

Developing a Teaching Portfolio

Why a teaching portfolio

“Applicant must demonstrate excellence in teaching.” These words are included in nearly every position description in academe. Yet how does one provide evidence of teaching efficacy? The teaching portfolio is one answer that has gained widespread use in academe. An increasing number of colleges and universities are using teaching portfolios to help them make hiring, tenure and promotion decisions (exact numbers are difficult to find, but Seldin (1997) estimates that well over 1000 institutions use teaching portfolios).

Few job announcements explicitly ask applicants to submit a teaching portfolio, but don't be tempted to use that as a reason for not creating a teaching portfolio. A teaching portfolio can help faculty members writing reference letters for you – they will be able to read exactly how and why you've been teaching and can tailor their reference letter accordingly. Secondly, interviewers will certainly ask about your teaching experience, methods and philosophy. By creating a teaching portfolio, you can more effectively and honestly answer these questions. If you find your time limited and cannot devote the necessary energy to creating a complete teaching portfolio, focus your efforts on writing a teaching philosophy statement and a statement of your teaching responsibilities; these two items are the most frequently asked for by a variety of academic institutions.

While a teaching portfolio can help you get a job, it can also help with teaching awards, research grants and even travel grants. Not sure about a career in academe? Don't discount the teaching portfolio. It can demonstrate skills derived from your teaching experiences, including working with people, managing data and independent creativity.

As you create your first teaching portfolio, you will find that it helps you reflect on your teaching and to critically analyze your teaching methods and philosophy. With time, a teaching portfolio will document the evolution of your teaching and will aid your personal and professional development

In general, a teaching portfolio answers three questions: How do you teach? Why do you teach? Why do you teach the way you do? It is a solid collection of evidence of the effectiveness of your teaching and reflections on that evidence. Do not be tempted, however, to include every document related to your teaching. A teaching portfolio is not an exhaustive collection of teaching related material. Rather, it is a select representation of teaching documents and evidence of your teaching effectiveness.

Creating your first teaching portfolio

It's never too early to begin thinking about your teaching portfolio. As part of your first teaching position, plan how you will collect information related to your teaching. Create a filing system, whether it's real or electronic and make a concerted effort to track your teaching each semester. On a regular basis, sort through the materials you've saved for your teaching portfolio, eliminating redundant materials to make room for documents that show the breadth of your teaching experience. Finally, don't develop your portfolio in isolation. Look to your advisor, committee members or other mentors for guidance, feedback and support.

As you formally assemble your first teaching portfolio, use the following questions as a guide for what should and should not be included.

1. What do you teach?
2. What's the evidence you're succeeding?

3. Why do you teach the way that you do?

Peter Seldin (1993, 1997) identifies 6 steps in creating a portfolio:

1. Clarify teaching responsibilities
2. Select items for the portfolio. Material can come from any of several sources, including:
 - a. Yourself
 - i. Statement of teaching responsibilities (see below)
 - ii. Statement of teaching philosophy (see resources, below)
 - iii. Representative course syllabi
 - iv. A list of programs you've participated in to improve your pedagogy
 - v. Descriptions of instructional innovations and assessments of their effectiveness
 - vi. A personal statement describing your teaching goals for the next five years
 - vii. Description of steps you've taken to evaluate and improve your teaching
 - b. Others
 - i. Statements from peers and mentors who have observed you in the classroom (http://taproject.rutgers.edu/services_tips/POP.php3)
 - ii. Student evaluations of the course (see below), including mid-semester evaluations (http://taproject.rutgers.edu/services_tips/Mid-Semester_Evaluation.php3)
 - iii. Honors, recognitions or awards for excellence in teaching
 - iv. Documentation of teaching development activities (for example, New TA Orientation, Introduction to College Teaching (http://taproject.rutgers.edu/college_teaching.php3), etc)
 - c. Products of Student Learning
 - i. Student scores on pre- and post-course exams
 - ii. Examples of student work (e.g. student essays with your comments and grade; successive drafts of student papers that demonstrate improvement)
 - iii. A record of students who have continued on to graduate studies in the field
 - iv. Student publication or conference presentation of course-related work
 - v. Student letters describing the impact of your course on their career choices
 - d. Other sources
 - i. Evidence of help given to peers to help them improve their teaching
 - ii. Videotape of your teaching (http://taproject.rutgers.edu/services_tips/videotaping_service.php3)
 - iii. Contributions to education journals
 - iv. Invitations to present on teaching in your discipline
3. Prepare statements on each item
4. Arrange items in order
5. Compile support data
6. Incorporate your portfolio into your CV

