



The Teaching Portfolio

A HANDBOOK FOR FACULTY, TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND TEACHING FELLOWS

B R O W N U N I V E R S I T Y



The Teaching Portfolio

A HANDBOOK FOR FACULTY, TEACHING ASSISTANTS AND TEACHING FELLOWS

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Introduction

EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING has become a stock phrase in most faculty job descriptions; yet how does one demonstrate this to current colleagues and/or future employers? One answer is a Teaching Portfolio, which is a description of an instructor's major strengths and teaching achievements. It describes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of an instructor's teaching proficiency. Over 400 institutions nationwide use Teaching Portfolios in personnel decisions regarding faculty appointments. Demonstrating an effective teaching philosophy is becoming more important at all institutions of higher education; thus, you will revise and update your Teaching Portfolio throughout your career as an instructor. The primary purpose of this handbook is to introduce and explain the Teaching Portfolio concept as a way to demonstrate one's teaching credentials to colleagues, department chairs and potential employers. Individuals and/or departments may also use Teaching Portfolios for other uses, such as a means for assessment and development of courses, a way to compare individuals for teaching awards, for contract renewals and for documenting general departmental teaching effectiveness.¹ To create several Teaching Portfolios for different contexts may prove fruitful as a way to continue to develop as an instructor.

In many cases, creating your first Teaching Portfolio enables you, the instructor, to think more critically about your teaching, to create new methods of assessing it and to discuss pedagogy with colleagues, advisors, students and others. Fundamentally, a Teaching Portfolio is similar to an artist's portfolio: a sampling of the breadth and depth of an artist's works in order to display to the viewer the artist's abilities, strengths and styles. But, unlike artists' portfolios, the main body of your portfolio guides and informs the reader through this sampling of your teaching

1. Please refer to other Sheridan Center Handbooks on *Instructional Assessment in Higher Education* and *The Syllabus Handbook*.

documents. These objects are very individual and personal, and no one portfolio is more correct than another. As such, this handbook cannot give you hard fast rules for the contents of your portfolio. What I hope to provide are some ideas, suggestions and examples. The majority of these suggestions for Teaching Portfolio contents represent those most commonly required by departmental search committees and personnel offices. The goal of your portfolio is to present your teaching skills, experiences and credentials in a meaningful positive package.

Essentially, Teaching Portfolios contain two basic elements: evidence of teaching and reflections on that evidence. The evidence begins with what is normally listed on curriculum vitae: lists of courses, lists of responsibilities, etc.; however, it extends beyond to include a variety of activities which have had an impact on your teaching such as Teaching Certificate programs, teaching seminars, videotapes of your lectures and classrooms, etc. The addition of these other documents adds depth to your teaching curriculum vitae. The meaningful aspect of the Teaching Portfolio lies in your written reflective statements about the evidence of your teaching.

When most of us teach, time constraints and other commitments force us to concentrate on what we teach, namely, the content. In creating a Teaching Portfolio, the key questions are why you teach and how you teach, that is, your teaching goals and your objectives for achieving those goals. Reflecting on these issues is a difficult task and is best tackled with others. The Teaching Portfolio shifts the emphasis of your teaching away from content and focuses it on delivery and learning. Why do you teach? How do you teach? Why do you teach the way you do? These are difficult questions, which is why, ideally, Teaching Portfolios are the product of collaboration with colleagues, mentors, students and others, as input from these sources helps you clarify and refine your personal statements and reflective descriptions. The process of creating your Teaching Portfolio may prove to be more difficult than originally expected; therefore, constant and honest feedback will be key to producing a successful portfolio.

The Format

THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO consists of two essential parts: evidence and reflections on that evidence. In the sample on the next page, the first two sections included in the table of contents are headings for self-reflective texts which explain, elaborate and highlight the evidence listed in the appendices. These statements are the “meat” of your Teaching Portfolio as they convey to the reader your teaching style, teaching philosophy, efforts to improve your craft, etc. For the sake of clarity and space, the evidence and data can be compiled in a series of appendices as shown; however, there may be some evidence which you would like to include at the outset. Rather than burden your main text with this evidence, you may want to consider attached appendices as well as appendices that would be available upon request. In the sample, I have included summaries of my student evaluations, a sample of my comments on student papers and samples of my course assessments throughout the semester because these documents were short, easily reproduced and immediately illustrative of the concepts discussed in the main text. On the next page is the format of my spring 1997 Teaching Portfolio. (Other examples may be found in the Appendix.)

