THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Matthew Kaplan

At institutions across the country, faculty are creating opportunities to exchange ideas on teaching and, in the process, becoming more reflective about their teaching. In part, this is a response to national discussions about the false dichotomy that is often drawn between teaching and research. To move beyond this debate, there have been calls for expanding the idea of scholarship to include certain teaching products, as well as research products (Boyer, 1990). Three strategies for taking a scholarly approach to reviews of teaching are ones that are common to discussions of research as well (Shulman, 1993). First, scholarship is firmly grounded in the disciplines, and a scholarly approach to the review of teaching would focus on the teaching of a specific discipline. Second, just as research becomes scholarship when it is shared, faculty would need to begin making teaching community property. And finally, scholarship often involves making judgments about faculty work, which, for teaching, would mean that faculty would become more involved in reviewing each others' accomplishments in teaching and learning.

The teaching portfolio is one of the tools faculty can use to document their scholarly work in teaching. This Occasional Paper contains a discussion of the nature and purpose of the teaching portfolio (and its offshoot, the course portfolio) and suggestions for how individuals and units can use portfolios most effectively.

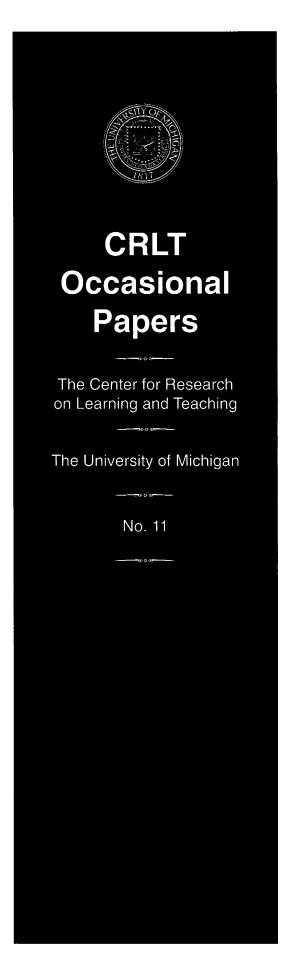## What Is a Teaching Portfolio?

A record of accomplishments in teaching

Based on the model of the portfolio kept by artists and architects, the teaching portfolio contains evidence of a faculty member's achievements in teaching: "What is a teaching portfolio? It includes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance. . . .The portfolio is not an exhaustive compilation of all of the documents and materials that bear on teaching performance. Instead, it presents *selected information* on teaching activities and *solid evidence* of their effectiveness" (Seldin, 1997, p. 2).

Documentation in context

The portfolio should be more than a simple collection of documents.

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It also should contain reflective statements on the material included and on the faculty member's approach to teaching and student learning. The reflective portions of the portfolio help set the documents in context for the reader; the materials provide evidence to back up the assertions made in the reflective statement.

What Might Go into a Portfolio?

When considering the contents of a portfolio, faculty must distinguish clearly between being *representative* and being *exhaustive*. Attempts to create an exhaustive compendium of an instructor's work in teaching run the risk of becoming exhausting, both for the person collecting the materials and for any readers who might choose (or need) to respond to the portfolio. Furthermore, the attempt to be completely comprehensive can turn the project of developing a portfolio into a paper chase. Such a large collection of documents makes it difficult to maintain the reflective aspect of the portfolio, which is one of its chief purposes and advantages.

The portfolio should, instead, be representative of the various aspects of a faculty member's teaching. This means looking beyond the most obvious part of teaching — what goes on in the classroom. While the activities and interactions with students in class are important, they do not fully reflect faculty work with teaching. Other items might include planning courses, assessing student learning, advising students (in office hours or in larger projects such as theses and dissertations), curriculum development and assessment, supervising student research, working to improve one's teaching, and publishing articles on teaching and learning.