Again, it's important to emphasize that your teaching portfolio is not meant to include every document related to your teaching. You may not have items for everything listed (in fact, you probably shouldn't!). Select those documents from your files that best reflect your teaching efforts. Keep in mind that you do not need to construct a biased picture of your teaching. Don't be afraid to include a teaching flop, especially when it demonstrates risk, innovation or response to critical feedback.

How to organize a teaching portfolio

Similar to an artist's portfolio, every teaching portfolio is unique, reflecting individual teaching styles and philosophies. As such, there is no single or correct way to organize a teaching portfolio. Your portfolio should display a clear structure. Present your materials in an integrated and coherent manner, being creative where appropriate. A sample table of contents as well as examples of teaching portfolios from various disciplines appear below.

1. Teaching Responsibilities
2. Statement of Teaching Philosophy
3. Teaching Methods, Strategies, Objectives
4. Student Ratings
5. Evaluations from Classroom Observers
6. Representative Course Syllabi
7. Products of Teaching (Evidence of Student Learning)
8. Teaching Awards and Recognition
9. Teaching Goals
10. Appendices

Statement of Teaching Responsibilities

(adapted from The Teaching Portfolio Guide, by Jesse Crosson, 1993)

A teaching statement reflects your priorities as a teacher and the methods used to achieve the goals that those priorities establish. It includes a summary of teaching responsibilities and a description of how those responsibilities have been met. The statement should describe, in broad terms, your role in the education of students and your development as a teacher. It is also a good idea to describe grading policies and standards and explain how they fit into your general educational approach.

As noted above, by creating a teaching portfolio you will begin to evaluate your teaching and can work towards improving it. It's also important to get evaluative input from other teachers, whether from peers (you can take advantage of the Peer Observation Program (POP), offered by TAP, or mentors. Another option is to have TAP videotape your class (a free service). You can then review the videotape with an experienced faculty member or TAP staff member. While having observers in your classroom might seem intimidating, seeking these evaluations shows an unusual commitment to improving the quality of your instructional skills. Such an effort must be carefully documented in your portfolio along with the results of these evaluations. Remember: you are documenting more than just the evidence that you are a competent teacher--you are showing that you are actively working to improve your teaching skills.

If your teaching experience is limited, don't panic. Detail any teaching experience, both formal and informal. In addition, include a paragraph (or two) discussing a course you would like to teach. Be sure to describe the course content, teaching methods, assessment tools and how such a course would further student development. Even if you have broad teaching experience, it's useful to spend time thinking about course design. Many interviewers will ask candidates to discuss their 'dream' course.

The Elements of a Teaching Statement

1. Summary of teaching responsibilities and a description of how they were met.
Were you an instructor, grader, teaching assistant, lab instructor, guest-lecturer?
What responsibilities did you have--lecture preparation, research, grading exams or papers, encouraging discussion?
2. Description of grading policies and the reasoning behind them.
For example, do papers or tests provide a more accurate means of evaluating student performance?
How are individual grades assigned on a group project, such as a lab?
3. Evaluations by others of your teaching abilities.
How have the comments of students and faculty affected your teaching?
What efforts have you made to get this feedback? (for example, do you use mid-semester evaluations? One-minute papers? etc.)
4. Indicate your teaching goals for the future.
What are the areas where you could work to improve your teaching?
How will you accomplish these goals?

For each course you teach (and for every semester you teach), complete a course record as a way to track your teaching experience (below). This course record will greatly simplify writing a short statement about your varied teaching duties. In addition to completing this record, be sure to archive a copy of the course syllabus, and, if possible, selected assignments, examples of student work and student feedback (for example, open-ended responses on mid- and end-of semester evaluations).

Course Record

Course Name

School

Course Level

Dates Taught

Class Size

Brief Course Description

Text(s) Used (if no texts were used, what was the reasoning?)

