

Building your teaching portfolio

Purpose

A teaching portfolio is a tool of professional development that provides you with a way to showcase how, why, and how well you teach currently, as well as demonstrate your potential to further develop your teaching skills.

Teaching portfolios typically serve one of two purposes.¹ The first is developmental—the portfolio is designed to make you think reflectively and critically about your teaching so that you can identify ways to improve. The second is evaluative and the portfolio is used to assess your performance as part of the promotion and tenure process; it usually contains, in addition to other elements, peer evaluations and a letter from the department chair. *You should prepare a developmental portfolio for your funding application.*

In either case, the portfolio should be designed as a succinct, standalone document.

Components of a teaching portfolio

Components of teaching portfolios vary but consider including these elements in your portfolio. These elements are drawn from guidelines published by the UW Center for Instructional Development and Research (CIDR), the UC Berkeley Career Center, the Stanford University Career Development Center, and other sources. Items in **bold** are those required for the department's funding application:

- Title page.
- Table of contents
- **A statement of teaching philosophy.** Statements of teaching philosophy vary considerably but, in general, an effective teaching statement is a concise (one to two pages) description of your ideas about teaching and learning. In general, it is a self-reflective essay that discusses what your most important teaching goals are and the strategies you have used (or plan to use) to attain those goals. It should include “big” thoughts (that’s the philosophy part) but be based on, and supported with, concrete examples. Ideally, it will reflect the breadth of your teaching experience, your concern for your students, and it may include a discussion of how you would integrate your research into your coursework. Finally, the statement should also reflect your personality.
- A teaching statement that assesses your evolution as a teacher: strengths, challenges, potential solutions, and skills that need development. While this statement may be incorporated into the statement of teaching philosophy, it differs from your teaching philosophy in that it requires you to reflect on what you are doing in the classroom right now and what you may need to do to realize the goals set out in your teaching philosophy. This statement provides the place where you can discuss your teaching evaluations, demonstrate your interest in interdisciplinary teaching, or otherwise expand on your goals and roles as an instructor.

¹ See "Developing a Teaching Portfolio: Guidelines for the Preparation and Use of Teaching Portfolios," on the CIDR website, <http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/portfolio/guidelines.html>.

- Examples of efforts to improve your teaching, such as participation in teaching workshops, committee work, or experiments in new teaching methods and practices. Include any teaching awards or recognition you may have received.
- Descriptions and samples of course materials you developed. These can include assignments, exercises, presentations, web resources (websites, discussion boards, etc.), and discussion questions. The samples should be annotated in such a way that a reviewer can understand how they were used. You may want to put the samples in the appendices.
- A list of courses you have taught—or anticipate teaching—with a brief description of the learning objectives, teaching format, and potential readings. Consider attaching sample syllabi, if you have them available. These syllabi could be placed in the appendices.
- **A copy of your *curriculum vitae*.**
- **Faculty evaluations of your teaching.**
- **Statistical results from the student evaluations for courses taught at the University of Washington.** This may, but is not required to, include students' handwritten comments. If you want to include student's written comments in the portfolio that accompanies your departmental application, you are required to include all of the comments for that section or course (see *Departmental statements on teaching portfolios* below). In other situations you may want consider including a fair sampling of those comments. In any event, you should place your evaluations—statistical or written comments—in context for the person reviewing your portfolio (see the comments above about the uses of the teaching statement).
- **Performance evaluations for readerships, internships, tutor positions, TA/RA/SA appointments at other schools or in other units at the University.** (As appropriate.)
- Other items to consider:
 - Relevant samples of students' work that illustrate how your assignments work or how they contributed to student learning. This may be particularly useful if your students are required to create something out of the ordinary—for example, a website, a short video, or a poster—as part of the course.
 - A video (on tape, CD, DVD, or online) of your teaching.
 - Links to course or section websites you developed.
 - Examples of how you have integrated technology into your teaching.

Plan ahead

A good teaching portfolio is not built in a day and it will change over time. Start now to collect things—syllabi, assignments, lesson plans, samples of students' work, etc.—that you may want to include in the next iteration of your portfolio. Attach an explanatory note to it before you file it away and then keep it all together someplace where you can find it.

Keeping a digital version (PDF is a common format) is a good idea, too.

A word about tone and writing style

Although the teaching portfolio is meant to demonstrate your ability to be reflective and critical of your teaching skills, the tone should be positive—even enthusiastic—and demonstrate a

certain amount of humility towards the challenges of teaching well.

In regard to students, your comments should reflect concern for the challenges they face and respect for them as individuals, not disdain or contempt of their inadequacies or their lack of interest or dedication in your classrooms.

Remember, too, that your teaching portfolio may be reviewed by someone outside your discipline or field so keep jargon to a minimum. Clear, concise writing is your goal.

Format and presentation

Teaching portfolios come in a variety of formats and how you present your information is usually up to you. Generally, however, the portfolio should have a clear organization that allows the reviewer to get a quick overview of its contents, understand how it fits together, and what its main points are. Make it easy for the reviewer to find things.

