

The Power of the Portfolio:

Honing and Marketing Your Teaching Skills

No matter how much your advisors stress the importance of your research – and it is critical, especially at a research university like UGA – the reality is that four-year teaching colleges offer the majority of jobs for future faculty members. Strong teaching credentials are a plus at research universities, too. A teaching portfolio is your best-bet tool for marketing yourself to employers, applying for awards and pushing yourself to be a better teacher.

Why a Teaching Portfolio?

A **teaching portfolio** documents your experiences and abilities as a college-level teacher. When you apply for jobs, most schools request at least some components of a portfolio, such as your teaching philosophy, syllabi or student evaluations. Submitting a portfolio makes for richer interviews, giving the search committee fodder for more detailed questions, and it allows you some control in guiding the questions, because you provide the fodder.

Over the course of your career, update your portfolio and use it for your annual reviews, your promotion and tenure dossier and to apply for teaching awards. As a student, you can be considered for graduate teaching awards; UGA confers two: the Outstanding Teacher Awards and the Excellence in Teaching Awards (<http://www.uga.edu/gradschool/financial/awards.html>). Finally, creating and maintaining a portfolio can push you to be a better teacher as you reflect upon and write your teaching philosophy or create teaching materials worthy of inclusion in your portfolio.

Preparing a Portfolio

Throughout your career, you should compile a folio, which houses all materials documenting your teaching. From this, pull the appropriate materials to assemble a portfolio for each position for which you apply. Just like your CV or resume, tailor each portfolio to reflect your discipline, experience and type of institution you're targeting. Send one copy before your interview; bring multiple copies for your campus visit.

The first and most difficult step is to write your teaching philosophy statement. Update this, along with your CV, for each job application. As a graduate student, prepare to create portfolios by summarize your teaching responsibilities each semester. Compose all the elements of your portfolio before the semester in which you finish your dissertation. That way, you can focus on writing cover letters while you job hunt.

All the Right Ingredients

A short version of your portfolio often includes a teaching philosophy, curriculum vitae, list of courses you've taught (without descriptions and teaching evaluations. Choose the components that best represent your teaching philosophy and are most appropriate to your discipline and the job for which you're applying. Following is a complete list of elements you'll likely include:

Teaching philosophy statement: Best kept to one page, this is a narrative, first-person, reflective articulation of your views on learning and how they guide your teaching strategy. Acknowledge the important truisms – e.g., “I believe in student interaction” and “Developing critical thinking in students is important” – but move on quickly to specifics. Think about what your discipline has to offer students and reflect that value when you describe how you teach the subject.

Description of courses taught: Avoid simple lists or long paragraphs. Consider including: the type of course, type of students in the course, your role (discussion leader, instructor of record, etc.) and responsibilities, instructional format and semesters taught. Be specific when describing your responsibilities, as they may vary widely depending on the professor with whom you work. Be specific about the resources and technologies you used (e.g., WebCT, PowerPoint). The values you express in your teaching philosophy should be evident in your course descriptions.

Sample teaching materials: Include syllabi, lesson plans, study guides, assignments, reading lists, tests, handouts,

worksheets – anything you create to provide students more information, help them think about course material in new ways or overcome obstacles to learning. Handouts show your appreciation for difficult material and different learning styles. Grading rubrics demonstrate explicitly what you value in student work and that you think it's important for students to understand how they'll be graded. Add short narratives explaining how you used each material in class.

Samples of student work: Graded student essays, projects and other assignments work well here. Design assignments that require critical thinking to show that you can develop that skill in students.

Innovative teaching projects and roles: Use anything you do in the classroom to meet your students' needs, whether it's a technological tool, supplemental instructions, a game or simulation: one graduate student assigned his students to create a game using elements from the subject matter they were studying. Include information about roles you have filled in your department, such as re-writing a lab manual, peer mentoring or participating on a committee related to student learning.

List of professional activities related to teaching: Include mentoring, scholarship on teaching, presentations at conferences about teaching in your discipline or curriculum development. If there is a hole in the course content of your department, create a syllabus for the class you'd teach to fill that hole. This tells a search committee that you know your field and how to design courses.

List of special training or teaching-related experiences:

List Graduate School courses or workshops on teaching, conferences, internships, experiences in which you have been mentored or training in technology useful for teaching.

Evaluation of teaching:

Student evaluations and comments are the most readily available materials for this section, but students can't evaluate your knowledge of the field. Ask a professor or peer to observe you while you teach and evaluate you. Include teaching awards or honors, a videotape of your teaching or any data from your courses documenting student learning.

Letters of recommendation:

The best letters are written by faculty members who have direct experience with your research and your teaching. Ask your advisor and other letter writers to observe your teaching to gain that knowledge.

Beyond these core elements, add documents that reflect your discipline, your experience and the position to which you apply, taking into consideration the type of institution. A one-size-fits-all portfolio will not do the trick. ■

Based on the Graduate School seminar "Creating Teaching Portfolios: The Who, What, When, Why and How" by Paul Quick, Center for Teaching and Learning. To view this seminar in full, visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu>.

More Help from the Graduate School

In cooperation with the Center for Teaching and Learning, as well as other departments and units, the Graduate School offers an interdisciplinary program in teaching. Graduate students interested in the program, which confers a certificate, should visit <http://www.grad.uga.edu> and click on **Graduate School Interdisciplinary Certificate in University Teaching** under the **Academics** section.

To complete the Certificate in University Teaching, you must teach at least four semesters at UGA, complete nine semester hours of coursework related to teaching skills and methods, develop a teaching project and either write a scholarly article or present a poster or session at the annual Fall Orientation for Teaching and Laboratory Assistants.

As part of the certificate, students must complete the Graduate School Teaching Portfolio Program, which is also open to graduate students not enrolled in the teaching certificate program. Submission deadlines for the portfolio program are announced each semester and participants are recognized at commencement.

For more information on the Graduate School Teaching Portfolio Program, the Graduate School Interdisciplinary Certificate in University Teaching, or creating a teaching portfolio, visit the Graduate School at <http://www.grad.uga.edu> or the Center for Teaching and Learning at <http://www.ctl.uga.edu>.