Creating a Teaching Portfolio:
Guidelines for Teaching Assistants

Judith Longfield
Georgia Southern University

Selecting, Designing, and Implementing
an Electronic Portfolio

Jeton McClinton
Jackson State University

Monique Earl-Lewis
Morehouse College

Walter L. Crockett
Jackson State University
Introduction

Whether paper-based or accessible electronically, the use of teaching portfolios for professional grown and job hunting purposes among graduate teaching assistants is growing. In fact, the request for information on teaching portfolios is ongoing at POD’s Graduate and Professional Students Development (GPSD) Committee meetings. In 2005 Laura Border met this need by publishing a short article in POD’s Essays on Teaching Excellence entitled “Teaching Portfolios for Graduate Students: Process, Content, Product, and Benefits (http://www.podnetwork.org/publications/teachingexcellence/05-06/V17,%20N4,%20Border.pdf). Five years later there was another GPSD call for information which resulted in the writing of the two papers presented here.

The first, “Creating a Teaching Portfolio: Guidelines for Teaching Assistants,” written by Judith Longfield at Georgia Southern University, provides basic information on portfolios. It is intended primarily for those new to teaching portfolios and includes information on how to get started, what to include, steps to follow and how to assess a portfolio. Included in the appendix is a teaching portfolio rubric and an annotated list of resources accessible via the Internet.

The second paper, “Selecting, Designing, and Implementing an Electronic Portfolio,” is written by Jeton McClinton and Walter L. Crockett from Jackson State University and Monique Earl-Lewis of Morehouse College. As experienced teacher educators who require students to complete electronic portfolios to demonstrate their professional development and competence, and they offer advice on the creation of electronic portfolios. Included is a discussion of the similarities and differences between paper-based and electronic portfolios, types of electronic portfolios, and information on Websites that host e-portfolios.

Special thanks to the Center for Teaching, Learning and Scholarship at Georgia Southern University for making the distribution of these papers possible.
Creating a Teaching Portfolio: Guidelines for Teaching Assistants

Judith Longfield
Georgia Southern University

What Is a Teaching Portfolio?

A teaching portfolio is a collection of artifacts (i.e., pieces of evidence) that document teaching activities. “At the heart of the portfolio . . . are samples of teaching performance, not just what teachers say about their practice but artifacts and examples of what they actually do” (Edgerton, Hutching & Quinlan, 2002, p. 40). Seldin (1997) estimates that over 1000 universities use “evaluative teaching portfolios” in the tenure and promotion process. Teaching assistants (TAs) can get a head start by creating a “developmental teaching portfolio,” not only for the purpose of documenting their teaching, but also for improving their teaching through reflection and analysis.

Why Develop a Teaching Portfolio?

If teaching portfolios are primarily used for tenure and promotion, why should TAs bother? Don’t they have enough to do teaching, taking classes and conducting research? According to Annis (1997), “feedback from professors indicates that the teaching portfolio is a very effective vehicle in finding a job, especially in a tight job market” (p. 253). Border and van Hoene (2010) also argue that graduate students, because they are in their formative years, are uniquely positioned to benefit from what they refers to as a “Socratic dialogue” with faculty and teaching center staff. The result of this dialogue can be a Socratic portfolio which includes “a narrative and accompanying artifacts that reflect their experiences, discussion, and decisions” (p. 336). Not only does the development of a teaching portfolio document teaching performance, it can also demonstrate a TA’s awareness of the critical nature of what Schön (1983) calls “reflective practice” and provide him/her with practice in talking about the nature of teaching for job interviews.

How Do I Get Started on a Teaching Portfolio?

Now that you’ve decided it’s worth the time to create a teaching portfolio, how do you get started? The first step is to identify your preferred teaching methods, and that’s where “student and faculty mentor feedback can be invaluable in helping [you] define the styles that are the best fit” for you (Border, 2005-06, “Content,” para. 3). Because teaching portfolios are typically not required, TAs often do not start developing one until they begin the job hunting process. However, it is important to get into the habit of collecting teaching materials from the very beginning. Just as you have a box or file drawer devoted to your research, you should regularly collect teaching materials like syllabi, assignments and student evaluations, and keep them in a central place. It is not necessary to immediately spend time sorting through these materials; you can save this task until you begin developing your actual portfolio. It’s easier to develop a portfolio from materials that have already been collected, than having to collect materials before you can begin. Border also suggests that “participation in teaching preparation activities such as workshops, seminars, courses, and videotaped consultations can add skills and confidence, and thus pages, to the portfolio” (“Content,” para. 2).