Editor's Note: When this handbook was first written in 1995, Teaching Portfolios were exclusively paper-based. However, in recent years, as technology has evolved, so has the presentation of Teaching Portfolios. At present, some compilers of Teaching Portfolios create electronic versions, usually web-based, which can easily be made available for others to view remotely. They may even extend the content of their e-portfolios to include the full range of their academic work (i.e., including teaching, research and service), thereby transforming their compilations into Academic Portfolios. The Center encourages those who create e-portfolios for the academic job market to mention their portfolio in cover letters and provide the access information for it, even when portfolios are actually not required for an application. The Center also suggests they create a paper-based version, which can be useful to have at hand during the interview process.

Hannelore B. Rodriguez-Farrar
Teaching Portfolio

SAMPLE

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Educational Philosophy

Sample Course Construction: Baroque Art at Rhode Island
College, Spring 1997

Related Teaching Responsibilities

The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning,
Brown University
Teaching Award and Teaching-Related Publications

Appendices Attached

- 1: Syllabus for Baroque Art
- 2: Sample of my comments on a paper as well as a student
self-evaluation form
- 3: Course evaluations and summaries
- 4: Copy of Classroom Visitation Form completed by
Department Chair
- 5: Summaries of student evaluations and copies of *The
Critical Review* (Brown University)

Appendices (Available Upon Request)

- A: Daily Handouts from Baroque Art
- B: Syllabi and handouts from HA 01, HA 02, HA 56, HA 85
- C: ITC Training Packet, Sheridan Center
- D: Teaching Portfolio Packet
- E: BRUIN Course Materials
- F: Sheridan Center Teaching Certificates
- G: Sheridan Center Materials
- H: Presidential Teaching Award, Brown University
- I: Sheridan Center *Teaching Exchange*

Procedure

THE PROCEDURE FOR CONSTRUCTING your Teaching Portfolio consists of six basic steps. These steps offer sufficient latitude that each Portfolio will be unique and will reflect the appropriate information necessary for specific circumstances.

1. Articulate a personal teaching philosophy.
2. Gather your evidence.
3. Organize your evidence.
4. Write reflective and summary statements about the evidence.
5. Share your draft with others and revise.
6. Rewrite your curriculum vitae, and under “Teaching” refer readers to your Teaching Portfolio.

Step 1: Articulate a Personal Teaching Philosophy or Statement About Your Teaching

While there are no set standards for contents of Teaching Portfolios, most departments, chairs, personnel offices and other institutions requiring Teaching Portfolios for contract decisions, awards and recognition, and hiring practices require a personal statement about one’s teaching philosophy. During the interviewing process, many institutions ask this question, so articulating this statement in your Teaching Portfolio will better prepare you for your interview.

A teaching philosophy is a very broad personal statement which can answer one or more of the following questions: how do you teach? why do you teach? why do you teach the way you do? what are your teaching goals, methods and strategies? It does not describe the content of a course, but rather your goals for what students will learn and the objectives by which you will help them achieve those goals. Do not assume that what you do as a teacher is commonplace. Instead, describing your

teaching philosophy will help you realize how unique it is. Refining this statement is critical and is best accomplished through collaboration, i.e., discuss the content of this statement with colleagues, mentors, advisors, students and others both before and after you write it.² Remember, a teaching philosophy is a work in progress; it will change as you develop as a teacher.

Step 2: Gather Your Evidence

Collect all the materials related to your teaching. These come from a variety of sources. Try to be creative and inclusive in assembling these materials. Below is a sampling of possible evidence.

