An introduction to the teaching portfolio

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Workshop goals

- To introduce the concept of portfolios as a way of documenting teaching for:
  - reflection and enhancement of teaching
  - teaching awards
  - career advancement
- To begin preparation of a teaching portfolio
- To explore the use and interpretation of portfolios
The traditional vitae

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>RESEARCH</th>
<th>Publications</th>
<th>Grants</th>
<th>Honours</th>
<th>Published papers</th>
<th>Original data?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>UNIVERSITY SERVICE</td>
<td>Committee memberships</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Committee reports?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COMMUNITY SERVICE</td>
<td>List of organisations</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>TEACHING</td>
<td>List of courses</td>
<td>Number of graduate students</td>
<td></td>
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What is a teaching portfolio?

- Summary of a teacher’s major strengths and accomplishments
  - just as publications, grants document research
- Selected short descriptions conveying scope and quality of teaching
- More complete evidence kept on file (portmanteau) to back up portfolio claims
  - just as published papers and research data back up a listing on the vitae
- Length 8-12 pages, plus appendices if necessary
- Onus on teacher to make own case
- Onus on colleagues and administrators to review portfolio
- Multiple sources of evidence
Two primary uses of the teaching portfolio

- Self-development
  - As a tool for reflection about teaching, possible change, and improvement

- Career advancement
  - E.g. job applications
  - Application for tenure
  - Promotion
  - Merit increments
  - Teaching awards

The portfolio onion

- Evidence for effectiveness
- Teaching responsibilities
- Teaching/Learning goals and philosophy
- and accomplishments
Basic components of a teaching portfolio

- Brief biography to provide a context
- Description of teaching responsibilities
  - List of courses taught, with brief description and enrolment
  - Student theses supervised
  - Service on teaching-related committees
- Statement of teaching philosophy
  - Your teaching values and beliefs
  - How you put these beliefs into practice
- Evidence from students
  - If available, summaries of recent teaching evaluations
- Professional development activities
- OTHER EVIDENCE of teaching effectiveness
  - What is already on hand?
  - What might you collect for future use?
- Future plans

Describing your rationale for teaching

- How do I teach?
  - Methods, materials, assessment tasks
- Why do I teach this way?
  - Teaching strengths, student learning
- What evidence do I have that my approach works?
  - Or what might be gathered in the future?
Four aspects of teaching

- **CLASSROOM PRESENTATION**
  - E.g. clarity of explanations, voice quality, enthusiasm, ability to handle questions, etc.

- **COURSE CONTENT**
  - E.g. organisation, level of complexity, coverage of field, use of examples, etc.

- **COURSE MANAGEMENT**
  - E.g. assessment methods, availability to students, quality of feedback, liaison with teaching assistants, organisation of student projects, field trips, etc.

- **NON-CLASSROOM TEACHING**
  - E.g. counselling students, mentoring colleagues, curriculum planning, writing textbooks and other teaching material, etc.

An evaluation circle

- Gather data
- Make changes in teaching *(for intrinsic rewards, institutional recognition)*
- Interpret, reflect on data *(with help from expert or mentor)*
- (New and useful knowledge)
Formative and summative evaluation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Formative</th>
<th>Summative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sources of evaluation data</strong></td>
<td>Students, colleagues, experts, self</td>
<td>Students, colleagues, experts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Role of evaluator</strong></td>
<td>Evaluator acts as consultant or coach to provide feedback for understanding and improvement</td>
<td>Evaluator acts as judge to decide on teaching merit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Goals of evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Feedback for change and improvement</td>
<td>Evidence of worth for career decision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Process of evaluation</strong></td>
<td>Change and growth over time</td>
<td>Snapshot in time</td>
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Questions and concerns

- **What should I include?**
  - Start with teaching responsibilities and teaching philosophy as a guide to criteria for selecting other items

- **Won’t it take too much time?**
  - Much of the material is already available; once you have compiled your first portfolio updating is much easier

- **Is it fair to ask former students to comment?**
  - Yes, as long as there is no conflict of interest

- **How can I document successful student learning?**
  - Evidence might include exam scores, success in a further course that builds on yours, exemplary student work, student publications. Be sure to get student permission for material you use.