One way to categorize items that a faculty member might include is to divide them into three categories based on the source of the item: materials from oneself (e.g., reflective statements, descriptions of course responsibilities, syllabi, assignments), materials from others (e.g., statements from colleagues who have observed or reviewed teaching materials, student ratings, letters from students or alumni, honors or recognition); and products of good teaching (student essays or creative work, a record of students who have succeeded in the field, evidence of supervision of theses). Some of these sources may be more appropriate for certain aspects of teaching than for others. See Appendix A for a more comprehensive list.

Purposes of Portfolios

Self-reflection and improvement

Assembling a portfolio involves reflection. Most portfolios include a reflective statement that can cover topics such as the instructor's approach to teaching and learning, his or her

assumptions about the roles of students and teachers, and goals the instructor expects students to achieve (Chism, 1997-1998). In addition, faculty need to collect documents that support their reflective statement, a process that also involves reflection (selecting some items over others, reviewing past work, etc.). As a result, the portfolio is well-suited to helping faculty examine their goals for teaching and student learning, and compare those goals to the reality of their praxis.

The comparison between the ideal and the real is the first step in the process of improving teaching. Instructors can gain a sense of how effective their teaching is and how they could improve from a variety of sources: student ratings of instruction, midsemester feedback, self-perception, discussions with colleagues, etc. By constructing a portfolio, faculty will look systematically at the various sources of data about their teaching; therefore, they can make more informed decisions about teaching strengths on which they wish to build and problems in their teaching they wish to address. The reflection and improvement process can be further enhanced when faculty work together (in pairs or small groups) as they develop their portfolios. Colleagues can offer support and advice, exchange new ideas and solutions to problems, and broaden each other's views of the teaching and learning process. Moreover, such exchanges help create a community of scholarship around teaching that is based on a concrete, discipline-specific context.

Decision making

Accomplishments in teaching are becoming a more important factor in administrative decisions such as tenure, promotion, reappointment, and merit increases. The teaching portfolio enables faculty and departments to insure that an instructor's work in teaching is judged using multiple forms of evaluation, seen by multiple eyes. This is important, since no one perspective can accurately represent faculty teaching. For instance, students can evaluate certain aspects of teaching that focus on classroom interactions, such as organization, rapport, and ability to stimulate discussion. On the other hand, faculty colleagues are in a position to judge items that are beyond the expertise of students, such as how up-to-date material is, how well a course is integrated into the curriculum, etc.

Self-evaluation and reflection are also important, especially for providing a context for understanding data about teaching effectiveness. The portfolio as a whole gives individual faculty a sense of control over the evaluation process. In addition, departments that encourage faculty to

submit portfolios will need to have discussions about what, if any, documents will be required and what will be left up to the individual faculty; how long the document can (or should) be; and how much reflection is required. Such discussions provide a useful venue for creating a shared sense of what constitutes good teaching in a department.

Graduate student portfolios

Graduate students who apply for faculty positions commonly use portfolios because many colleges and universities now require job applicants to provide some proof of teaching experience. Graduate students are turning to the portfolio as a way of organizing their work in this area. Currently, the requirements vary widely among schools. Some require just a list of courses taught or a reflective statement on teaching, and some ask for specific items (such as proposed syllabi for certain types of courses, student ratings, demonstrations of commitment to undergraduate research, etc.). The earlier in their teaching careers that graduate students begin to think about their portfolios, the more chance they will have to retrieve the documents they find most representative of their accomplishments. Aside from its value for the job market, the portfolio often represents the first time graduate students have had the opportunity to reflect on their teaching, which they often find both challenging and rewarding.

An Alternative to the Teaching Portfolio: Course Portfolios

A variation on the teaching portfolio is a course portfolio. As the name implies, these documents focus on a specific course, with a special emphasis on student learning. A course portfolio, therefore, is analogous to a scholarly project. It includes sections on goals (intended student learning outcomes), methods (teaching approaches used to achieve outcomes), and results (evidence of student learning) for a specific course.

