Creating a teaching portfolio, or dossier, by compiling your teaching materials and related documents gives you a chance to reflect on your accomplishments and to organize information that will be useful in subsequent revisions of the course. Portfolios created for these self-assessment purposes are called working portfolios, developmental portfolios, or portfolio banks.

More selective portfolios may be requested by committees making decisions about employment, promotion, and tenure; these portfolios, which combine materials from several courses, are called presentation portfolios, evaluative portfolios, assessment portfolios, or showcase portfolios.

There are no conventions governing the content of a portfolio; examples of portfolios are available online at the Web sites for Cornell University, University of Nebraska, and University of Massachusetts, among others. The suggestions below address the materials you might compile for yourself and then adapt for a personnel committee for making decisions about merit and promotion.

General Strategies

*Prepare a concise working portfolio for each course you teach.* Place copies of relevant documents in a folder as the term progresses: course syllabus, course materials, sample assignments, exams, and examples of graded student work. Jot down ideas for improving the course as they occur to you, and assemble the portfolio shortly after the end of the term, while your memory is still vivid.

*Include samples of successes and failures.* Careful and judicious selection of materials will help you think more critically about your teaching. Don’t, however, overlook your teaching missteps. Good teachers take risks and experiment with new ideas. As you create your portfolio, reflect critically on what did and didn’t work.

*Keep a teaching file during the term.* Writing regularly about your teaching can contribute to your growth as a teacher. Set up a “next time” file (hard copy or online) for each class you teach, and take five or ten minutes immediately after each session to jot down some comments: At what points did your students seem
puzzled? What questions did they ask? How well did the activities engage them? How well did you allocate the class time? Add a test question that came to mind, and list one or two things you could do to improve this session. Review these notes when you are preparing to teach this course again. (Sources: McKeachie and Svinicki, 2006; Mues and Sorcinelli, 2000)

Components of a Working Portfolio

**Describe the course.** List the course title and course number. How many times have you taught this course? Is the course required or an elective? How does it fit within the department’s curriculum? Were there any course activities that placed special demands on your time (for example, field trips or student projects)?

**Describe your students.** How many students enrolled? Did these students seem more or less engaged, inquisitive, passive, or hardworking than other students you have taught? How many students preregistered for the course but then dropped it? How steady was attendance throughout the term? Did students show up at office hours? Did you make extra efforts to work with students who were not well prepared for the course or with students facing special challenges? Did you make extra efforts to work with your best students?

**Write a succinct self-assessment of your teaching in this course.** Self-assessments generally include four components: (1) the goals of the course, (2) your teaching philosophy and methods, (3) the effects of your course on students’ learning, and (4) your plans for improvement.

**Goals.** What were your goals in teaching the course? How well did the course meet these goals? What problems did you encounter in attempting to meet these goals? Here are examples of goals (adapted from materials on Web sites at Iowa State University, Carnegie Mellon University, and Indiana University/Purdue University at Indianapolis):

- helping students learn factual knowledge, fundamental principles, and ways to apply course material in new situations
- fostering critical thinking (ability to analyze ideas and information from multiple perspectives)
- facilitating the acquisition of lifelong learning skills
- developing problem-solving skills
- expanding creative capacities (inventing, designing, performing in art, music, or drama)
• strengthening writing
• helping students express themselves orally
• developing skills in interpreting or expressing concepts using visual or mathematical representations

Philosophy and methods. Write a brief statement about the values that inform your teaching. What imperatives guide your teaching? What do you do to help students learn? How are your goals translated into action? How did your choice of teaching strategies relate to your goals? How did your methods take into account the level and abilities of your students? What were your grading policies? What changes did you make in topics, readings, or assignments for a course you have taught repeatedly? How well did those changes work? (Sources: Chism, 1997–98; Coppola, 2002)

Because teaching is personal, you may want to draft your statement of philosophy before looking at the examples of others. If you are stumped, try to answer these questions (Korn, 2003): What are the characteristics of the best and worst teachers you have had? What metaphor would describe your teaching? If you decide you want to see examples, search the Web or your university’s Web site (using “teaching philosophy” or “teaching statements”) or see Tollefson and Davis (2002).

Effects. Describe how your teaching encouraged independent thinking, intellectual development, and students’ enthusiasm for the subject matter. How did you know whether students were gaining competence and learning the material? What evidence do you have of student learning? How many students demonstrated understanding and at what levels? What misconceptions did students have and how did you address these? How well did student work meet your intellectual goals for the course? (Source: Bernstein, 2002)

Improvement. What were the strong and weak points of the course and your teaching? What would you do differently next time? What did you find most interesting about this course? Most frustrating? In addition, list any specific ideas you have for improving your teaching.

Compile selected course material. Include copies of the course syllabus, examinations and assignments, course reader, handouts, and your teaching notes. Annotate the materials to give details about how you used them and your candid assessment of their effectiveness. Look critically at the materials to identify the kinds of intellectual tasks you set for students. Do the materials reflect adequate breadth and depth? Your commentary might respond to the following kinds of questions:

• Are fundamental concepts and core principles adequately addressed so that students can understand advanced ideas and research in the field?
• Is the treatment of the subject matter consistent with the latest research and thinking in the field? Is this material valuable and worth knowing?
• Are the topics logically sequenced? Does each topic receive appropriate attention relative to other topics?
• Do the readings represent the best work in the field? Do they offer diverse, up-to-date views? Are the reading assignments appropriate in level and length?
• Are the assignments effectively coordinated with the syllabus and well integrated into the course? Are they appropriate in frequency?
• Do the tests and exams give students a fair opportunity to demonstrate their abilities? Do they adequately cover the subject matter? Do test questions assess students’ abilities to apply concepts as well as the accuracy of their recall?
• Are the standards for grading clearly communicated to students? Is the grading fair and consistent? Are written comments on papers constructive and helpful?