- **What do I say about changes that back-fired?**
  - Documenting these efforts shows your concern for teaching, and gives useful contextual information for judging future changes and improvements.
**Will preparing a portfolio improve student learning?**
– Preparing a portfolio involves reflection on teaching and thinking about course outcomes, which is a first step to change and improvement.

**What resources are available to help?**
– Colleagues (whom you can ask to critique your portfolio), students, teaching and learning centre.

**Will my chair and colleagues read my portfolio?**
– Yes, if it is carefully prepared, well written and organised, and reasonably short. Many universities have policies endorsing the use of portfolios for job applications and major career decisions.

**Should a portfolio stress effort or accomplishments?**
– Ideally, both! To assess accomplishments it is important to have clear criteria for effective teaching and learning.

**I am too modest to make a good case in my portfolio.**
– Unsupported claims will not impress your chair or colleagues. But it is reasonable to make the best possible case for your teaching, just as you would for your research endeavours.

**Presentation will win out over substance**
– Colleagues are usually quite able to detect false claims, exaggerations, misinformation, or omissions!

**How can use of portfolios be reconciled with the need for standardised evaluation procedures and criteria?**
– If the institution or department has adopted teaching standards or criteria this is actually helpful in preparing a portfolio. As with research, individuals can differ in the way they meet criteria.

**In the end, judging portfolios is subjective.**
– All evaluation is a matter of judgement, but the better the evidence, the more reliable and valid the decision.
Hints on maintaining your portfolio

- Use a word processor
- Update regularly
- Keep everything, but take care to distinguish between the official portfolio you give to others and the “portmanteau” you keep as back-up
- Keep a teaching log (start with your diary)
- Keep e-mail exchanges with students
- Get advice from colleagues
- Get advice from students
- Hard evidence is better than opinion
- Show that opinions about your teaching are representative of all, not just a few “fans”
- Keep it succinct – summarise
- Balance weight and length of entries

Getting feedback on a portfolio

- Is the portfolio “user-friendly”?
- Is the teacher’s approach to teaching plausible?
- Does the portfolio appear to portray an honest picture of the person’s teaching approach and achievements?
- What is lacking? What might be omitted or shortened?
A checklist for portfolio interpretation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria for effective teaching</th>
<th>Relevant evidence in portfolio</th>
<th>How well portfolio meets the criteria</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Interest, enthusiasm, concern for students</td>
<td>Student evaluations; letters from students, alumni</td>
<td>Evaluations among highest in department; very positive letters (but how selected?)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long-term impact on student learning</td>
<td>High proportion of students pursue graduate study; letters from alumni</td>
<td>Good preparation for graduate study, but what about students entering other professions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate teaching load</td>
<td>Normal undergraduate load, mainly senior classes with small enrolments; heavy graduate supervision</td>
<td>Load probably appropriate for strengths and interests of teacher</td>
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Centra (1993) on portfolios

*Centra compared teaching portfolios with other measures of teaching effectiveness (e.g. student evaluations and classroom visit by the dean)* He found that:

- “using a portfolio in summative decisions can help provide a more complete representation of performance”
- “evaluation of portfolios can undoubtedly benefit from discussion among evaluators about criteria and standards”
- “the portfolio should include not only what individuals and others say about their teaching, but examples of what they actually do”
It has become a truism of portfolio use that putting them together is easier than knowing “what to do with them once you’ve got them.” But . . . the accounts from campuses I’ve visited do not bear out that observation. Even . . . where portfolios are being used to determine tenure and promotion by committees having little experience with them, judgments have been arrived at, committees have stood behind these decisions, faculty have not flocked to grieve the process. In fact . . . the process of reading and reviewing portfolios has turned out to be illuminating and significant. I hear chairs talking about a better understanding of teaching and learning . . . as a result of reading portfolios.

Pat Hutchings, American Association of Higher Education