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Introduction

A teaching portfolio is a coherent and comprehensive set of materials representing an individual’s teaching practice as it relates to student learning. Teaching portfolios vary considerably depending on numerous factors, including personal preference. In fact, the items that an educator elects to place in a teaching portfolio often communicate much about that individual’s values with respect to teaching and learning. The University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill considers teaching portfolios to be truly personalized documents. In fact, the only elements considered to be requirements are a compilation of teaching activity (student contact in all forms of teaching reported by semester) and the results of teaching evaluations. Thus, faculty members are provided wide latitude regarding the structure and content of their teaching portfolios. However, the maintenance of an updated teaching portfolio is an expectation of the University.

The elements of a good teaching portfolio may be subdivided into three general categories:

1. A reflective statement of teaching philosophy and goals. This statement is the individual’s opportunity to articulate clearly what she or he values as an educator, as well as expectations of students in the learning environment. To the extent possible, value statements should be supported by appended material. For example, if a faculty member indicates that “improving critical thinking” is highly valued, it is helpful to point to documentation elsewhere in the portfolio (appended material perhaps) demonstrating that strategies designed to improve critical thinking have been incorporated into the overall educational strategy.

2. A summary of teaching activities to date. This section logically would focus on quantitative aspects of teaching activities: number of contact hours, number of students, and outcomes of teaching evaluations. Such a summary should include teaching in all of its relevant forms, not simply classroom activities. In addition, this section may include a brief discussion of teaching methods and strategies, a summary of course development or re-design activities, and a description of actions undertaken by the individual to improve teaching effectiveness.

3. A self-assessment and statement of goals and plans for the future. An identification by the individual of her or his perceived strengths and weaknesses helps to place the aggregate teaching activities in an appropriate context. This self-assessment should draw in part, of course, upon evaluations provided by students and, where applicable, by peers. Plans for the future should be related at least in part to this self-evaluation in order to build upon areas of strength and to improve areas of weakness.

In most cases, the body of the portfolio is of modest size (less than 10 pages), and is accompanied by appended material. The appendices would consist of supplemental materials that further document or support the information provided in the body of the portfolio.
What are Teaching Portfolios used for in the School of Pharmacy

The requirement that each faculty member maintain an updated teaching portfolio grew from a mandate by the state legislature ¹. At minimum, it was viewed as a mechanism by which a faculty member could demonstrate relevance to the citizens of North Carolina. We hope, of course, that a teaching portfolio will be of significant value to the individual faculty member, as it provides a framework for reflection, self-evaluation, and planning relative to the central mission of our School. While teaching portfolios can serve a variety of purposes, in the School of Pharmacy they have been used primarily for assessing teaching effectiveness during consideration for reappointment, promotion, or the granting of tenure. In some cases, teaching portfolios have been used as part of the documentation for annual reviews. Often, such portfolios provide core material for evaluation of a candidate for competitive teaching awards.

General Guidelines to Developing a Teaching Portfolio

Start now! Many components of a teaching portfolio are difficult to obtain after a course or other teaching activity is complete. Collecting this information continuously makes assembling and updating the portfolio much easier. As the portfolio is assembled, the faculty member should:

- Give a fair and accurate presentation of the record as an educator. The positives should be highlighted, of course, but the negatives should not be omitted.
- Be selective regarding which materials are included, while ensuring that a cross-section of teaching, and not just one aspect of it, has been represented. A relatively small set of well-chosen documents is more effective than a large, unfiltered compilation.
- Make the structure of the portfolio explicit to the reader. A table of contents at the beginning, and tabs separating the various components of the portfolio, are good ways to assist the reader in reviewing the document.
- Make sure that every piece of evidence in the portfolio is accompanied by appropriate context and explanation. For instance, if a sample lesson plan is included, provide the reader with a description of the course and the students, as well as a reflection on the efficacy of the lesson plan.

¹ Administrative Memorandum 338 dated September 28, 1993
Steps in Developing a Teaching Portfolio

Although how one develops a teaching portfolio is as unique as each portfolio itself, some very practical strategies can be applied or adapted to individual needs.

