GRADUATE
STUDENT
SERIES

DOSSIER PREPARATION:

Teaching Portfolios and Teaching/Research/Personal Statements

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DOSSIER PREPARATION

The term *dossier* refers to the application materials used when applying for academic jobs. The minimum job application in academia requires that the dossier include a vita (CV), letter of application (or cover letter), and at least three reference letters. Many departments also request a writing sample, a personal statement, a statement of research interests, a statement of teaching interests, and/or at least one chapter from your dissertation.

The career development center is available to review all aspects of your dossier with you when you are applying for academic jobs. Below is an overview of teaching portfolios and teaching, research, and personal statements. In addition, our handout *CVs and Cover Letters* can also help you in the preparation of your dossier.

DEVELOPING AN EFFECTIVE TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Since teaching ability is not easily demonstrated on a vita or during an interview, a "teaching portfolio" which demonstrates one's teaching expertise, may sometimes serve as a useful addition to your application for an academic position. A teaching portfolio may be especially relevant when applying for positions where teaching is stressed in the job description. The intent of the teaching portfolio is to capture the intellectual substance and actual samples of teaching methods that an academic interview, vita, or application letter cannot.

Job applicants seeking positions in other career fields including architecture, art, advertising, fashion, and writing often prepare "portfolios" containing samples of their work. Employers use portfolios as a means to determine the abilities of applicants.

Review of the portfolio is usually part of the interview process, although some applicants are prepared to submit samples of work earlier in the process upon request. Others choose to send a portfolio as part of the dossier. It is up to you to determine what to send, how much to send, and the appropriate time to send the different components of your application. Samples of teaching portfolios are available at the Career Development Center and the Center for Teaching and Learning.

SUGGESTED COMPONENTS OF A TEACHING PORTFOLIO:

WORK SAMPLES FROM CURRENT OR RECENT TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES:

- Course materials prepared for students such as syllabi, exams, handouts, and/or discussion questions. **If you have never created such items, it is okay to create a mock-up of planned materials you would use.*
- Essays, field or lab reports and other student works with TA critiques and feedback.
- An edited videotape or written case study of a classroom teaching experience.

DOCUMENTS OF ONE'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT AS A TEACHER:

- Records of changes resulting from self-evaluation.
- Evidence of participation in workshops, seminars and professional meetings intended to improve teaching.
- Statement of teaching responsibilities.
- Statement of pedagogical philosophy and strategy.

INFORMATION FROM OTHERS:

- Student evaluation forms.
- Statements/evaluations from colleagues who observed your teaching.
- Invitations to teach from outside agencies.

TIPS FOR DEVELOPING YOUR TEACHING PORTFOLIO:

- Start compiling samples for your portfolio as early as possible.
- Form the habit of filing away samples of work that demonstrates your teaching.
- Select those items that you deem to be the best examples of your work demonstrating teaching quality.
- The format of your teaching portfolio will vary, depending on intended use.
- Be sure the format is well organized and present your work with care, neatness, and creativity.
- After you secure a job, plan to continue to retain copies of your work.

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE TEACHING STATEMENT

Though teaching portfolios are a good way to display evidence of teaching experiences and skills, teaching statements are requested more often. This is typically a self-reflective essay about teaching which may be included in your portfolio or submitted on its own. It is typically one to two pages in length and will focus on your teaching interests, provide an overview of the teaching you have done thus far, and highlight your beliefs about learning, education, and pedagogy in general.

To make the teaching statement easier to prepare, it is best to begin by writing down your thoughts about the following prompts:

- Why does teaching appeal to you?
- Who was your favorite teacher? Least favorite? Why?
- What is the purpose of teaching? (i.e. – To train future leaders? To provide critical thinking skills? To promote your field? Etc.)
- How do students best learn? What techniques have you used to promote this learning?
- What/where have you taught and what/where do you want to be teaching in the future?
- What is it about the position to which you are applying (and the students you will be teaching) that specifically appeals to you?
- How have you assessed your teaching effectiveness? What have you done/will you do to improve effectiveness?

After you have thought about each of these ideas, begin writing. The order of your teaching statement may vary but in general you may want to organize it around these concepts:

Pedagogical Statement: Learning and Teaching is…

Goals: My students will learn….

Implementation: I have encouraged/will encourage this learning by….

Growth: I have successfully developed and learned….

Goals: In the future, I plan to….

It is okay to mention personal experiences which have brought you to this place in your career as is mentioning mistakes from which you have learned. What is most important, however is that the information be relevant and positively-focused. In addition, it is also common to use metaphors for teaching or quotations about teaching which guide you. Again, however, it is important to bring such references back to you – how you have implemented said philosophies. To see teaching statement samples, visit the Career Development Center, the Center for Teaching and Learning, and/or http://www.acs.ohio-state.edu/education/ftad/portfolio/philosophy/phil_sampl.htm

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE RESEARCH STATEMENT

Many top-tier academic institutions and science/tech departments require applicants to submit a research statement as part of their dossier. This is typically a one to two page essay about your research interests, experiences, and goals. It is used to assess fit with the institution as well as level of research acumen in a particular area or field. Although everyone's research statement will vary, the general framework will be:

- **Previous Research Experience (25%):** Where did your career begin and on what early projects did you work? How did it lead you here? What are your research philosophies and methodologies?

