

# The Teaching Portfolio

---

Online document source:

University of Minnesota Center for Teaching and Learning

<http://www1.umn.edu/ohr/teachlearn/tutorials/philosophy/background/index.html>

## The Teaching Portfolio

A Teaching Philosophy often appears as part of a Teaching Portfolio, which has two main uses—summative and formative—both of which involve evaluation:

1. Summative Evaluation is used to demonstrate the quality of a person's work for hiring and promotion purposes or for purposes of passing a course of study. Summative evaluation judges the outcome of one's work.
2. Formative Evaluation is used as a means of assembling and examining one's work for the purposes of professional improvement. Formative evaluation seeks to identify areas to be improved and to suggest possible ways to make those improvements.

In general, the Teaching Portfolio is most often used for summative evaluation; that is, for hiring and promotion. As such, it can be described as "a factual description of a professor's [instructor's or TA's] teaching strengths and accomplishments. It includes documents and materials that collectively suggest the scope and quality of a faculty member's teaching performance. It is to teaching what lists of publications, grants, and honors are to research and scholarship."

"The portfolio is not an exhaustive compilation of all the documents and materials that bear on teaching performance. Instead, it presents selected information on teaching activities and solid evidence of their effectiveness. Just as statements in a curriculum vitae should be supported by convincing evidence (such as published articles or invitations to present a paper at an academic conference), so claims in the teaching portfolio should be supported by firm empirical evidence."

When compiling a teaching portfolio, remember the following: use multiple sources of evidence, present detailed data, tailor your presentation to the specific requirements at hand, and present a personal portrait that chronicles your development and projects forward into the future.

For specific guidance regarding the inclusion of teaching materials in a faculty dossier for promotion and tenure, please contact your college dean's office.

The following materials written by you may be included in a Teaching Portfolio:

- Philosophy of teaching statement
- Description of teaching responsibilities including a list of courses, number of students, and level of students (undergraduate, graduate, postdoctoral)
- Course syllabi and sample course and assessment materials with reflective annotation/self-evaluation
- Description of course development or teaching improvement efforts
- Copies of papers or presentation on teaching topics
- Videotape of a sample of classroom teaching
- Records of teaching awards and honors

The following materials written by others may be included in a Teaching Portfolio:

- Student evaluations of teaching summarized with reflective summary
- Student letters and/or thank you notes
- Peer class observation feedback
- Written assessment of course materials
- Graded/commented upon samples of student work with reflective summary

## **What Is a Philosophy of Teaching Statement?**

A teaching philosophy is a self-reflective statement of your beliefs about teaching and learning. In addition to general statements, your teaching philosophy should also include examples of how you put your beliefs into practice by including concrete examples of what you do or anticipate doing in the classroom.

## **What is the purpose of a Philosophy of Teaching Statement?**

There can be many purposes for writing a teaching philosophy. You can think of it as a way of introducing yourself as an instructor to your colleagues. You can think of it as an exercise in concisely gathering together your beliefs about teaching and learning so that you can easily articulate them to your students, your peers, and search committees. The Statement is also an introduction to your teaching portfolio, thus setting the stage for the reader of that portfolio. Additionally, the teaching philosophy can be a means to professional growth since it requires you to give examples of how you enact your philosophy, thus requiring you to consider the degree to which your teaching is congruent with your beliefs. As you attempt to fully enact your beliefs about teaching and learning, you may realize that there is a lot of room for growth.

## **What is the expected length of a Philosophy of Teaching Statement?**

A Philosophy of Teaching Statement is approximately one to four pages in length. Aiming for two double-spaced pages is a good drafting aim. While a philosophy should cover a lot of ground, the writing also needs to be succinct. Although it is usually more difficult to write a well-written short essay than a long one, a brief but cogent essay will be well received by faculty, search committees, and others.

## **Do I need to discuss my Philosophy of Teaching with colleagues in my department?**

Yes, absolutely. Each academic discipline has its own culture and subcultures. What might be appropriate tone and emphasis for one discipline, might be less so for another. You will want one or more colleagues from your discipline to review your teaching philosophy and teaching portfolio, particularly before you consider sending them out as part of a job application.

## **Other Teaching Portfolio Considerations**

### **Presenting Course Syllabi for Documenting Teaching Effectiveness**

Course syllabi are different and vary according to the context of the course. What would you choose to present? Depending on the kind of review for which you are preparing a portfolio, you may need to include several samples. Unless you are instructed to do otherwise, it is best to include a representative set from your most current course syllabi. If you are a graduate student preparing a portfolio for a search committee, you may not have syllabi that you have actually used. You might include one that you construct for this purpose, noting that this is how you would put together the course given the chance. Whether you are including actual or planned syllabi, write a rationale statement that describes why you've organized the course in this particular way.

