

Teaching Portfolios and Peer Evaluations of Teaching

These two related strategies for evaluating and improving teaching have been receiving increasing attention in higher education, and some of you may be wondering if you should, or if you will be expected to, take advantage of these strategies. I'll tell you what I know. [Note, however, that although I am using several sources for this information, I am not going to provide detailed citations. Many of my sources are handouts I received at workshops, and complete citations weren't provided. If any of you would like to borrow my materials, let me know.]

What is a teaching portfolio?

A teaching portfolio is a collection of materials that represent an instructor's teaching practices and outcomes. I've attached a list of the types of materials that can be included in a teaching portfolio. Teaching portfolios (as well as individual items included in them) can be used for summative evaluation (such as personnel decisions), formative evaluation (professional development of individual instructors), or both. Some authors claim that it is difficult for a portfolio to serve both purposes well simultaneously. A portfolio designed for summative evaluation should probably summarize an instructor's major teaching accomplishments and strengths; a portfolio designed for formative evaluation should include more self-reflective information on the instructor's goals and strategies. In any case, a portfolio should be continually updated and revised. Older materials should be replaced with newer materials. If the portfolio is to be used for summative evaluation, an executive summary should be provided.

Who should have a teaching portfolio?

Obviously, creating and maintaining a teaching portfolio can be a lot of work. Also, there is no current requirement for faculty at WVU to provide a complete teaching portfolio as part of the faculty evaluation process. We currently include student evaluations and syllabi (and often other teaching information or materials as well) in our faculty evaluation files. This year's Policies and Procedures for Faculty Evaluations does, however, encourage a broader range of strategies for documenting teaching effectiveness:

Excerpt from LaBelle's memo:

For purposes of evaluation, I want to encourage you to provide evidence of your teaching effectiveness not only through the student evaluation process, but in a variety of ways, such as those identified on page 3 of the "Policies and Procedures" document, including peer evaluations, review of syllabi and other evidence of course content.

Excerpt from page 3 of the Policies and Procedures:

Supporting documentation for the evaluation of performance in teaching might include evidence drawn from such sources as the collective judgment of students, of student advisors, and of colleagues who have visited the faculty member's

classes. It might also include analyses of course content, evaluation of products such as textbooks or videotapes, studies of success rates of students taught, or other evidence deemed appropriate and proper by the department and college.

Therefore, I think it is appropriate for faculty members anticipating tenure or promotion decisions in the near future to start collecting some of the information and materials that might be included in a teaching portfolio. Keep in mind, however, that these other materials will be considered as supplements to, rather than replacements of, student evaluations of teaching. I also think that graduate students who will be applying for academic jobs should seriously consider developing a teaching portfolio. Increasing numbers of schools are using portfolios in their faculty evaluation process, and I expect many schools will begin asking for teaching portfolios as part of the application process for new positions. Finally, anyone who is seriously interested in improving their teaching should consider developing a teaching portfolio focused on formative evaluation to facilitate their efforts to change and improve.

How can peer evaluations be used?

Teaching portfolios often include information based on peer evaluations. Peer evaluations of teaching are useful because peers are knowledgeable about many aspects of teaching and can provide evaluation and feedback that may not be available or appropriately obtained from student evaluations. Some aspects of teaching that can be usefully evaluated by peers include "elements of course design, including goals, content, and organization; methods and materials used in delivery of instruction; evaluation of students' academic work and the instructor's grading practices; and integration and interpretation of information gathered from students, administrators, and self-assessments as well as from peers" (Keig & Waggoner, 1994).

Peer evaluations for formative evaluation can be quite informal, and probably occur frequently already. I'm sure most faculty and graduate students would be willing to observe a lecture, review a syllabus, discuss grading practices, etc., and provide informal feedback. Those of you developing teaching portfolios may want to request more formal feedback that can be included in your portfolio. Graduate instructors should request written feedback from their supervisor's observations of their classes for inclusion in a teaching portfolio. If you would like help in finding someone to evaluate a component of your teaching, let me know. I also have some materials that might be useful in guiding peer (and self) evaluations. The book, How am I teaching? Forms and activities for acquiring instructional input, contains the following forms that can be copied freely:

- Classroom Environment Inventory
- Course Materials Review (peer and student versions)
- How Do You Teach?
- Instructor Self-evaluation
- Made-to-order Form for Instructional Observation (peer and student versions)
- Open-ended Questionnaire
- Self or Colleague Analysis of Videotaped Teaching Sample
- Specifically, What Needs Improvement? (instructor and students versions)

Teacher Behaviors Inventory

Further information

If you would like further information on these topics, I have a few relevant articles, books, and references, and would, of course, be happy to talk with you. Esther Gottlieb (293-3441) is quite knowledgeable about teaching portfolios. The Instructional Improvement Network (293-7212) may be able to provide additional information or referrals.