Getting Started

Before you begin to put together a teaching portfolio, it is helpful to develop and gather material from which the contents of the portfolio will be drawn. At this preliminary stage, most individuals collect more material than can be included in a portfolio of reasonable length. Some tips that might be helpful include:

- Establish a filing system specifically for material related to teaching development efforts.
- Sketch out reflections on teaching (beliefs, values, strategies) and how teaching relates to student learning in the relevant disciplinary area(s). These reflections likely will become part of the teaching philosophy statement.
- Talk to other faculty members about their approaches to teaching. Often such a dialog can stimulate the reflective process and help assist in articulating priorities, values, and goals.
- Collect material on teaching-related activities.
- Develop goals for teaching development and seek out opportunities to support these goals (e.g., attending a teaching seminar or workshop, participating in a program offered by the Center for Faculty Excellence, education-focus journal clubs, or attending an off-campus conference related to teaching).

Preparing the Portfolio

Once the supporting documents have been gathered, it generally takes a total of two to three days to prepare the portfolio. One helpful strategy in selecting final documentation for the portfolio is to think about a teaching portfolio as an argument -- much as is made in a grant proposal or scholarly article -- in which the reader is provided with a context, a main point or theme is stated, and the material around that point is selected and organized. Two of the greatest pitfalls in developing a portfolio are including too much material and inserting it in raw form (without explaining why it is there). Thinking of the portfolio as an argument can help avoid these pitfalls by providing a framework for selecting and shaping the material that will go into the portfolio. It also will assist in deciding what points to highlight in the teaching philosophy statement, and what evidence is available to support these points. It is useful to remember that including supporting evidence does not mean that “failures” should be ignored. Discussing why a teaching strategy did not work, and how that strategy has been or will be changed, is evidence that the educator can adapt and improve as a teacher.

Working with a mentor (or mentors) often is helpful when preparing the teaching portfolio. An effective mentor can be any faculty member -- even one from a different discipline -- who is interested in enhancing the quality of teaching. As we have
mentioned before, teaching portfolios are highly individualized, and the content and organization vary among institutions, departments or divisions, as well as from one faculty member to another. Nevertheless, it may be useful to review the portfolios of experienced colleagues to visualize what a teaching portfolio might contain and how it might be organized. The following generic guidelines include components typical of most portfolios:

**Teaching experience and responsibilities.** This section provides a context for the main points an individual’s history as an educator. Courses taught (currently or in the past), including number of credit hours, whether the course was required or elective, number of students, and whether they were graduate or professional should be summarized here. Teaching activities outside the classroom, such as advising graduate or undergraduate students, supervising students engaged in independent studies, and otherwise mentoring students, are also important to include.

**Teaching philosophy and goals.** Despite its typical brevity (about 1-2 pages long), this statement is the foundation on which the portfolio is built. The aim here is to answer in some way one main question: What is it that the individual wishes to accomplish as an educator, and what steps are taken to achieve those goals? Reflections on this question generally include four components, which may be discussed separately or be intertwined in some way:

1. Beliefs about how student learning in their specific field occurs.
2. Beliefs about how the educator can best help students learn.
3. Methods of putting into practice beliefs about effective teaching and learning.
4. Goals for students.

Reflecting on these issues serves as a good basis for self-assessment and potential growth as a teacher. Because this section of the portfolio is a personal statement, writing in first-person, narrative form is appropriate in most circumstances. Writing in broadly understood terms rather than in highly technical language is usually best.

**Teaching methods and strategies.** It may help the reader to explicitly state some connection (perhaps in a simple phrase) between the material in this section and the teaching philosophy statement. In the same or a separate section, it also is useful to reflect on the effectiveness of teaching efforts to date. Supporting materials that illustrate the teaching approach and provide evidence of teaching effectiveness help to establish the appropriate level of competence. This supporting documentation often is placed in one or more appendices.

**Activities undertaken, or to be undertaken, to improve teaching.** As is true for any activity, self-reflection on teaching performance can and should lead to identification of steps that may be taken to improve as an educator. A discussion of such steps that have been taken in the past, as well as those that are planned for the near future, indicate a level of seriousness regarding the individual’s role as a teacher. Such steps, if
described in the portfolio, should be very specific, and should be linked to particular outcomes.

**Shaping the Final Portfolio**

The following organizational material can make the portfolio easier for readers to follow:

1. Title page and table of contents.
2. Headings and subheadings that clearly identify and separate the portfolio’s components.
3. In the body of the portfolio, references to material in the appendix, where appropriate.
4. Brief explanatory statements accompanying each item in the appendix, where appropriate. (What is the item’s context, purpose, or relationship to the body of the portfolio?)

The following questions also may be useful for consideration before submitting the portfolio to a review committee:

1. Have data been selected, organized, and presented in a way that brings the most compelling evidence into focus?
2. Does each piece of evidence serve a purpose, supporting a specific point?
3. Does the portfolio give the reader a sense of the individual as a teacher?