### **Presenting Course Materials for Documenting Teaching Effectiveness**

Course materials are powerful indicators of an instructor's approach to teaching and learning. They are important in supporting in- and out-of-class experiences. In preparing to present your course materials, you will want to include materials that have been used well in your courses and are in line with your philosophy of teaching. Some of these course materials could include course handouts, course packets, course bibliographies, class participation guidelines, mid-course feedback instruments, tests, software, and the like.

Which of these would you choose to include? Think back on your goals. If you stated in your teaching philosophy that active learning is important to you, then you will want to include course materials that best illustrate this. These could be handouts, guidelines for class participation, or ground rules that you developed for discussion. Given the specialized nature of many course materials, you will want to include a rationale statement to provide the reviewer with some context of the course so that an appropriate judgment can be made about the materials, such as their appropriateness, basic format, tone, etc.

### **Documenting Student Evaluations for Teaching Effectiveness**

Do you have examples of numeric student evaluations of teaching to include in your portfolio? If so, are they summarized? (If you use an institution's campus-wide evaluation instruments, that information will generally be provided along with your results.)

There are many schools of thought on whether one should include areas of strengths and weaknesses when summarizing open-ended comments from student evaluations. Some argue that portfolio documentation should focus only on the best of one's teaching. However, others state that one's best work is the most reflective, including improvements made over time. In order to engage the reviewer in how

this was done, summaries of student evaluations should take into account the inquiry, diagnosis, and experimentation of teaching practice rather than concealing them. No matter what area you choose to document, you will want to include a rationale explaining the context of the evaluation. Consider the following tips offered below.

### **Tips on summarizing numeric student evaluations**

- Include number of students, dates, response rates, or other pertinent data
- Summarize and display graphically when possible
- Be inclusive and document as many courses as possible
- Be descriptive (how evaluations were collected, context for the response rate, scale used, who summarized - you or a colleague)
- Be reflective and include a statement on how you interpret these results
- Include a comparison or referent group for each course listed

### **Tips for summarizing open-ended comments**

- Look for common themes throughout the summary
- Include areas of strengths and areas for improvement

### **Example of a summary from an introductory course in psychology**

These are representative themes and student comments :

- Increased my interest in psychology
- "I never thought of this for a job, but now I am seriously entertaining it"
- "I now find myself interested in TV shows on related topics."
- Challenged me to work harder
- "I worked harder than I ever did for an elective, but gained from it."
- "The simulation exercise drove me nuts. I couldn't quit until I had achieved the goal."
- Structured class discussions
- "I really enjoy the discussions but sometimes we get off track."
- "I am never sure what it is exactly she is wanting us to get from our discussions."

### **Documenting Teaching Responsibilities for Teaching Improvement**

In preparing to document your teaching responsibilities for personal improvement purposes, it is important to think again of the overall picture or goals of your teaching and what these responsibilities are. Teaching responsibilities can include advising, supervising, guiding, and mentoring of students; developing curricula; developing courses; developing computer exercises; and classroom teaching. Have you been documenting your teaching responsibilities? You will want to include a reflective statement focusing on areas of strength as well as areas that you have worked for improvement.

Be inclusive: were you responsible for classroom teaching, leading recitation or lab, one-on-one tutorials, or independent studies? Include a concise but explicit course description which sets out the context of each course, including the number of students, dates, and other pertinent data. Include an overall narrative that explains what percentage of your time is devoted to teaching, your responsibilities, and what role you played in various activities. Consider summarizing and displaying information graphically when possible.

### **Example of a description of teaching responsibilities in a course**

BIOL 220 Introduction to Human Physiology (taught three times) This is a senior level course for pre-med, pre-dentistry, and pre-nursing majors, designed to provide an introduction and overview of the major systems of the human body and their functions. Enrollment ranged from 21-26 for these three offerings. Topic areas include, the endocrine system, the nervous system, the respiratory system, the cardiovascular system, musculoskeletal system, and the reproductive system. The primary goal of this course is for students to synthesize and apply knowledge of the functions of these systems to making informed choices in health care. In addition to homework assignments and writing lab reports of experiments conducted in the laboratory sessions, students were tested three times, one of which was a practical examination. I had primary responsibility for teaching this course, and supervised two teaching assistants who assisted with lab sessions and course administration.