> Moreover, it is the relationship or congruence among these elements that makes for effectiveness. We expect a research project to shed light on the questions and issues that shape it; we expect the methods used in carrying out the project to be congruent with the outcomes sought. And the same can be said of teaching.

> By encompassing and connecting all three elements – planning, implementation, and results – the course portfolio has the distinctive advantage of representing the intellectual integrity of teaching. (Cerbin, 1993, p. 51)

Course portfolios offer advantages for the person developing them as well as for the curriculum. For the faculty member developing the portfolio, the advantages are similar to those of assembling a teaching portfolio (e.g., self-reflection and a chance to compare intentions with outcomes), but with more in-depth insight into the impact of teaching on students. For departments, course portfolios can provide continuity and reveal gaps in the curriculum. For example, a course portfolio becomes a record of the purpose and results of a course that can be passed on to the next person in charge of that course or to the faculty member who teaches the next course in a sequence. By examining a set of course portfolios, a curriculum committee can gain an overview of what students are learning and what is missing, which could help with the process of curriculum revision.

How are Portfolios Evaluated?

Just as there is no one model for a teaching portfolio, there is no one method for evaluation. Again, this is a strength of the portfolio, since it means that individual units will need to develop criteria for evaluation and make them relevant to faculty in that unit. The process of deciding on criteria can also help to clarify what faculty in that unit value with respect to teaching. For one example of an evaluation scheme, see Appendix B.

As units develop criteria for evaluating portfolios, they should first consider the ways they plan to use the portfolio. Will portfolios be limited to faculty being considered for tenure or promotion or for instructors nominated for teaching awards, or will all faculty prepare a course portfolio in preparation for a department-wide curriculum review? These purposes differ and so should the requirements for the portfolios involved.

Once the purpose is clear, faculty will probably want to create guidelines for assembling portfolios. While it is important to maintain the flexibility of the portfolio, it is also necessary to insure some degree of consistency in order to make evaluation fairer and more reliable.

Faculty might establish consensus on required items, such as a page limit for the overall size of the portfolio, the focus (a single course, an overview of teaching, or a combination), opportunities for reflection, or a template (so that faculty do not need to worry about format and can concentrate instead on the content). Ideally, such guidelines will be established with input from potential reviewers in the unit as well as those faculty who will be under review.

Advantages of Portfolios

In the AAHE monograph *The Teaching Portfolio: Capturing the Scholarship of Teaching*, the authors describe four main benefits of the teaching portfolio (Edgerton, Hutchings, & Quinlan, 1991, pp. 4-6). Course portfolios have similar attributes.

1. *Capturing the complexity of teaching*

- Portfolios contain evidence and reflection in the context of what is being taught to whom under what conditions.
- The portfolio can present a view of a teacher's development over time.
- Entries in the portfolio can be annotated to explain their significance for the faculty member's teaching.

2. *Placing responsibility for evaluation in the hands of faculty*

- Faculty are actively involved in presenting their own teaching accomplishments so that evaluation is not something done "to" them.
- Portfolios extend evaluation beyond student ratings and encourage peer review and collaboration.
- The need to evaluate portfolios can lead to discussions on standards for effective teaching.

3. *Encouraging improvement and reflection*

- Assembling a portfolio involves reflection.
- Because they involve reflection, portfolios allow faculty to compare their ideals with their actions, a first step in efforts to improve.
- A faculty member's portfolio reveals both products (evidence) and processes (reflection) of teaching to colleagues who read it.

4. *Fostering a culture of teaching*

- Portfolios can provide a rich and contextualized source of evidence about teaching achievements that can be used for a variety of purposes, including evaluation, improvement, summary of faculty careers, and defining "good teaching" in a department.

How Can Faculty Get Started?

Faculty can begin at any time to collect materials for their portfolios. At first, this process might entail simply saving relevant materials related to teaching so that they are readily accessible for review. At some point the faculty member will need to sort through the materials and decide which ones best represent his or her teaching accomplishments. Often this process is enhanced when faculty collaborate with each other as they build their portfolios.

