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. Perhaps more importantly, in preparing a teaching portfolio, teaching beliefs and practices are 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; Schon, 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 A TEACHING PORTFOLIO

In devising a teaching portfolio, its purpose will dictate its contents, i.e. who is the audience, what is it required for, etc. For the purpose of this fact-sheet, the teaching portfolio is discussed in terms of the application process for teaching awards and, as a result, suggests standard headings that may be included in the portfolio. In this regard, the portfolio 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 do not illustrate a comprehensive view of your teaching. Think about engaging in peer observation of teaching, for example, or you could ask your Head of Department or another colleague to read your portfolio, and give you feedback on how they believe it reflects your teaching career.

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?

This statement should be no longer than 2 pages in length so 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/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. **Other relevant information**

Highlight any other information which you regard as relevant to your development as a teacher including any of 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 work related report and structure it as such. 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 appendix;
- Evidence to support every statement you make on your approach or contribution to teaching;
- If you are using your teaching portfolio to participate in an award scheme, it is important to ascertain how many copies of your portfolio/teaching DVD will be required.

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. Enhance the student evaluation section
9. Limit number of student comments
10. Include names and titles of people to whom you refer
11. Use page numbers
12. Make bulky portfolio items available on request (peer observation videos etc)

REFERENCES AND RESOURCES FOR FURTHER READING ON TEACHING PORTFOLIOS

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