You may want to consider that:

- Tailoring your portfolio to the specific task at hand (e.g., a specific opening, the type of institution, or requirements outlined in the job description) allows you to emphasize the talents that are most relevant in each situation.
- Teaching portfolios are often part of a job application so you may want to use a format that will fit easily in the mail. Slim three-ring binders or similar bindings allow you to tailor the contents of your portfolio and offer a professional presentation. You can also insert a media holder if you are including a CD, DVD, or videotape.
- Headings and subheadings are good navigation tools.
- Appendices allow you to include bulky or hard-to-format material in the portfolio—but be sure to reference the location in your narrative.
- A table of contents, tabs, and page numbers all make it easier for the reader to navigate through your portfolio.
- Brevity and clarity often go hand in hand. You do not need to include samples of everything.
- The portfolio should stand alone and provide enough explanation that a reviewer can see how each part reveals your development and competency as an instructor.
- Consider using color where appropriate (don't overdo it). Color photocopies or color output from inkjet printers are easy to get and inexpensive in small quantities.
- Consider setting up an online version of your portfolio but ask yourself, first, if you want everyone (and anyone—maybe even your students) to have access to it.

Departmental statements on teaching portfolios

The UW History department outlines two, slightly different, sets of requirements for the teaching portfolios that must accompany the funding application.

The first, from the department's *Application for Departmental Funding (TAships, Lead TA, Writing Link & Fellowships)*, is slightly more inclusive. It can be found at:

<http://depts.washington.edu/history/forms/applyfunding.html>

It states that a funding application must include:

Two copies of the applicant's teaching portfolio. Your portfolio must include:

- Photocopies of all statistical results from the student evaluations for each section taught during the quarters in which the applicant held a TA appointment.

An applicant may choose to include photocopies of the handwritten student comments. Please note that these are not required. However, if an applicant wishes to submit these student assessments, the applicant must include copies of all the comment sheets from one section or course and not simply a selection of comments culled from different sections and/or courses.

- Photocopies of your TA performance evaluations completed by your faculty supervisor.
- A statement of teaching philosophy.
- Information on and performance evaluations for readerships, internships, tutor positions, TA, RA, SA appointments at other schools or in other units at the University of Washington, etc.

NOTE: Do not submit original copies. Keep originals for your records.

The second, which explains the department's rationale in requiring teaching portfolios, can be found by going to "Graduate Study Funding" on the department's webpage, clicking on "Funding" and then clicking on "Service Appointments" and then clicking the underlined text, "Detailed information on the appointment process and administrative matters," under "Teaching Assistantships. To go there directly:

<http://depts.washington.edu/history/studying/graduate/funding/ta.html#portfolios>

It reads:

TEACHING PORTFOLIOS The History Department considers preparation for an academic career an important part of graduate training. Since teaching portfolios are often required to apply for academic positions, the Department recognizes that the ability to put together a sophisticated, well-developed teaching portfolio will enhance the competitiveness of our graduates. For this reason, teaching portfolios are required for all TA [appointment applications](#).

[Teaching portfolios](#) for students who have not held a History TA appointment should include a statement of teaching philosophy; performance evaluations for readerships, internships, tutor positions, TA/RA/SA appointments at other schools or in other units at the University; other information regarding such appointments or other relevant positions.

[Teaching portfolios](#) for TAs who have held previous teaching appointments must include copies of all the statistical results from the [student evaluations](#) for each section taught. An applicant may also choose to include xerox copies of the handwritten student comments. Please note that this is not required. However, if an applicant wishes to submit these student assessments, the applicant must include copies of all the comment sheets from one section or course and not simply a selection of comments culled from different sections and/or courses. In addition, these teaching portfolios should include a statement of teaching philosophy; performance evaluations for readerships, internships, tutor positions, TA/RA/SA appointments at other schools or in other units at the

University; other information regarding such appointments or other relevant positions, etc.

Students may consult [CIDR](#) and the History Department's Lead TA for information on how to construct a teaching portfolio. Interested students may attend sessions on teaching portfolios that CIDR runs periodically. All History graduate students are encouraged to attend workshops on preparing teaching portfolios that the Lead TA organizes. In addition, the Lead TA maintains copies of teaching portfolios of current and former TAs at various stages in their TA appointments (e.g., new TA, first-year TA, second-year TA). History graduate students may arrange to review these sample portfolios by contacting the Lead TA.

Final thought

Once you have put together a draft of your teaching portfolio, don't be shy: ask others—faculty advisers, colleagues, CIDR consultants—to read and review it. Ask them to pay particular attention to your statement of teaching philosophy. Is it clear? Is it vivid? Does it ring true to the real you?

Some selected additional reading

"Developing a Teaching Portfolio"—CIDR

<http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/portfolio/index.html>

Betty Dessants, "Graduate Students Forum: Preparing the Teaching Portfolio," *AHA Perspectives*, September 2003.

<http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/2003/0309/0309for2.cfm>

Frederick D. Drake and Lawrence W. McBride, "The Summative Teaching Portfolio and the Reflective Practitioner of History," *The History Teacher*, November 2000.

<http://www.historycooperative.org/journals/ht/34.1/drake.html>

"PhDs Teaching Portfolio"—UC Berkeley Career Center

<http://career.berkeley.edu/PhDs/PhDportfolio.stm>

"CVs, Cover Letters & Teaching Portfolios," Stanford University

http://www.stanford.edu/dept/CDC/graphics/pdfs/CV_covlets.pdf

"How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy," *Chronicle of Higher Education*

<http://chronicle.com/jobs/2003/03/2003032702c.htm>

UW Career Center Academic Job Search

<http://depts.washington.edu/careers/gradstudents/academicjobsearch>