- **Current Projects (25%):** On what does your dissertation focus? How was/is it funded? What are your specialty areas? What methodologies did you use?

- **Future Endeavors (50%):** Where will this lead? What are your funding sources? What are the implications of this research? How does this fit within the institution to which you are applying?

Within the research statement, you are not required to explain exactly what your research will be in the future (you do not need to state hypotheses or name specific methodologies unless necessary, for example). What is most important is that you are able to present a realistic and interesting research agenda which fits the goals, facilities, and needs of the department to which you are applying. In doing so, you also do not have to highlight potential working relationships within the department unless there is an obvious fit or you feel it will make your essay stronger.

Finally, be sure to cite any work from which you draw. It is not necessary, however, to talk entirely about the work of your research group. While it is important to give credit where it is due, your essay should focus on the work you have done within the group so that the committee can garner an idea of your skills and potential.

Samples of research statements can be found at:
http://www.cs.caltech.edu/~baksoylu/research/research.pdf and
http://www.math.mcmaster.ca/~osburnr/RESEARCH.PDF

WRITING AN EFFECTIVE PERSONAL STATEMENT

One of the most commonly asked questions by applicants are "what do schools look for in a personal statement?" There is no short answer to this question. There are, however, some guidelines and suggestions to be offered. *In a discussion of the personal statement, there are two general principles to consider:*

First, some universities use the personal statement as a pre-interview document.

Second, most job descriptions do not state exactly what they want in a personal statement or they only list vague guidelines. This is because the search committee wants to know what you feel is mot significant about your application.

Content:

As to more specifically what the personal statement should contain, the applicant's essay should be about him or herself. Although this may seem obvious, it is amazing how many essays are submitted which focus on relevant personal goals in addition to professional ones. Search committees are more eager to read about what the applicants have to say about themselves as candidates for positions.

What should they write about themselves? The key is to stress their strengths without being obnoxious and deal with their weaknesses without being defensive. Committees look at how persuasive an applicant is in discussing their own candidacy.

The personal statement gives the applicant the opportunity to take the search committee by the hand and guide them through his / her application. The big advantage here is that it can be done solely on the applicant's terms. Consequently, if there is some activity, work, or life experience that he / she is very proud of, that should be stressed and expanded on in the personal statement. It is the applicant's responsibility and advantage to highlight the strongest parts of the application. Separate yourself from the pack. By stressing your strong points, you are able to maximize your chances. However, be careful how this is done. Confidence is a fine quality, however arrogance is something else. The line between the two is fine, but it is crucial that the applicant understand the difference.

Some people would say that you should not discuss your weaknesses in a personal statement. They argue that to deal with your weaknesses only draws attention to them. There is merit in this, of course. However, part of the search committee's job is to examine closely both the strong points and the weak points. The issue is not whether the weaker parts of the application will be examined. The issue is on whose terms they will be examined.

Some applicants are reluctant to discuss certain aspects of their background, such as history of disadvantage, ethnic status, etc. and the affects these had on their career decisions and goals. This is a mistake. No one is asking for lengthy stories of heroism in overcoming enormous obstacles. Information of this kind, however, is very valuable to committees and in most instances, if done professionally; it can only work to the applicant's advantage.

In conclusion, remember these few things:

First, applicants should be brief. They should say what they have to say and no more. There are usually no page restrictions. However, experience suggests that two pages are sufficient.

Second, many applicants subscribe to the theory that recruiting is strictly a numbers game and most personal statements are never read. This is not the case. Of course, the numbers are very important in any decision, but the statements *are* read. Applicants should be advised to write their statements with great care. In many cases, they will be the determining factor.

An Example….

It is refreshing to read an essay, which gives some background on why a person wants to work at a particular university. *Here is an excerpt from an essay:*

"Shortly after my return from Washington, D.C., in 1999, I was awarded a research fellowship from the International Union for the Conservation of Nature. The purpose of this project was to develop an inventory of ecologically balanced, marine-based technologies. During this project, I was given my first glimpse into the complex work of international law. My work on this fellowship culminated with several published articles and an invitation to lecture on this subject in Japan."

This concerns the past – now what are the hopes or plans for the future? *Later in the essay, the applicant wrote:*

"The preceding paragraphs have illustrated the extensive connection my education and work have had with the law. In retrospect, I believe that I am most effective in a classroom environment, educating future leaders to think critically and produce solid research. This is what has led me to academia."

10 MISTAKES TO AVOID WHEN WRITING YOUR TEACHING, RESEARCH, AND PERSONAL STATEMENTS

1.Failing to recognize the importance of the personal/research/teaching statement.
2.Underestimating the difficulty and time involved in developing the essays.
3.Waiting until just before your deadline to begin work on the statement(s).
4.Not researching the school, department, and/or position ahead of time.
5.Submitting a statement that are more generic than personal.
6. Filling your statement with clichés.
7. Not focusing on all aspects of your experiences (previous work, current projects, and what you hope to produce from here).
8.Submitting your essay with typographical or grammatical errors.
9.Trying to guess what the committee wants instead of focusing on what you personally bring to the position.
10.Writing statements that simply list out experiences or repeat information from the CV instead of expounding on information and writing about it in conventional essay formats.

An appointment at the CDC can help!