



## PREPARING YOUR TEACHING PORTFOLIO

### WHAT IS A TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

A teaching portfolio is a record of your professional development as a teacher. It illustrates your philosophy of teaching and your overall approach to teaching and professional development.

*“It is a collection of materials that document teaching performance. The portfolio is to teaching what lists of publications, grants and honours are to research and scholarship” (Seldin, 2004: 3).*

Typically, it is a personal record of your teaching experience and your reflective practice over your career. More importantly, preparing a teaching portfolio requires teaching beliefs and practices to be put under the microscope with the aim of rendering explicit knowledge which may currently be implicit, and framing teaching itself as a source of scholarly enquiry (Boyer, 1990; Schön, 1995; Lyons, 2002). While your portfolio makes a case for who you are as a teacher, it should not be confused with a teaching CV. Good teaching portfolios are reflective documents, which provide a coherent narrative of the teacher’s professional journey. This narrative uses evidence which clearly substantiates the commentary made about this journey, and reflects on the impact that teaching has on student learning.

### WHAT IS ITS PURPOSE?

Teaching portfolios have two particular purposes according to Mues & Sorcinelli (2000):

- A developmental *process* for reflecting on and improving one’s teaching;
- An evaluative *product* for personnel decisions such as tenure, promotion, or a teaching award.

However, best practice recommends that regardless of promotional opportunities, it is important to develop and maintain your portfolio. It is a very useful document to have at various points in your career and will help you to focus on developing your skills and abilities as a teacher. It is a process which encourages us to think about our teaching and to reflect on our approach to teaching and how this may have evolved over time. It also helps to reinforce our worth as educators when we reflect on the teaching and related activities over the course of an academic year.

Seldin (2003) puts forward the following reasons for preparing a teaching portfolio:



- to gather and present hard evidence and specific data about teaching effectiveness to tenure and promotion committees;
- to provide the needed structure for self reflection about areas of teaching that may need improvement;
- to foster an academic environment where discussion about teaching practices become the norm;
- to apply for teaching awards;
- to present as part of documentation submitted for a job search;
- to share teaching expertise and experience with new faculty members.

### WHO SHOULD HAVE A TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

Ideally anyone with teaching responsibilities should have a teaching portfolio which is maintained and updated regularly. This helps to ensure that professional development is recorded and allows for reflective practice to occur.

### DEVELOPING YOUR TEACHING PORTFOLIO

In devising a teaching portfolio, the purpose will dictate content, e.g. who the audience (if any) will be, what it is required for, etc. This factsheet refers to best practice when compiling a portfolio for award purposes or for formative development. Typically, an award based portfolio should contain quite extensive reflective dimensions. Please note that the current UL promotional framework and application template now refers to these CTL portfolio guidelines. **For the purposes of promotion, statements of teaching achievements and competence should be briefer, should emphasise factual, verifiable evidence of teaching excellence, and typically include fewer references to one's own reflections about teaching.** It is however, useful to use similar sources of demonstrable information listed on the CTL website: student evaluations of teaching, focus group feedback, peer observations, teaching analysis feedback, and award nominations and successes at institutional, regional, national or international levels.

The following standard section headings are suggested for inclusion in the portfolio. These are:

1. Statement of Teaching Philosophy
2. Teaching Performance and Effectiveness
3. Planning and Preparation
4. Assessment and Examination of Student Learning
5. Professional Development: Past, Present and Future

Portfolios should not exceed 4,000 words in length (excluding appendices).

## WHAT IS INCLUDED IN A TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

When you are choosing materials and artefacts to demonstrate how your teaching has been effective, it is important to provide variety. Student Evaluations of Teaching are certainly valuable, but they will need to be complemented with other evidence if you wish provide a comprehensive view of your teaching. Think about engaging in peer observation of teaching, or including comments from external examiners.

While teaching portfolios are unique to each teacher, the following five section headings should help direct you in terms of what to include, and should provide a helpful framework within which to document and reflect on your teaching.

### 1. Introduction: Statement of teaching philosophy

The teaching philosophy is a statement about how you view teaching and your personal orientation towards teaching and learning within your academic discipline. In effect, this is the part of your portfolio where you present your ideological stance on teaching.