**How Will The Portfolio Be Evaluated?**

In general, experts seem to agree that the content of a teaching portfolio and the evaluative criteria used to judge it should be related to the goals of the instructor’s academic unit and the mission of the institution. Authorities on teaching portfolios typically note that evaluators should judge a portfolio according to its:

- Inclusion of evidence that backs up the claims a teacher makes — evidence of teaching accomplishments, of student learning, and of efforts to improve teaching.
- Consistency between the individual’s teaching philosophy and accompanying evidence of teaching strategies, effectiveness, and efforts to improve.

**Items That Might Be Included in a Teaching Portfolio**

The following items, loosely organized into several categories, reflect teaching activities inside and outside the classroom. Although no portfolio would ever include all of these items, some are relatively common to all portfolios, and others can be selected to meet specific needs.
Roles, Responsibilities, and Goals

- Brief biographical sketch related to what has shaped the individual’s teaching
- Statement of teaching roles and responsibilities
- Reflective essay describing teaching philosophy, goals, and methods
- List of courses taught, with enrollment and comment as to if new, substantially revised, required or elective, team-taught, etc. (*this material is required*).
- Roles and activities related to academic advising:
  - Description of advising responsibilities, goals, and approaches
  - Number of undergraduate and graduate advisees
  - Advising materials developed for students
  - Assistance with undergraduate program
  - Assistance with planning for employment or graduate school
  - Referral to other university services
  - Serving on graduate examination and thesis or dissertation committees

Representative Course Materials

- Syllabi
- Course descriptions with details of content, objectives, methods, and procedures for evaluating student learning
- List of texts and outside readings; rationales for selecting texts/readings
- Assignments
- Exams and quizzes, graded and ungraded
- Handouts, problem sets, lecture outlines
- Descriptions and examples of visual materials used
- Descriptions of use of computers or other technology in teaching

Assessment and Extent of Student Learning

- Student scores on standardized or other tests, before and after instruction
- Samples of student work, such as papers, essays, lab books, workbooks, publications, presentations, or other creative work
- Examples of graded exams from the best to the poorest students, with explanations of why the exams were so graded (redacted, of course, to protect student confidentiality)
- Written feedback on student work (e.g., feedback on successive drafts of student writing)
- Information from colleagues or others (e.g., students) addressing preparation of students for advanced work
- Information from colleagues or others (e.g., students) addressing effect on students’ career choices and employment
Descriptions and Evaluations of Teaching

- Summarized student evaluations of the individual’s teaching, including response rate, students’ written comments, and overall ratings (this material and analysis is required)
- Results of interviews with students after they have completed a course
- Letters from students and alumni
- Videotape of the individual teaching a class
- Statements from colleagues about your:
  - Mastery and selection of course content
  - Suitability of course objectives, both in terms of student and departmental needs
  - Suitability of course materials for achieving course objectives
  - Suitability of specific teaching and assessment methods for achieving course objectives
  - Commitment to teaching as evidenced by expressed concern for student learning
  - Commitment to and support of departmental instructional efforts
  - Willingness to work with others on instructional issues
  - Ability to teach concepts (such as writing or critical thinking) in a way that allows students to use them in other courses

Course and Curriculum Development

- Designing new courses or development of sequence of courses
- Designing interdisciplinary or collaborative courses or teaching projects
- Administering a multisection course
- Working on curriculum revision or development
- Obtaining funds or equipment for teaching labs or programs

Activities to Improve Instruction

- Having colleagues observe classes
- Serving as a team teacher or guest teacher
- Participating in seminars or professional meetings on teaching
- Conducting classroom research projects
- Using new methods of teaching, assessing learning, grading
- Using innovative audiovisual materials, computers, or other technology
- Assisting colleagues by conducting seminars or facilitating workshops on effective instructional methods
- Preparing a textbook or software for a course
- Mentoring other teachers or teaching assistants
Contributions to Institution or Profession

- Participating in local, state, regional, or national activities/organizations related to teaching and learning
- Publishing articles in teaching journals
- Developing student assistantship or internship program; arranging and supervising internships
- Participating in school-college partnerships to connect and improve learning across educational sectors

Honors or Recognitions

- Teaching awards from department/school/university
- Teaching awards from profession
- Invitations, based on your teaching reputation, to consult, give workshops, write articles, etc.
- Requests for advice on teaching by committees or other organized groups