

Creating A Teaching Portfolio

As the semester ends, TAs may find themselves facing mountains of papers and exams to grade as well as deadlines for their own graduate work. Soon, however, summer will bring the chance to slow down a bit and relax. While some TAs spend the summer traveling or catching up on all the movies they missed during the semester, others teach their own classes, do dissertation research, work on conference papers, or study for qualifying exams. Whether you plan to spend your summer mainly working or mainly playing, consider setting aside some time to work on a teaching portfolio.

A teaching portfolio allows you to demonstrate to prospective employers your skills and experience as a teacher, and it can give you an edge in the academic job market. A strong teaching portfolio will communicate your commitment to undergraduate teaching and will show how your experiences at Rutgers have prepared you to take on the teaching challenges of a faculty position.

While teaching portfolios will vary somewhat from person to person and from discipline to discipline, the point of a teaching portfolio is to provide a profile of you as a teacher. It should contain a teaching statement and a packet of supporting materials. The supporting materials should include course syllabi, lesson plans, assignments, handouts, and evaluations.

The first step to creating a teaching portfolio is to compile a record for every course you have taught. Each course record should contain: administrative information, including course name, date taught, class size, course type and level, and a description of your role (teacher, lab instructor, TA, grader, etc.); information about the course's content, including a course description, syllabus, assignments, handouts, and any bibliography used in course preparation; grading records; changes and improvements that you would make if you were teaching the class again (or that you have made if it is not the first

Summer Suggestion: Finding Funding

In addition to developing a teaching portfolio, the summer is also a good time to research grant and fellowship opportunities. Many applications are due in the fall; find out what funding opportunities are available and get a head start on the applications before classes resume.

Two good places to start are Chaser and ORSP. Chaser is a service of the Graduate School – New Brunswick which offers assistance to graduate students in identifying potential sources of funding and applying for them. It provides an online database of grants and fellowships as well as articles on how to apply for funding and sample proposals. Visit the Chaser web site at <http://chaser.rutgers.edu>. While Chaser is aimed specifically at graduate students, the Rutgers Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (<http://orsp.rutgers.edu>) offers assistance to the entire Rutgers community. It provides information on funding opportunities within and outside the University, as well as guides to grant and proposal writing.

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time you are teaching the course); and evaluations of your teaching, including student evaluations and the assessments of faculty or other observers. Mid-semester evaluations can be included as well, and if you implemented any changes in your courses as a result of those evaluations, you can describe the changes. If you've never been evaluated, ask a faculty member in your department to observe your class and write an evaluation, or have your class videotaped by the TA Project and review the tape with a faculty member. If you assist in a large lecture course, ask the professor in charge of the course to write you an evaluation at the end of the semester.

Maintaining course records not only allows you to document your experience for a teaching portfolio, it can also simplify future course preparation and help prepare you for any future faculty review processes. Get into the habit of updating your course records after every course that you teach—it will make a big difference when you draft or update your teaching portfolio.

In addition to the course records, which provide evidence of your teaching responsibilities, methods, and effectiveness, your teaching portfolio should include a teaching statement. This statement is a narrative description of your responsibilities as a teacher and a reflection on your general approach to teaching. An effective teaching statement explains your philosophy of teaching—your understanding of the role you play in the education of your students. In your teaching statement, you should spell out your general and specific pedagogical goals for the classes you've taught—what did you want your students to learn in your classes—and the methods that you used to achieve those goals. In other words, how do your teaching style and class activities support and advance your teaching goals; why do you teach the way you do? The teaching statement should also include a description of your grading and assessment methods and a discussion of how those methods relate to your teaching goals. What do you think are the best ways to evaluate student performance, and why? Finally, the statement should also describe your development as a teacher and how you have worked to improve your teaching skills. What have you learned from your teaching experiences, and how have

you responded to feedback from students and observers? Discuss your teaching goals for the future, and how you plan to continue to improve your teaching.

Just as you should update your course records on a regular basis, your teaching statement also needs to be updated and revised regularly. When you finish teaching a class and create the course record, consider how your teaching of that class relates to your teaching philosophy. Spend time thinking and writing about what you learned through teaching the class, what worked well and what you would do differently, and whether it made you reconsider any of your ideas about teaching.