O' Farrell highlights a number of questions to reflect on when considering your personal philosophy:

- What are my goals as a teacher?
- What demonstrates my desire to grow as a teacher?
- What are the opportunities and constraints under which I learn and others learn?
- Has my approach to teaching changed?
- What role do my students play in the classroom (listeners, participants etc.)?
- What teaching practices do I use and prefer? Why?

It is important to distil your beliefs about teaching down to their essence. As your teaching philosophy is a personal statement, it can be presented in the first person. It is also a good idea to elucidate at this point how long you have taught for, and your specific context of teaching e.g. the discipline within which you teach.

As you develop your teaching portfolio, it useful to think about how your teaching philosophy is reflected in your practices, and how you are illustrating that.

### 2. Teaching performance and effectiveness

Highlight and discuss the key disciplines you teach and describe your delivery strategies, evaluation of the quality of teaching and how you would describe the teacher/class relationship.

- Versatility, volume and level of teaching  
It is a good idea to clearly outline your teaching roles and responsibilities, including course/module titles, and whether they are undergraduate or postgraduate etc.
- Range of delivery strategies and quality of delivery

How do you deliver your modules? Why do you elect to use this strategy, and how does it impact on student learning?

How do you evaluate and reflect on whether these strategies have been successful?

- Teacher/class relationship

What sort of classroom dynamic do you aim to develop? How and why do you do this, and what indications do you have that you have been successful?

### 3. Planning and preparation

Describe the teaching and learning methods you employ and the teaching materials you use (case studies, handouts, visual aids, labs, etc.)

- Teaching and learning methods

How do you develop and deliver an effective learning experience for your students?

- Teaching materials

What is the rationale behind the materials you use in class?

### 4. Assessment and examination of student learning

Describe your approach to assessment and discuss any innovative assessment strategies or materials which you have developed:

- Assessment strategies

What range of specific assessment strategies do you use? How do these strategies complement the learning outcomes of your module or course? What impact does assessment have on your students? How do you provide feedback for your students?

- Innovation in assessment

Have you designed new and effective methods of assessment? You may wish to include samples of students' work.

### 5. Professional Development: Past, present and future

This section is included to give you an opportunity to reflect upon and discuss how your teaching has developed during the course of your career and your plans for future professional development. A brief closing section could include your thoughts about the experience of preparing the portfolio and how it has affected your teaching practice, or any concluding remarks you consider appropriate.

Include detail on activities that demonstrate your commitment to professional development, or that demonstrate the regard that your professional peers hold for you. For example, you might include information on the following:

- Invitations to teach elsewhere (as guest lecturer);
- Publications in pedagogical journals;
- Publications of student textbooks or teaching software;
- Leadership in team teaching, contribution to the development of teaching within the University or elsewhere;

- Professional service to other Universities (as external examiner, subject expert or adviser/consultant);
- Teaching appointments such as visiting professorships/lectureship;
- Participation in third level teaching and learning training or workshops.

#### FORMAT OF THE FINAL PORTFOLIO

It is useful to approach your portfolio as you would any piece of academic writing in terms of presentation. Ensure that you include the following:

- Title page and table of contents;
- Headings and subheadings that clearly signpost the material for the reader;
- References, where appropriate, to material in appendices;
- Evidence to support every statement on your approach or contribution to teaching.

#### NOTES

- Since the portfolio is a narrative, make sure that all supporting evidence included in the portfolio (e.g., quantitative results of SET evaluations) is incorporated into the textual flow of the document.
- If you have been *shortlisted* for a regional award, you will be asked to include a teaching DVD in your submission. In this case, you should also include a short section in your portfolio that provides the context of the class/lecture/lab etc. you have recorded and a discussion of how it fits with the teaching narrative of the overall portfolio.

#### IN SUMMARY: GENERAL TIPS FOR MAINTAINING A TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Seldin (2004: 21) offers some useful tips for developing and maintaining your portfolio in order to increase effectiveness:

1. Include date of portfolio
2. Include a detailed table of contents
3. Add a list of appendix items
4. Include specific dates for courses taught
5. Use specific examples to illustrate points
6. Integrate material from the faculty member, material from others and products of student learning
7. Explain the evidence in the portfolio
8. Limit number of student comments
9. Include names and titles of people to whom you refer
10. Use page numbers

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