CRLT offers campus-wide workshops on teaching and course portfolios, and we can bring a customized workshop to departments. The focus of the workshop is to help faculty develop a clear idea of what a portfolio is and what items it might include and to give faculty an opportunity to begin a reflective statement on teaching. When workshops are conducted in a department, faculty can begin to answer the question, "What is good teaching in our department?" CRLT also provides one-on-one consultations for individual faculty who are working on their portfolios and for units as they develop a systematic approach to portfolios.

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Possible items for inclusion

Faculty members should recognize which of the items which might be included in a teaching dossier would most effectively give a favorable impression of teaching competence and which might better be used for self-evaluation and improvement. The dossier should be compiled to make the best possible case for teaching effectiveness.

THE PRODUCTS OF GOOD TEACHING

1. Students' scores on teacher-made or standardized tests, possibly before and after a course has been taken as evidence of learning.
2. Student laboratory workbooks and other kinds of workbooks or logs.
3. Student essays, creative work, and project or field-work reports.
4. Publications by students on course-related work.
5. A record of students who select and succeed in advanced courses of study in the field.
6. A record of students who elect another course with the same professor.
7. Evidence of effective supervision of Honors, Master's or Ph.D. theses.
8. Setting up or running a successful internship program.
9. Documentary evidence of the effect of courses on student career choice.
10. Documentary evidence of help given by the professor to students in securing employment.
11. Evidence of help given to colleagues on teaching improvement.

MATERIAL FROM ONESELF

Descriptive material on current and recent teaching responsibilities and practices.

12. List of course titles and numbers, unit values or credits, enrollments with brief elaboration.
13. List of course materials prepared for students.
14. Information on professor's availability to students.
15. Report on identification of student difficulties and encouragement of student participation in courses or programs.
16. Description of how films, computers or other nonprint materials were used in teaching.
17. Steps taken to emphasize the interrelatedness and relevance of different kinds of learning.

Description of steps taken to evaluate and improve one's teaching.

18. Maintaining a record of the changes resulting from self-evaluation.
19. Reading journals on improving teaching and attempting to implement acquired ideas.
20. Reviewing new teaching materials for possible application.
21. Exchanging course materials with a colleague from another institution.
22. Conducting research on one's own teaching or course.
23. Becoming involved in an association or society concerned with the improvement of teaching and learning.
24. Attempting instructional innovations and evaluating their effectiveness.
25. Using general support services such as the Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) in improving one's teaching.
26. Participating in seminars, workshops and professional meetings intended to improve teaching.
27. Participating in course or curriculum development.
28. Pursuing a line of research that contributes directly to teaching.
29. Preparing a textbook or other instructional materials.
30. Editing or contributing to a professional journal on teaching one's subject.

INFORMATION FROM OTHERS
Students:

31. Student course and teaching evaluation data which suggest improvements or produce an overall rating of effectiveness or satisfaction.
32. Written comments from a student committee to evaluate courses and provide feedback.
33. Unstructured (and possibly unsolicited) written evaluations by students, including written comments on exams and letters received after a course has been completed.
34. Documented reports of satisfaction with out-of-class contacts.
35. Interview data collected from students after completion of a course.
36. Honors received from students, such as being elected "teacher of the year".

Colleagues:

37. Statements from colleagues who have observed teaching either as members of a teaching team or as independent observers of a particular course, or who teach other sections of the same course.
38. Written comments from those who teach courses for which a particular course is a prerequisite.
39. Evaluation of contributions to course development and improvement.
40. Statements from colleagues from other institutions on such matters as how well students have been prepared for graduate studies.
41. Honors or recognition such as a distinguished teacher award or election to a committee on teaching.
42. Requests for advice or acknowledgement of advice received by a committee on teaching or similar body.