Once you have identified your preferred teaching styles and collected teaching materials, you will need to think about the purpose and the audience. Do you want to use the portfolio for your own professional development, for job searches or for an award nomination? Form should
follow function. A portfolio that is intended for your own personal development as an instructor will probably not emphasize student assessment results in the same way that a portfolio for an award will. Thinking about the purpose and audience in advance helps you shape your portfolio and customize it according to its intended use.

The important thing is to start early and to keep it manageable. Universities like Brown, UCLA and Vanderbilt University offer on-line advice for TAs on how to create teaching portfolios. Appendix B contains an annotated list of websites and web-based materials featuring information on how to get started, what to put into a teaching portfolio and how to select artifacts.

What Goes in a Teaching Portfolio?

A teaching portfolio is more than a collection of teaching materials. It should also “contain reflective statements on the material included and on [your] approach to teaching and learning” (Kaplan, 1998, p. 2). Like portfolios in the fine arts or architecture, teaching portfolios are highly personalized and no two are exactly alike. Both the content and the organization differ from discipline to discipline and person to person. Although there is no one best format or length for teaching portfolios, they often contain some or all of the following components:

- Teaching philosophy including strategies and methodologies
- List of courses taught with instructional goals
- Samples of instructional materials—syllabi, assignments, exams, Web pages, etc.
- Samples of student work
- Summary of student evaluations and sample comments
- Teaching observation reports
- Reflection on what you learned and how you intend to develop your teaching in the future

Before selecting specific items for your teaching portfolio, look at samples created by other TAs or faculty. Departments sometimes maintain a collection of portfolios as do many teaching centers. If sample portfolios are not available, you can find samples from a variety of disciplines in Peter Seldin’s *The Teaching Portfolio* (1997). His book contains twenty-three portfolios from disciplines as diverse as speech, biology, law, finance and electrical engineering. By looking at teaching portfolios from other disciplines, Seldin believes readers will gain helpful information and insights applicable to their disciplines. Although the portfolios in Seldin’s book exclude the appendix materials referenced in the samples, you can find samples of artifacts that are typically included in a portfolio from Carnegie Mellon’s *Guidelines for Teaching Portfolios* available at http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/DocumentingYourTeaching/TeachingPortfolios/TeachingPortfolios.pdf. Be patient, the file is large (13+ MB) and takes time to load.

As a TA looking at sample teaching portfolios developed by faculty members, remember that your teaching experiences are different from theirs. TAs often teach courses that have pre-set content and methods of assessment. You may even be required to use a standardized syllabus, making it difficult to highlight your own teaching-learning ideas. The Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at the University of Waterloo offers the following tips on how to deal with this situation:

- **Describe a course that you’d like** to teach. You only need to provide a paragraph stating what the course will cover and the learning objectives,
• Try writing up a syllabus for a course you’d like to teach. Consider how you could incorporate your area(s) of specialization into the course. To plan a course, you’ll need to consider issues in course design. It helps if you make a weekly schedule of topics and activities to cover. . . . When you’ve completed the syllabus, ask a professor in your discipline for feedback.

• Prepare an assignment for a course you’d like to teach. (“Content,” para. 4)

**What Steps Can Be Used to Develop a Teaching Portfolio?**

In *The Teaching Portfolio*, Seldin suggests the following steps for developing a teaching portfolio (pp. 13-14):

1. **Summarize teaching responsibilities.** Start with one or two paragraphs describing the courses you currently teach; provide details on their levels (e.g., freshmen, seniors, etc.) and whether or not they are required or electives, general education or courses in the major.

2. **Describe your approach to teaching.** This is often referred to as a teaching philosophy, which should be a “reflective statement describing [your] teaching philosophy, strategies, methodologies, and objectives” (p. 13).

3. **Select items for the portfolio.** Pick teaching documents which are relevant to your teaching responsibilities, as well as those which reflect your personal preferences, teaching style and discipline. If you teach environmental chemistry and believe in promoting higher order thinking skills, you might include a test you created that focuses on students’ problem solving skills rather than on their ability to recall facts or balance equations.