PERSONAL MATERIAL

- statement of teaching responsibilities, including specific courses, and a brief description of the way each course was taught
- personal teaching philosophy, strategies and objectives
- personal teaching goals for next 5 years
- representative course syllabi (include why courses were constructed this way)
- description of steps taken to evaluate and improve one's teaching
- curricular revisions – new course projects, materials, course assignments, etc.
- self evaluation – include “an explanation of any contradictory or unclear documents or materials in the Teaching Portfolio”
- publications on teaching – any editing, contributions, etc.
- information on direction/supervision of honors, graduate theses and research group activities

2. Later when preparing for interviews, identify how your philosophy fits into the mission of the institution and the goals of the department.

MATERIAL FROM OTHERS

- statements from colleagues who have observed your teaching
- statements from colleagues who have witnessed out-of-class activities such as instructional and curricular development and instructional research
- student and course evaluations which show improvements in effectiveness
- department statements on your teaching
- performance reviews as a faculty advisor
- honors, awards, and other recognition
- outside agencies' invitations for papers on teaching
- invitations from other schools to demonstrate effective teaching
- participation in teaching development within your discipline
- documentation of teaching development at the Sheridan Center or other teaching centers
- teaching research
- videotape of your teaching
- student scores on standardized tests

PRODUCTS OF GOOD TEACHING

- student essays, creative work, lab books, publications, course-related work
- "Information about the effect of the professor's courses on student career choices or help given by the professor to secure student employment"
- record of students who succeed to advanced courses in the discipline
- statements from alumni
- examples of graded student essays showing excellent, average and poor work, along with instructors' comments as to why they were so graded

Step 3: Organize Your Evidence

Upon pulling the evidence of your teaching together, decide how best to group it and to summarize the contents. For example, do the syllabi of courses you taught coalesce around a specific theme about your teaching? Have you participated in programs, colloquia and seminars to improve your teaching skills? Do you have a variety of measures of your teaching effectiveness? Refine your data by prioritizing it according to the goal of the Teaching Portfolio. For example, if you want to emphasize your efforts toward improving your teaching skills, the contents of your Teaching Portfolio would revolve around this central focus.

Ideally, the organization of the evidence allows you to consolidate a variety of documents under one theme. In the example above on page 6, I separated my own course from courses for which I served as a teaching assistant. My experiences as a teaching assistant are collected under the heading “Teaching and Related Responsibilities” while my course is given more emphasis by having its own section. Course syllabi and handouts are then grouped within appropriate appendices allowing me to summarize and highlight relevant teaching skills, methods and strategies in the concise statement included in the body of the Teaching Portfolio.

Step 4: Write Reflective and Summary Statements about the Evidence

A reflective statement allows you to identify your teaching goals in a specific context. Strive to be concise and to the point. Summarize your data giving contextual clarification where needed. These statements can be of any length, but keep your audience and readers in mind. Incorporate your evidence, but do not force the reader to refer to specific aspects of each relevant appendix. Instead, describe your evidence, explain its importance and direct the reader to the appropriate appendices as documentation of your statement. On the following page is an excerpt from my sample portfolio.

Teaching and Related Responsibilities

As indicated, I have been the teaching assistant for the following courses:

- Course xx: General Survey of the Topic
- Course xx: Survey of Topic in Context
- Course xx: Example A
- Course xx: Example B

SAMPLE

For these courses, I was responsible for two weekly sections, the grading of all exams and papers, the implementation of review sections and slide reviews, and the general administrative duties needed for the smooth running of these courses. Approximately 50 students signed up for my sections, and in general, they were well attended.

Departmental evaluations conducted at the end of each course document student feedback on my teaching and how my sections were run. For Course xx and Course xx, I also conducted a personal mid-semester survey in order to evaluate my sections and to improve their quality. Summaries and highlights from these evaluations are attached. Finally, *The Critical Review*, a Brown undergraduate student publication, has featured me in evaluations of these courses. Copies of these reviews are also attached.

Please refer to Appendix A: Syllabi and Handouts from Courses; Appendix B: Mid Term Student Evaluations and Year End Student Evaluations; Appendix C: *Critical Review* Evaluations and Appendix D: Teaching References.