Teaching Responsibilities (were you solely responsible for the course, a recitation instructor, a grader, etc?)

Grading Rubrics (if used)

Suggested Improvements

How is your philosophy of teaching reflected in this course?

Results from Teaching Evaluations

Other information

Writing Your Teaching Philosophy Statement

It's likely that you haven't formally considered your teaching philosophy. Many of us are hastily thrown into a classroom in early September and paddle like crazy to make it through the semester. Yet even through the chaos, you had a teaching philosophy. As a graduate student, you've been on the other side of the desk for many years and you've undoubtedly formed opinions about teaching and learning. A teaching philosophy statement will help you conceptualize and consider your approach to serving as an instructor.

A teaching philosophy statement is a non-technical description of how you believe learning occurs and how you, as the instructor, facilitate learning. In general, your statement should include specific examples of how you enact your philosophy through course design, assignments and assessments. You may also include general goals you have for students, from learning facts, developing critical thinking and improving writing skills to learning to appreciate a particular discipline or developing life skills.

As part of the teaching portfolio, the teaching philosophy statement can be an important component of hiring, tenure and promotion decisions. It can also be a good way to 'introduce' yourself to faculty and colleagues, since it will provide them with an understanding of whether your goals and values will mesh with theirs.

Tips for writing your statement

Keep it short.

While statements will vary by discipline, generally a concise statement of 1 –2 pages is sufficient.

Be concrete.

Avoid the temptation to be abstract in defining your philosophy. Be as specific as possible, and, if possible, provide evidence and support from your teaching experiences.

Do some research.

Just as you are familiar with current trends and issues in your own discipline, it's also important to be current on the trends and issues in teaching in your discipline. To begin, consider reading a general book on teaching, like *Teaching Tips* (McKeachie and Hofer 2002), *Tools for Teaching* (Davis 1993) or the *New Professor's Handbook* (Davidson and Ambrose 1994). From there, browse through journals devoted to teaching in your discipline to update yourself on current teaching issues.

Be creative.

Don't be afraid to shed traditional academic writing standards. Stand out by making your statement unique to you. Use an interesting organizing style, an original perspective on teaching, or an engaging and creative writing style.

Know your audience.

Your teaching portfolio and, by extension, your philosophy of teaching, will be reviewed by a host of individuals from various institutions. As a result, you might have several versions of your

philosophy. Different institutions have different missions and expectations of their faculty. Take the time to research the mission statements of the institution and department that will be reviewing your portfolio. If possible, address the similarities between your teaching philosophy and that mission.

What not to include

1. Your CV. The teaching philosophy statement is not the place to restate your CV or your teaching statement.
2. Empty statements. Sure, you can write about how you value collaboration, but if you don't back that up with actions you've taken in the classroom (or plan to take, if you're new to teaching), it's meaningless. Specificity is key.
3. Arrogant tones. It can be tempting to adopt an all-knowing about teaching in your discipline, especially if you worry that you won't be hired because of your limited teaching experience. That's folly. A good teacher understands that teaching is a process, one that evolves through time and experience. Even after many years of teaching, the best teachers freely admit to knowledge gaps and that what they do in the classroom continues to be trial-and-error.

Getting started

Writing your philosophy of teaching statement can be daunting. It is, however, an essential component of your teaching portfolio. Before frustration sets in, take the time to ask yourself a few questions. These can help you define your teaching style, figure out what aspects of teaching are important to you, and how you view the teacher-student relationship. If you haven't taught before (or have limited teaching experience), think about the great teachers you've had (from kindergarten through graduate school) and what made them so effective.

First answer:

What do I want students to learn?
What can I do to facilitate their learning?
What are the roadblocks to student learning?
How can I help students move past these roadblocks?

Then move on to:

How do people learn?
How do I facilitate that learning?
What are my goals for students?
Why do I teach the way that I do?
What do I do to implement these ideas about teaching and learning?
Are these methods working?
How do I know they are/are not working?
What are my future goals?

Finally, if you're still having difficulty, consider completing the Teaching Inventory, below, developed by the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University.

Teaching Inventory

From "Guidelines for Constructing your Teaching Portfolio," created by the Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, Brown University.

