similar information. For example, if the individual has been a guest lecturer in another instructor's course, that could be a source of evaluation. Or if the individual has presented workshops for colleagues either locally or elsewhere, participants could be asked to evaluate the presenter.
- Evaluations from other faculty in team taught courses.
- Documentation of teaching development activities, such as attendance at conferences or workshops on teaching either locally or at professional conferences.
- Statements from colleagues who have reviewed the professor's teaching materials, such as course syllabi, assignments, testing and grading practices. Data can be solicited from outside reviewers on these documents by inviting review from others teaching similar material at similar institutions.
- Honors or other recognition such as a distinguished teaching award or nomination for such an award.

Products of Teaching

- Samples of student work along with the professor's feedback to show the range of student performance and how the instructor has dealt with it.
- Student journals compiled during the semester and reflecting student growth in a wide range of areas.

Preparing a Teaching Portfolio

- A record of students who succeed in advanced study in the field or who become majors in the field and reflect back on the instructor's influence.
- Testimonials from the employers of former students.
- Student scores on class examinations, departmental exams, national certification exams.

Some Items that Occasionally Appear

- Descriptions of curricular revisions, including new course projects, materials, and class assignments.
- Self-evaluation of teaching-related activities.
- Contributions to, or editing of a professional journal on teaching in the discipline.
- Service on professional society committees or University committees dealing with curriculum or teaching issues.
- A statement by the department chair assessing the professor's teaching contributions to the department.
- Invitations to present at national conferences on the individual's teaching.
- A videotape of a typical class session.
- Participation in off-campus activities related to teaching in the discipline, such as working with local community groups in educational campaigns.
- Evidence of help given to colleagues leading to improvement of their teaching.
- Descriptions of how non-traditional materials are used in teaching.
- Statements from alumni.

**As noted earlier, not all these items would be appropriate for every portfolio. These lists are provided merely as stimulation for the professor's own thinking.

More Details on Components of a Portfolio

Statement of Teaching Philosophy and Reflective Practice

The purpose of this statement of philosophy is to describe the individual's general approach to teaching and learning and their changes in response to changing conditions. It could include:

- How the individual views the teacher's role in a range of teaching situations and in general.

Preparing a Teaching Portfolio

- How the teaching methods typically used reflect that interpretation of the teacher's role.
- How the teaching methods have been modified in response to changes in students, course materials, the instructor's situation, curriculum changes, and other mitigating factors.

Centra (1993) reported a study on portfolios and found that the teacher's reflections on some key areas were helpful to evaluators. The six areas he recommends commenting on are:

- questions of student motivation and how to influence it.
- the goals of instruction, both for individual courses and in general.
- the development of rapport with students as a group and individually.
- the assessment of various teaching strategies as they related to the instructional goals.
- the role of disciplinary knowledge in teaching and how students learn the discipline.
- recent innovations in the content of the field and their effects on teaching.

Below we have included an example of comments given by an instructor from the study just cited:

Commitment to Teaching (motivational skill):

My commitment to teaching is demonstrated by a variety of behaviors in and outside of the classroom. I teach five sections of a course that requires a term paper. It is a freshmen course, and many students were either immobilized by the assignment or had an extremely high level of anxiety about it. Indeed, many of them lacked adequate skills in preparing and writing term papers. Therefore, I scheduled term paper workshop sessions on a different weekday for any students who desired extra time with me to help them prepare an "excellent" or A-type term paper. This appeals to most students, especially those who feel unsure and unconfident. For the past two semesters, more than half of the students enrolled in those sections have attended more than three sessions each semester. The outcome of my efforts and the students' labor has been a productive one. The total caliber of term papers has improved, and I am greatly pleased that the extra time on my part has been beneficial to all - student and teacher alike. (From Centra, 1993, pg. 104)

Interpretations of Student Evaluations

Plotting Means of Course Instructor Surveys (CIS)

When working with faculty members who come to DIIA for feedback we have found it useful to plot the progress of teaching in a given course over several semesters. By laying out general items along a time line, a professor can document upward (or downward) trends in student evaluations. (See Figure 1.) If a single data point is out of line, its impact is lessened by the overview, and the professor may choose to discuss factors in that particular semester that could have contributed to the deviation.

Analyzing Written Comments

In addition to plotting cross-semester results, an instructor can make an analysis of student written comments as well. We do this by laying out a matrix which groups written comments according to the overall course rating given by each student evaluator. (See below.) This provides a context for the comments. An instructor can see what kinds of comments were made

Preparing a Teaching Portfolio

by students who were in general satisfied with the course, and what kind were made by those who were dissatisfied. One can also sort comments according to overall student GPA or expected grade in the course or major status. This analysis of written comments sometimes helps to explain certain comments or to mitigate the effects of particularly strong negative comments, which might be confined to a small subset of a course. (See Figure 2)