A common source of feedback on one's teaching is evaluations by the department within which you teach, either from a supervising professor(s) and/or students. Since these evaluations, in many cases, present a wide variety of views of one's teaching, they can appear disconnected and misleading. By organizing, reviewing and evaluating them in their entirety, you can add insight and clarify the context of the criticism and praise. Group the evaluations in sections which best highlight the aspects

you want to emphasize, and then summarize this organization. In your summaries, contextualize the evaluations. One strategy is to use excerpts from student evaluations which reflect the general nature of the student responses.

Step 5: Share Your Draft with Others and Revise

As mentioned above, the ideal creation of a Teaching Portfolio includes extensive feedback from colleagues, advisors and others. Feedback will help you refine and edit your Teaching Portfolio. If you have other colleagues who are writing Teaching Portfolios as well, offer to read their drafts and work together to clarify your ideas.

Step 6: Rewrite Your Curriculum Vitae, and Refer Readers to Your Teaching Portfolio

Remember to include in your cover letters some reference to your Teaching Portfolio. You must try to gauge if a Teaching Portfolio will help strengthen your application; remember not all positions will look upon receiving a twenty-page document with appendices and videotapes as necessary or important. In writing your cover letter, a shortened summary of your teaching philosophy, your teaching interests and strengths, and/or teaching experience will help you introduce your portfolio to the search committee. Keep in mind the requirements for the position; some institutions expect full dossiers from the beginning while others would prefer your portfolio during an interview. In either case, you will have to send a cover letter and, unless you know that they expect your portfolio, the cover letter provides the perfect venue for introducing your portfolio as further evidence of your qualifications for the job.

Conclusion

THE INCREASED DEMAND for use of the Teaching Portfolio by institutions of higher education as a way to measure and predict teaching effectiveness and to document better teaching proficiency proves that these portfolios work. The ever changing landscape of higher education now requires more thorough assessments of teaching effectiveness, and Teaching Portfolios provide a meaningful statement of teaching abilities. A Teaching Portfolio may be used to land your first job, but it is also an efficient way to evaluate continually your teaching as you gain experience in the classroom. Devise a Teaching Portfolio for the survey course you teach every year in order to improve the delivery of the syllabus, transform course content and develop new teaching methods or strategies; create a portfolio for any new courses in order to document its successes and failures; and submit a portfolio for consideration for national, departmental and disciplinary teaching awards and honors. Just as your research demands constant work to remain current and relevant, so too your teaching requires constant development to ensure that it enables your students to learn effectively. Use your Teaching Portfolio as a method to improve your skills, hone your ideas, and develop new strategies and techniques. You will find that your Teaching Portfolio will change with every semester as you take on new teaching challenges; rather than putting off updating your portfolio for job searches, continuously update and think creatively about the content of your portfolio. You will find that it will not only improve your Teaching Portfolio itself, it will also change and improve your teaching.

Appendix: Sample Teaching Portfolios

THE FOLLOWING SAMPLES of Teaching Portfolios are adapted from Peter Seldin's *The Teaching Portfolio* (1991) and *Successful Use of Teaching Portfolios* (1993). Institutional affiliations and details have been omitted, and many aspects have been changed. The purpose of these examples is to provide you with a sense of the breadth of possibilities.

Linda F. Annis³

SAMPLE

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Statement of Teaching Responsibilities and Objectives
Syllabi, Reading Lists, Assignments, Exams, and Handouts
from Courses Taught
Description of Efforts to Improve my Teaching
Peer Evaluation of Both My Teaching and Teaching Skills
Student Teaching Evaluation Data from Courses Taught
Videotapes of My Instruction
Measures of Student Achievement
Other Evidence of Good Teaching
Future Teaching Goals

Appendices

- A: Current Syllabi for All Courses
- B: Representative Course Material
- C: Documentation for My Teaching Improvement Activities
- D: Peer Evaluation and Classroom Observation Reports
- E: Videotape of Courses

3. Seldin, 1993, pp. 33–38.

Linda F. Annis⁴
Department of English

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Donald W. Orr⁵
Department of Mathematics and Physics

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- B: Representative Course Syllabi
- C: Student Feedback: Numerical Data
- D: Student Feedback: Written Comments