Other sources:

43. Statements about teaching achievements from administrators at one's own institution or from other institutions.
44. Alumni ratings or other graduate feedback.
45. Comments from parents of students.
46. Reports from employers of students (e.g., in a work-study or "cooperative" program).
47. Invitations to teach for outside agencies.
48. Invitations to contribute to the teaching literature.
49. Other kinds of invitations based on one's reputation as a teacher (for example, a media interview on a successful teaching innovation).

Appendix A

Note: From *The Teaching Dossier: A Guide to Its Preparation and Use* (pp. 14-23) by B. Shore, S. Foster, C. Knapper, G. Nadeau, N. Neill, and V. Sim, 1986, Ottawa, Ontario: Canadian Association of University Teachers. Reprinted by permission.

SUGGESTED FORM FOR PEER REVIEW OF UNDERGRADUATE TEACHING BASED ON DOSSIER MATERIALS

QUESTION	DOSSIER MATERIALS	SUGGESTED FOCUS IN EXAMINING DOSSIER MATERIALS
1. What is the quality of materials used in teaching?	Course outline Syllabus Reading list Text used Study guide Description of non-print materials Hand-outs Problem sets Assignments	Are these materials current? Do they represent the best work in the field? Are they adequate and appropriate to course goals? Do they represent superficial or thorough coverage of course content?

Peer Reviewer's Rating: Low____|____|____|____|____|____|____ Very High

Comments _____

_____

| 2. What kind of intellectual tasks were set by the teacher for the students (or did the teacher succeed in geeting students to set for themselves). And how did the students perform? | Copies of graded examinations
Examples of graded research papers
Examples of teacher's feedback to students on written work
Grade distribution
Descriptions of student performances, e.g., class presentation, etc.
Examples of completed assignments | What was the level of intellectual performance achieved by the students?
What kind of work was given an A? a B? a C?
Did the students learn what the department curriculum expected for this course?
How adequately do the tests or assignments represent the kinds of student performance specified in the course objectives? |

Peer Reviewer's Rating: Low____|____|____|____|____|____|____ Very High

Comments _____

_____

| 3. How knowledgeable is this faculty member in subjects taught? | Evidence in teaching materials
Record of attendance at regional or national meetings
Record of colloquia or lectures given | Has the instructor kept in thoughtful contact with developments in his or her field?
Is there evidence of acquaintance with the ideas and findings of other scholars?
(This question addresses the scholarship necessary to good teaching. It is *not* concered with scholarly research publication.) |

Peer Reviewer's Rating: Low____|____|____|____|____|____|____ Very High

Comments _____

_____

| 4. Has this faculty member assumed responsibilities related to the department's or University's teaching mission? | Record of service on department curriculum committee, honors program, advising board of teaching support service, special committees (e.g., to examine grading policies, admission standards, etc.)
Description of activities in supervising graduate students learning to teach.
Evidence of design of new courses. | Has he or she become a departmental or college citizen in regard to teaching responsibilities?
Does this faculty member recognize problems that hinder good teaching and does he or she take a responsible part in trying to solve them?
Is the involvement of the faculty member appropriate to his or her academic level? (e.g., assistant professors may sometimes become over-involved to the detriment of their scholarly and teaching activities.) |

Peer Reviewer's Rating: Low____|____|____|____|____|____|____ Very High

Comments _____

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| 5. To what extent is this faculty member trying to achieve excellence in teaching? | Factual statement of what activities the faculty member has engaged in to improve his or her teaching.
Examples of questionnaires used for formative purposes.
Examples of changes made on the basis of feedback. | Has he or she sought feedback about teaching quality, explored alternative teaching methods, made changes to increase student learning?
Has he or she sought aid in trying new teaching ideas?
Has he or she developed special teaching materials or participated in cooperative efforts aimed at upgrading teaching quality? |

Peer Reviewer's Rating: Low____|____|____|____|____|____|____ Very High

Comments _____

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Peer Reviewer's Signature _____

Date _____

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Appendix B

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CRLT Occasional Paper No. 11

**The Center for Research
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