4. **Prepare statements for each item.**

5. **Arrange the items in order.** The sequence of items is determined by their purpose. If you want to “demonstrate teaching improvement, entries that reflect that goal (such as participating in seminars and workshops designed to enhance classroom performance) would be stressed” (p. 14).

6. **Compile the supporting data.** This might include student evaluation of teaching and teaching observation reports from faculty members or your campus teaching center, samples of student work, and any of the other items listed above in the “What Goes in a Teaching Portfolio?” section.

*I’ve Selected What I Want to Include, Now What Do I Do?*

At this point you may have enough materials to fill two three-ring binders, so now what do you do? How long should your teaching portfolio be? How should you go about organizing it? Recommendations on the length of the portfolio vary, but the Center for Teaching Excellence (CTE) at the University of Waterloo (n.d.) recommends that commentary and reflective statements be limited to ten pages. “Be selective; choose items that highlight your strengths and achievements and that your reader will find convincing. Refer your reader to appendices if you want to include detailed evidence such as student feedback or an example of teaching material” (“Format,” para. 1).
Remember that although reflective statements and supporting artifacts are important, the teaching portfolio needs to be reasonable in length so that it will be read in its entirety. Keep it concise. Rodrigues-Farrar (n.d.) notes that the reflective statement “allows you to identify your teaching goals in a specific context” and advises describing the evidence, “explain[ing] its importance and direct[ing] the reader to the appropriate appendices as documentation” (p. 10). According to Kaplan (1998) “the attempt to be completely comprehensive can turn the project . . . into a paper chase.” (p. 2). Kaplan and Rodrigues-Farrar suggest dividing the support materials into three groups based on the sources of artifacts: (1) personal materials (teaching philosophy, summary of responsibilities, syllabi, assignments, etc.), (2) materials from others (student ratings, observations of your teaching, letters and thank you notes from students or colleagues, teaching awards or nominations, etc.) and (3) good teaching “products” (essays, lab books, etc.)—for a more complete list of possible items, see pages 8-9 in Rodrigues-Farrar.

Now that you’ve written your reflective statements and selected artifacts for the appendices, put all of the portfolio materials into a three-ring binder with separate sections or on a computer disk. Posting the materials to a website is another option. If you choose to create an e-portfolio, be sure to mention this in your cover letters and provide the Web address where it can be accessed.

Once your materials are in a binder or e-portfolio, don’t make the mistake of thinking you’re done—it’s time to evaluate the finished product. Think back to your audience and purpose, and decide whether or not your portfolio is constructed appropriately. The Schreyer Institute for Teaching Excellence at Penn State (n.d.) suggests you ask yourself the following questions:

- Does your portfolio give the reader a sense of who you are as a teacher?
- What is the most striking claim you make about your teaching in the portfolio?
- Will the evidence presented for this claim be convincing to this audience?
- Are all of the claims and evidence offered for teaching effectiveness relevant? (para. 3)

If you’re comfortable with your responses to these questions, you’re ready to review your teaching portfolio using the rubric in Appendix A. You’ll also want to ask your mentor or advisor, and perhaps other faculty members, to review your portfolio. Look for someone who serves on the hiring committee in your department or someone who will examine your teaching portfolio with the lens of a committee member looking at a candidate for a tenure track position. Once the review process is complete, revisit your portfolio and make any needed revision.

Final Thoughts

Pat Hutchings of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, and a long time advocate of teaching portfolios, notes that the what and how of teaching portfolios—what goes in them, how long they are, etc.—is not as valuable as the process. She concludes: “The point of teaching is learning; and [using teaching portfolios] we need to ask, on a regular, ongoing basis, whether students are learning what we think we are teaching” (in Anderson, 1993, p.6). Do you know whether or not your students are learning what you’re teaching? Could you provide evidence of student learning to a hiring committee? If you answered “No” to either question, it’s time to think about developing a teaching portfolio by talking to your mentor or a consultant at your campus teaching center.
References