4. Seldin, 1993, pp. 136–42.

5. Seldin, 1993, pp. 167–73.

Vivia L. Fowler⁶
Department of Religion

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Statement of Teaching Responsibilities and Objectives

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C: Representative Course Materials

D: Statement from Chairperson of Department

E: Student Evaluation Summaries

F: Student Comments

G: Example of Course Evolution

6. Seldin, 1993, pp. 167-73.

Nina Caris⁷
Department of Biology

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B: Lecture Outlines and Objectives

C: Sample Transparencies and Handouts

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Ronald C. Warner⁸
Department of Modern Languages and Classics

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A: Representative Course Syllabi and Course Materials

B: Peer Evaluations

C: Student Evaluations

D: Awards and Honors

7. Seldin, 1993, pp. 110–16.

8. Seldin, 1993, pp. 144–49.

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The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning

The Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning was founded in 1987 to assist faculty and graduate teaching assistants to improve the quality of undergraduate and graduate instruction within the University. Today, the center supports members of the Brown teaching community in building reflective teaching practices which ensure that a diverse student body has the best possible environment for learning. The Brown curriculum promotes the mutually productive relationship between teaching and research among faculty, graduate students, and undergraduate students. The center plays a crucial role in facilitating the ongoing development of that relationship. The Sheridan Center further seeks to help prepare graduate teaching assistants for productive professional teaching careers after they leave Brown.

To those ends, the Sheridan Center offers a variety of programs, services and publications. Programs include broad-scale teaching forums, the Sheridan Teaching Seminar lecture series and three Sheridan Center Teaching Certificate programs (I: Building a Reflective Teaching Practice, II: Classroom Tools and III: Professional Development Seminar). Consulting Services provide faculty and graduate students with individual feedback on classroom performance, course revision, presentation/conference paper skills, and grant requirements. Through the agency of faculty and graduate student liaisons to academic departments, the center assists with the design and implementation of seminars on discipline-specific teaching and learning. The center also maintains a resource library of books, articles, journals and videotapes on teaching and learning issues for members of the University teaching community.

The Sheridan Center publications include *The Teaching Exchange*, Handbooks and a web site. *The Teaching Exchange* is a bi-annual forum for the exchange of ideas about teaching across the Brown community. Handbooks include *Teaching at Brown*, *Constructing A Syllabus*, *The Teaching*

Portfolio, and *Teaching and Persuasive Communication* and *Teaching to Cognitive Diversity*. The videotape *Effective Teaching for Dyslexic/All College Students* is distributed nationally to facilitate understanding of learning diversity in the classroom. The center's web site offers 24/7 access to information about center activities, on-line editions of all publications, and two unique, interactive, pedagogical workshops. The Sheridan Center also facilitates the exchange of ideas on teaching and learning at Brown between faculty and other individuals and agencies on campus through The Brown Teaching Collaborative.

The Sheridan Center is located at 96 Waterman St., near Thayer St. For information about the Center and resources for teaching at Brown, please contact the Center at: Box 1912; (401) 863-1219; Sheridan_Center@Brown.edu; http://www.brown.edu/sheridan_center/

About the Author

HANNELORE RODRIGUEZ-FARRAR was a Graduate Fellow at Brown University's Harriet W. Sheridan Center for Teaching and Learning, formerly known as the Center for the Advancement of College Teaching (CACT) from September 1993 to September 1995. As the Center Fellow she revised and co-edited *Teaching at Brown: A Handbook for Faculty, Teaching Assistants and Teaching Fellows* and co-edited the CACT handbooks *Report on Instructional Assessment* and *The Syllabus Handbook*. In concert with her Graduate Fellow colleague Nobel Sanjay Rebello, she created the Center's peer Individual Teaching Consultation program. Ms. Rodriguez-Farrar holds a B.A. from Brown University. She is an A.B.D. in the doctoral program in the History of Art and Architecture at Brown. In 1990 she won the Brown University Presidential Award for Excellence in Teaching. She is a member of the Brown University Corporation and is currently completing her Doctorate at the Harvard Graduate School of Education.

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