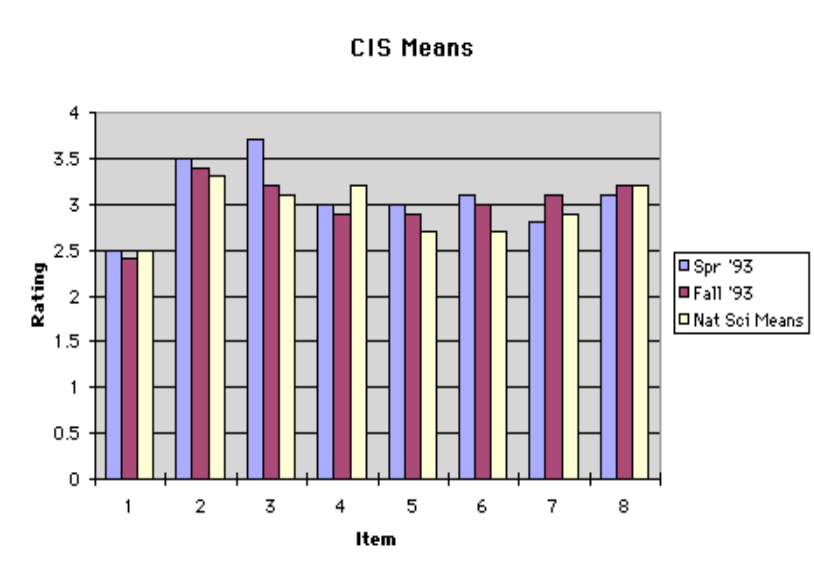


Figure 1: Bar Graph of CIS Averages

Written Comments Analysis Grid

Instructor _____
Semester: Spring '02

- Negative Comments
+ Positive Comments

Course _____
No. Students: 50

Rating of Course	Subject Matter	Organization/ Clarity	Interaction	Dynamism/ Enthusiasm
5 Excellent	+ I really learned a lot! - This should be a 3-hr course because of the amount of material.	+ Outlines were wonderful (3)	- Had a little trouble understanding the lecturer at times.	+ Great teaching! (2) + I hope to take another course with this prof. (2)
4 Very Good	+ Tests were fair. + Material was interesting. - Too much material is covered each class session - Labs were very complex and difficult.	+ Explained the information very well + Study guides were wonderful (4) + Typed outlines were very useful (2)	+ Takes time to really talk to the students (2) + Always willing to answer questions - Slow down when lecturing	- Instructor gets a bit flustered when answering questions.
3 Satisfactory	+ Emphasized key points very accurately + Very interesting course + I learned some valuable things. - The course should have prerequisites – chemistry & biology	+ Presented material in a well prepared manner + Outlines were good (7) - Switched topics very quickly	+ Responded to student questions with great interest and enthusiasm - Lectured a little fast (4) - Should be more receptive to questions	- Need to tell students to come in the back door if they arrive late. - Not a real effective teacher.
Etc.				

Figure 2: Written Comments Analysis Grid

Peer Observation of Classroom Instruction

(A more detailed description of Peer Observation and Evaluation procedures is available in another document available on the DIIA website.)

In providing this type of evaluation data, peers should follow some basic guidelines as noted below:

- Prior to observing the class, the colleague should discuss with the professor the purposes of the course and the reasons behind the instructional choices the professor has made. The peer may also wish to receive some background on where the session to be observed fits into the overall course picture. This information places the class in context and facilitates evaluation of the session. For example, if the peer knows that this is a class period early in the discussion of a topic, he or she should expect more student clarification questions and a more basic level of content. Sessions later in the sequence should be pitched at a higher level and involve students more in analysis and other higher cognitive activities.
- It is advisable to observe more than one class session if possible. If that is not possible, a post-observation interview with the instructor about how typical the session was of the course and the instructor's thinking as the session progressed would help place the activities of the day in perspective.
- It is preferable to be specific in comments or to back up general comments with examples. For this reason, the observer should record his or her impressions as soon as possible after the observation and should have used a format for observing that would facilitate noting instances and key points.
- Peer observers should be aware that their own expertise will provide them a head start in understanding the class activities in comparison to the students in the class. Something that seems extremely clear to the colleague might not be clear to the students. In addition the peer's own teaching style should not be used as the standard against which all other instruction is measured; there should be a recognition of the validity of diverse styles. The focus should be on whether or not the style used is helping the students learn.

Hart (1987) has recommended that colleague observations focus on six interrelated categories, to which we are adding this first one in the list:

- *The cognitive dimension* (the organization of the learning setting to achieve a variety of levels of complexity of learning, the use of questions and activities to stimulate deeper analysis of the subject or a more thorough understanding of the basics, the level at which the class is directed and its appropriateness for the students)
- *The socio-political dimension* (the apportioning of roles within the class and their interaction, the use of authority, directions, commands, invitations, judgments, rewards and threats, the building or maintenance of rapport)
- *The classroom structure and procedures* (instructional methods and materials used, their purposes and effectiveness)
- *The curricular context* (the relationships between this class and the course as a whole, this course and the curriculum as a whole, this content and the notions of education in general and the field in particular)

- *The effects of teaching* (how well students are learning as indicated by questions, activities, general attention level, specific assessments during class time, and the use of that information in redirecting the teaching from moment to moment)
- *The rhetorical dimension* (the use of language, organization, forms such as expository, argumentative, persuasive, etc., sharing of talk-time, turn-taking)
- *The physical-temporal dimension* (time of day, room size and shape, physical comforts aspects, seating, visibility, acoustics, and how the instructor is aware of them and compensating for them)

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