Appendix 1

Teaching Portfolio Rubric

**Scoring System:** 3 = Exemplary  2 = Meets Expectations  1 = Needs Improvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Score</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The materials in the portfolio logically organized.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The philosophy of teaching is clearly articulated and explained.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The preface, précis or teaching autobiography adequately explains the TAs goals/objectives in the context of his/her teaching situation.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The length of the portfolio was appropriate, not too short or to long, for the materials selected.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The portfolio balanced information from self, from others, and from products of students learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was an explanation of the materials selected for inclusion in the portfolio, including materials in the appendix.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The materials (syllabi, assignments, exams, class activities, etc.) used to support learning was of good quality.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There was consistency among the various components of the portfolio that demonstrated effectiveness in practice tied to the TAs philosophy of teaching.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Challenging, higher order thinking skills or intellectual tasks (papers, projects, activities, assignments, exams, etc.) were set by the TA for students, or designed jointly with students. There is evidence that students were able perform these tasks at appropriate levels.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multiple sources (observations of teaching, students work samples, test scores, etc.) offered a varied and objective assessment of teaching and evidence of successful learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The portfolio provided evidence of efforts to improve teaching, learning goals, instructional practices, course materials, and/or assessment in order to improve student learning.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Comments:**

**Sources:**


Appendix 2

Teaching Portfolio Resources

From The Ohio State University, a web-page containing an overview to portfolios, including a description of different kinds of portfolios and characteristics of effective portfolios.  
http://ucat.osu.edu/teaching_portfolio/teaching_port.html

This web-page contains steps for compiling a portfolio, an extensive list of materials that can be included, and examples of a short teaching philosophy and interpretation of student evaluations. It is from the University of Texas at Austin.  
http://ctl.utexas.edu/teaching-resources/advance-your-career/assemble-your-teaching-portfolio/

This web-site from the University of Washington contains “guidelines for the preparation and use of teaching portfolios.” At the bottom of each page are links to additional pages including ones with resources and tools, and information on developmental teaching portfolios as well as evaluative teaching portfolios for promotion and tenure.  
http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/portfolio/guidelines.html

From the University of Nebraska-Lincoln, this web-page offers advice on constructing a teaching portfolio, including teaching roles and responsibilities, teaching statements, and evidence of effective—check out the links in this section to see an example of how to summarize teaching evaluations.  
http://www.unl.edu/gradstudies/current/dev/portfolio.shtml#final

A web-page from Iowa State University which contains an annotated bibliography on teaching portfolios and related topics.  
http://www.celt.iastate.edu/faculty/selected_readings.html

For a brief, two-page overview of teaching portfolios, this resource from Penn State is a good place to start. Included is a one-page annotated bibliography of leading print references.  
http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/Designing_a_Teaching_Portfolio.pdf
A 12-page handbook for faculty and graduates students, *The Teaching Portfolio* from Brown University contains steps on how to create a teaching portfolio. Includes a short appendix with outline examples.

http://www.brown.edu/Administration/Sheridan_Center/docs/teach_port.pdf

This 11-page guide from the University of Toronto contains five activities that walk lecturers, librarians and graduate students through the process of creating a course portfolio.

http://ctl.utsc.utoronto.ca/home/sites/default/files/Teaching_portfolios.pdf

This “how to” guide, entitled *Guidelines for Teaching Portfolios*, is from Carnegie Mellon University. The first eight pages contain tips on creating portfolio, and the remaining 167 pages contain real examples of teaching statements, classroom rubrics, and other materials that might be included in a teaching portfolio.

http://www.cmu.edu/teaching/resources/DocumentingYourTeaching/TeachingPortfolios/TeachingPortfolios.pdf

*The Teaching Portfolio* is an eight-page occasional paper from the University of Michigan. In addition to basic information on portfolios, it includes information on how they are evaluated, plus a peer review rubric. Also of value is the one-page list of 49 items which might be included in a portfolio.

http://www.crlt.umich.edu/publinks/CRLT_n011.pdf

This guide to “Developing a Teaching Portfolio” from Rutgers University features suggestion on how to create and organize your first portfolio, as well as six steps to follow. Included are tips on writing a teaching philosophy and a diagnostic statement about teaching.

http://taproject.rutgers.edu/services_tips/teach_portfolio.pdf

From the Tomorrow’s Professor Listserv, you can accesses Chapter 3, “Preparing the Teaching Portfolio,” from Peter Seldin, J. Elizabeth Miller, and Clement A. Seldin’s book, *The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Improved Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions*. You will need to type “1076” in the box in the upper left-hand corner where you can search the listings by number.

http://cgi.stanford.edu/~dept-ctl/tomprof/postings.php