Writing your Teaching Philosophy statement:

1. How does your statement demonstrate to the reader your teaching philosophy?
2. Does your approach to teaching show good judgment, careful planning or flexibility when appropriate?
3. How does your statement articulate openness to different perspectives? And how will you demonstrate this?
4. Does your statement show awareness of disciplinary conventions/expectations?
5. How are these ideas consistent with the way you have constructed your courses?

1. Diagnostic Statements about Teaching. Circle if you agree or disagree.

	Strongly Agree (1)	Agree (2)	Neutral (3)	Disagree (4)	Strongly Disagree (5)
Teaching should be an interactive process.	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching in my field necessarily involves a great deal of lecturing.	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching a large course involves exclusively lecture format.	1	2	3	4	5
Teachers ought to be teaching to the middle level of the class' ability.	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching my courses is primarily relaying information and showing practice.	1	2	3	4	5
Teaching my courses is primarily relaying how to process information.	1	2	3	4	5
Students learn effectively through induction.	1	2	3	4	5
Students should work on individualized projects as much as possible.	1	2	3	4	5
Students should be self-motivated to learn the material.	1	2	3	4	5
Students need to listen actively to lectures.	1	2	3	4	5
Students need practice in order to learn.	1	2	3	4	5
Students should be required to read and learn a lot on their own.	1	2	3	4	5
I enjoy teaching more than researching.	1	2	3	4	5
I intend to publish in journals committed to teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
I am committed to improving my teaching throughout my career.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe much of my research informs my teaching.	1	2	3	4	5
I believe doing research also makes me a better teacher.	1	2	3	4	5

2. Complete the following sentences about characteristics of good teaching practice.

A. The top three characteristics of a good teacher are:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

B. Excellent teachers recognize that students are:

C. My primary goal in teaching can be summarized as:

Resources

Websites

Carnegie Mellon University

<http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/developphilosophy.html>

University of California, Santa Barbara

<http://www.oic.id.ucsb.edu/TA/port-FAQ.html>

University of Washington

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/PortfolioTips.htm>

Essays by Nancy Van Note Chism

http://www.artsci.wustl.edu/~teachcen/WUTC/TA/teach_phil.pdf

<http://www.cofc.edu/~cetl/Essays/DevelopingaPhilosophyofTeaching.html>

Articles from the *Chronicle of Higher Education*

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/2003/03/2003032702c.htm>

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/2003/03/2003032701c.htm>

Samples of Teaching Philosophies

http://www.isd.uga.edu/teaching_assistant/philosophy/

General teaching books

Davidson, C. I., and S. A. Ambrose. 1994. *The new professor's handbook : a guide to teaching and research in engineering and science*. Anker Pub. Co., Bolton, MA.

Davis, B. G. 1993. *Tools for teaching*, 1st edition. Jossey-Bass Publishers, San Francisco, Calif.

McKeachie, W. J., and B. K. Hofer. 2002. *McKeachie's teaching tips : strategies, research, and theory for college and university teachers*, 11th edition. Houghton Mifflin Co., Boston.

Journals

Issues in Teaching and Learning

Teaching in Higher Education

Syllabus Magazine

Journal on Excellence in College Teaching

Teaching in the Sciences

General

Electronic Journal of Science Education

International Journal of Science

Education

Journal of College Science Teaching

Journal of Research in Science Teaching

Biology

American Biology Teacher

Journal of Biological Education

Chemistry

Journal of Chemical Education

Engineering

Chemical Engineering Education

Prism

Geology/Earth Science

Journal of Environmental Education

Journal of Geoscience Education

Mathematics

College Mathematics Journal

Mathematics and Computer Education

Mathematics Teacher

Physics

American Journal of Physics

Physics Education

The Physics Teacher

Student Instructional Rating Survey (SIRS)

Each semester, the Center for the Advancement of Teaching (CAT) conducts a University-wide survey of students regarding their classroom experiences. Instructors, departments, schools and the university use results from these surveys for the assessment and improvement of teaching. For example, faculty members must often provide summaries of SIRS for tenure, promotion or merit-based pay decisions.