The TA Project provides a guide to creating a teaching portfolio, with recommendations for keeping accurate, thorough records and guidelines for writing an effective teaching statement. The guide is available on the "Publications" page of the TAP web site (tapproject.rutgers.edu). The Teaching Excellence Center also offers advice on teaching portfolios at <http://teachx.rutgers.edu/faculty/portfolios.html>.

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Technology and the TA: Teaching with Blogs

A weblog, or a blog, is an online journal; people who create and maintain them are called bloggers. Bloggers use their sites to express ideas and opinions, and they can post text, images, and other media objects, like sound clips or videos. Some blogs are similar to personal diaries, updating their readers on the blogger's day-to-day activities; others focus on a specific topic, such as politics or sports. Blogs are generally updated on a regular basis, many of them daily. The logging software used to create blogs automatically dates and archives entries. Blogging software lets people with very little technical experience maintain and update an online journal. Blogs allow their users to create hyperlinks easily, linking the blog to other websites.

Although some blogs are password-protected, most are publicly accessible to anyone using the world wide web. A blog may have a readership of thousands, or its audience may consist of just a few friends and family members of the blogger. This audience, whether it's the blogger's mother or a total stranger, can respond to the material. Weblogs are interactive; they contain a commenting function, which allows visitors to the blog to post comments that anyone else visiting the site can read.

Educators have begun to

explore how blogs can be put to pedagogical use, as a tool for active learning. Instructors can create their own blogs to share material with students, make announcements, and, through the commenting function, get feedback from students or hold an informal online discussion. Blogs can also be a way for students to reflect on course material in a collaborative environment. Blogs give students a chance to "publish" their work online and receive feedback on it. By creating hyperlinks, students can use blogs to make connections to material anywhere on the web, including news stories, images, scientific data, and other blogs, and they can discuss this material or use it as evidence to support an argument. The public nature of blogs means that the content created by a student can be read and responded to by an audience that goes beyond the student's instructor and classmates.

If you're considering using blogs in your teaching, familiarize yourself with the "blogosphere." Read several classroom blogs to see how other instructors are using them. Visit <http://www.schoolblogs.com> or conduct a search on Google using keywords that describe your subject area and "blog." Both [schoolblogs.com](http://www.schoolblogs.com) and [blogger.com](http://www.blogger.com) provide free blogging services.

Richard E. Ferdig and Kaye D. Trammell of the University of

Florida have several suggestions for instructors who want to incorporate blogs in their courses.¹ They recommend that instructors spend time discussing the concept of blogging with students, talking about what blogs are for, showing them examples of good and bad blogs, and setting guidelines for postings, including length of entries, how frequently blogs will be updated, topics to be covered, and number of hyperlinks. Because students may be used to using informal language with other forms of internet communication, such as email, make sure you are clear with your students about what you consider appropriate language, and remind them that even in their blogs, they must always give credit, with references and quotation marks, to other people's work. Also remind students that because their blogs will be on the web, they may potentially be seen by friends, parents, and employers, and bloggers should take that into consideration in deciding what to post.

¹ Richard E. Ferdig and Kaye D. Trammell, "Content Delivery in the 'Blogosphere,'" *T.H.E. [Technical Horizons in Education] Journal*, February 2004. Accessed March 11, 2004. <[Http://www.thejournal.com/magazine/vault/A4677.cfm](http://www.thejournal.com/magazine/vault/A4677.cfm)>

TA
Helpline
Call
932-11TA
Monday-Friday
between
the hours
of
8:30 am - 4:30 pm

TAP Calendar

4/15	12:00-1:00 pm	Teaching Your Own Class	CAC*
4/15	4:00-5:30 pm	Women in Science: Balancing Work and Family	BCC*
4/20	12:00-1:30 pm	Interviewing Skills (Corporate Setting)	BCC+

*Call 732-932-7747 for information or to register.

+Call 732-445-6127 for information or to register.

Want to be a Movie Star?

Get your class videotaped!

<http://taproject.rutgers.edu>

Call 932-11TA for details

Sign up for the Peer Observation Program!

Having a class observed by a peer can be a great way to gain valuable feedback about your teaching. The Teaching Assistant Project offers the Peer Observation Program to any interested TA. You will be put in contact with a fellow graduate student teacher and provided with helpful materials for giving constructive criticism. For details, or to sign up, visit the website!

<http://taproject.rutgers.edu/pop/pop.html>

Teaching Assistant Project

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