Include representative examples of student learning. As appropriate, include the distribution of students’ scores on tests; samples of students’ work with your comments; successive drafts of student papers with your comments for improvement; graded work from the best and poorest students in the course; and student publications and presentations done under your auspices. Remember to obtain students’ permission to keep copies of their papers, lab books, assignments, or reports.

Describe any instructional innovation or experiments you undertook. Whether your experiments were successful or not, discuss what you tried to do, and the effect on students and on your teaching. Include any efforts to get feedback from students during the term and changes you made in response; see Chapter 32, “Informally Assessing Students’ Learning” and Chapter 52, “Early Feedback to Improve Teaching and Learning.”

Comment on student ratings from the course. Include a copy of the student rating form and results, noting the response rate (the percentage of your students who turned in questionnaires). Respond briefly and candidly to the students’ evaluations and critiques, commenting on those aspects with which you agree and will change in the next offering and those with which you disagree; see Chapter 60, “Student Rating Forms.”

Assess your role with your graduate student instructors. If you worked with graduate student instructors (GSIs), review your role in guiding, supervising, and
evaluating them. What did you do that was especially effective in helping them learn how to teach? What did the GSIs do that was especially helpful to students or to you? How satisfied were you with the GSIs' teaching performance? What would you do differently if you taught this course again? See Chapter 58, "Guiding, Training, Supervising, and Mentoring Graduate Student Instructors."

**Add any evaluations by reviewers or observers.** If colleagues or instructional consultants observed your course, interviewed your students, or reviewed your teaching materials, include their notes in your portfolio. If appropriate, add statements from faculty in your department or elsewhere on campus regarding the levels of preparation of your students for subsequent courses.

**House your hard-copy portfolio in a convenient form.** Store materials in labeled folders in a file drawer or box it in a way that will be easy to update the next time you teach the course. A three-ring binder may also work well. Date all materials, and create a brief table of contents.

**Create an electronic portfolio.** Compared to hard copies, electronic materials are easier to update, navigate, and disseminate. An electronic portfolio can also include video and audio, or links to multimedia material. With an electronic portfolio, it is even more important to limit the amount of information and to organize it. Barrett (2003) describes how to create an electronic portfolio; examples of e-portfolios, pros and cons, and tools and resources are described in Batson (2002), Heath (2005), and Lorenzo and Ittelson (2005). The Open Source Portfolio Initiative (www.osportfolio.org), designed to work with the Sakai Project (www.sakaiproject.org), offers free software and templates and tools for faculty interested in developing e-portfolios. The Knowledge Lab at the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching and Learning contains galleries of multimedia teaching portfolios and KEEP, a free toolkit (www.CarnegieFoundation.org/KML/KEEP/index.htm).

### Presentation Portfolios

**Find out what your institution requires and how portfolios are evaluated.** Some observers (Burns, 1999, 2000; Pratt, 2005; Wright et al., 1999) have raised concerns about using portfolios for decisions about merit and promotion: faculty and administrators may not know how to review portfolios; there is scant research on the reliability and validity of faculty judgments with this type of data; portfolios can be time consuming to review; and reviewers' own philosophies of teaching
may unduly influence their evaluations. Other observers (Braskamp and Ory, 1994; Centra, 2000; Zubizarreta, 1999) believe that portfolios can provide useful information when multiple reviewers work from clearly defined standards for evaluation. Quinlan (2002) analyzes how academics review a colleague's portfolio, noting that reviewers tend to pay the most attention to student evaluations, the self-reflective essay, and the course syllabus. Quinlan also recommends that faculty whose teaching practices are unorthodox explain their rationale for reviewers. Bernstein's guidelines (2002) for peer review of course portfolios focus on four areas for evaluation: the course's intellectual content, the quality of teaching practice, the quality of student understanding, and the quality of self-reflection and development.

**Include materials that demonstrate your broad contributions.** Present your teaching contributions, both inside and outside the classroom. Organize the materials in a way that exemplifies your thinking about teaching, your current responsibilities, and your efforts to improve your performance. Provide a table of contents and a brief executive summary. A presentation portfolio could include some of the following (adapted from Braskamp and Ory, 1994; Knapper and Wright, 2001; Mues and Sorcinelli, 2000; Murray, 1995; O'Neil and Wright, 1995; and Seldin, 2004):

- description of teaching responsibilities (courses taught, enrollments, frequencies, office hours and advising, efforts to involve students in research and publications)
- statement of teaching philosophy, values, and beliefs
- discussion of teaching objectives, strategies, and methodologies
- representative instructional materials (syllabi, exams, assignments, course readers, course Web sites, handouts)
- evaluation activities conducted during the term (feedback on teaching and learning)
- end-of-term evaluations of your teaching by students
- classroom observations by faculty peers or administrators
- review of teaching materials by internal or external colleagues
- evidence of students' learning (assignments with your comments, graded exams, other assessments)
- efforts to improve teaching (innovations, curricular revisions, conferences or workshops attended, grants for improving teaching and learning)
- contributions to the institution or profession (publications on teaching, participation in school partnerships to improve student learning)
- teaching recognition and awards
Strive for brevity. Keep your comments succinct, and present only those materials and documents that are accompanied by thoughtful analysis and reflection. Researchers recommend limiting text to ten pages, exclusive of appendices. (Source: Knapper and Wright, 2001)

Show self-awareness, but don’t be overly self-critical. You are unlikely to be rewarded for focusing on your weaknesses. Showcase your best work, and cast it in the best light. Nonetheless, your institution is likely to welcome some degree of candor, which should be accompanied by your plans for improvement. (Source: Murray, 1995)

References