Interpreting the data from SIRS can be difficult. For help in understanding what the statistics mean for you, visit http://cat.rutgers.edu/sirs/sirs_stats.html. This information will be invaluable to you as you reflect on your teaching goals, philosophy and gauge the success of your teaching methods.

All members of the University have access to the summary statistics from these surveys on-line at <http://sirs.rutgers.edu>. Results prior to 2001 that are not available on line are archived at the Rutgers University Libraries. However, please be aware that as part of the Family Education Rights and Privacy Act (FERPA), Rutgers University decided to halt on-line posting of SIRS results for TAs beginning in the Fall of 2004. As a result, there are no records for TAs on-line from 2004 through the present.

SIRS results are returned directly to department in which the course was taught and CAT recommends that departments make the data available to instructors. However, each department has their own policies regarding SIRS; it's best to ask an administrator what the policy of the department is regarding SIRS. You may be given a copy of your SIRS results or be allowed to view the results at an arranged time. No matter what the policy, take the time and effort to look at your SIRS – they are one of the best sources of evidence regarding your teaching efficacy.

As part of your teaching portfolio, SIRS provide substantial evidence of your teaching success. However, individual SIRS results from each course you have taught would be too much to include within the portfolio. Instead, summarize key statistics from representative classes. Consider averaging results if you taught multiple sections of a course in a given semester. Include select student comments that reflect your teaching philosophy and goals. If you wish to be thorough, consider creating an appendix where you fully present the SIRS results and can include additional student comments.

Examples of Teaching Portfolios

You can find several outstanding examples of teaching portfolio in Peter Seldin's book, *The Teaching Portfolio, 2nd Edition*. However, there are several on-line examples of teaching portfolios.

Business

<http://krypton.mnsu.edu/~schumann/www/research/tporf2.html>

An extensive portfolio, but full of good ideas.

Engineering

http://www.mech.uwa.edu.au/NWS/NWS_Teaching.html

An extensive portfolio and a good example of an electronic portfolio.

History

<http://www.cfkeep.org/html/snapshot.php?id=82817644889297>

This is an outstanding example of an electronic portfolio. If your web skills are good, you may want to consider this option instead of or in addition to a paper portfolio. More information on electronic portfolios is available at <http://www.coe.ufl.edu/school/portfolio/history.htm>

Math

http://orion.math.iastate.edu/wagner/Teaching_Portfolio.html

This portfolio includes an explicit section on methods used to improve teaching. If you feel your teaching hasn't been as successful, consider including a similar section to let potential employers know both that you are aware of your teaching shortcomings and that you are actively working on your teaching methods.

Philosophy

<http://www.pitt.edu/~wuthrich/Portfolio2005.pdf>

This student has extensive teaching experience, but also includes a listing of course he could potentially teach. This is an excellent idea, especially if your teaching experience is somewhat limited.

Physics

<http://www.physics.uci.edu/~jeff/teach.html>

Additional Resources

Brown University

http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/publications/teacport.html

The Chronicle of Higher Education

<http://chronicle.com/free/2001/07/2001071902t.htm>

Harvard University

<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~history/forms/gr/TeachingPortfolio-Philosophy.pdf>

The Ohio State University

<http://ftad.osu.edu/portfolio/>

The Pennsylvania State University

http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/Designing_a_Teaching_Portfolio.pdf#search=%22Penn%20State%20teaching%20portfolio%22

Rutgers University

<http://cat.rutgers.edu/faculty/portfolios.html>

Seldin, P. 1993. *Successful Use of Teaching Portfolios*. Anker Publishing Company, Inc, Bolton, MA.

Seldin, P. 1997. *The Teaching Portfolio: A practical guide to improved performance*, 2nd edition. Akner Publishing Company, Inc, Bolton, MA.

University of California, Berkeley

<http://career.berkeley.edu/PhDs/PhDportfolio.stm>

University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey

http://cte.umdnj.edu/career_development/career_portfolios.cfm

University of Minnesota

<http://education.umn.edu/SPS/career/teachport.html>

University of Texas

<http://www.utexas.edu/academic/cte/teachfolio.html>

University of Washington

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/PortfolioTools.htm>

Washington State University

<http://www.wsu.edu/provost/teaching.htm>