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The Teaching Portfolio Concept

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INTRODUCTION

An important and welcome change is taking place on college and university campuses: Teaching is being taken more seriously. Countless institutions are reexamining their commitment to teaching and exploring ways to improve and reward it. As for faculty, they are being held accountable, as never before, to provide solid evidence of the quality of their classroom instruction.

The familiar professorial paradox is crumbling on many campuses. Traditionally, college professors were hired to teach but were rewarded for research. While this is still true in many institutions, especially those with strong graduate schools, it has been largely swept away on campuses stressing undergraduate education. Today, teaching may still be in second place in the race with research, but the gap is slowly closing.

There is an explosive growth to the movement to take teaching seriously. Interest is evident from the overcrowded conferences and second and third printings of books on improving and evaluating teaching. It can be seen in the recently issued reports by such institutions as Berkeley, Dartmouth, Michigan, Penn State, and Stanford, all chorusing the pressing need for closer attention to the quality of teaching. Moreover, institutions are finding the funds to support the teaching renaissance. Stanford University, for example, set aside \$7 million for programs aimed at rewarding and improving teaching (Mooney, 1991); the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School offered a \$15,000 cash award ("No Such Problems. . .") and the University of Missouri–Columbia \$10,000 ("10 Top Teachers Get Recognition. . .") to recognize and reward outstanding faculty teaching.

What is behind the new emphasis on teaching? Faculty and administrators who chafed at the inequity of teaching and research played a part. The growing number of students and parents facing the swiftly escalating annual costs of higher education led to demanding questions about the quality of teaching. And the insistent viewpoint that teaching is actually an expression of scholarship, that scholarship does not confine itself to the cutting edge of research but also lives in intimate knowledge and teaching of the research in the classroom (see *Scholarship Revisited*, Boyer, 1990), added to the pressure on campuses. But perhaps the most compelling force for the new seriousness about teaching is the strident demands for teaching accountability from newly aroused legislatures and institutional

governing boards. Facing an unrelenting budgetary squeeze, they are taking fresh, almost inquisitorial interest, in knowing how faculty members spend their time and about their effectiveness as teachers.

In short, the movement to improve and reward teaching and to take it seriously has become a groundswell across the nation. It has enlisted state legislatures, boards of trustees, financial donors, academic administrators, faculty members, parents, and students to press colleges and universities to scrutinize more carefully the classroom performance of each professor.

Unfortunately, factual information on teaching performance is at best often skimpy. The typical professor has little solid evidence about what they do in the classroom and how well they do it. True, they probably have student ratings but that's about all, and student ratings alone fall far short of a complete picture of one's classroom performance. They may have a curriculum vitae, but typically that lists publications, honors, research grants, and other scholarly accomplishments and says very little about teaching.

Yet in the absence of factual information about teaching, how can it be evaluated? How can it be rewarded? How can it be improved? And how can institutions give the teaching function its proper role and value in the educational process? Is there a way for colleges and universities to respond simultaneously to the movement to take teaching seriously and to the pressures to improve systems of teaching accountability? The answer is yes. A solution can be found by turning to the teaching portfolio. It is an approach increasingly recognized and respected.

WHAT IS A TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

It is a factual description of a professor's teaching strengths and accomplishments. It includes documents and materials that collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching performance.

The portfolio is to teaching what lists of publications, grants, and honors are to research and scholarship. As such, it allows faculty members to display their teaching accomplishments for examination by others. And, in the process, it contributes both to sounder personnel decisions and to the professional development of individual faculty members (Seldin, 1991). As a result, it provides a strong signal that teaching is an institutional priority.

Why would a faculty member want to prepare a teaching portfolio? They might do so in order to spell out for the record the hard evidence and specific data about their teaching effectiveness. That is a clear advantage when an evaluation committee examines academic credentials for tenure and promotion decisions. Or they might do so in order to provide the needed structure for self-reflection about areas of their teaching needing improvement.

An important point: The teaching portfolio is not an exhaustive compilation of all the documents and materials that bear on teaching performance. Instead, it culls from the record selected information on teaching activities and solid evidence of their effectiveness (Seldin, 1991). And, importantly, just as in a curriculum vitae, all claims in the portfolio should be supported by firm empirical evidence.

To the skeptical professor who hesitates to spend valuable time preparing a teaching portfolio, Lemm (1992) offers this answer: As faculty, he says, we are trained to document our research and publication activities. We update our curriculum vitae as we strive for tenure and promotion. But we don't document our teaching, nor are we expected to do so. Doesn't it make sense to document teaching activities with the same care and vigor we document research and scholarship? The portfolio enables a professor to present evidence of teaching achievements in an orderly, efficient, and persuasive way.

The logic behind portfolios is straightforward. Earlier assessment methods, such as student ratings or peer observations, were like flashlights. That is, they illuminated only the teaching skills and abilities that fell within their beams. As such, they shed light on only a small part of a professor's classroom performance. But with portfolios, the flashlight is replaced by a searchlight. Its beam discloses the broad range of teaching skills, abilities, attitudes, and philosophies.

Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan (1991) make the case for teaching portfolios in this way:

1. Portfolios provide documented evidence of teaching that is connected to the specifics and contexts of what is being taught.
2. They go beyond exclusive reliance on student ratings because they include a range of evidence from a variety of sources such as syllabi, samples of student work, self-reflections, reports on classroom research, and faculty development programs.
3. In the process of selecting and organizing their portfolio material, faculty think hard about their teaching, a practice which is likely to lead to improvement in classroom performance.

4. In deciding what should go into a portfolio and how it should be evaluated, institutions necessarily must address the question of what is effective teaching and what standards should drive campus teaching practice.
5. Portfolios are a step toward a more public, professional view of teaching. They reflect teaching as a scholarly activity.

The teaching portfolio is increasingly recognized and respected. Among the many presidents of academic institutions and associations supporting the portfolio approach are Derek Bok, former Harvard University president; Donald Kennedy, president of Stanford University; Ernest Boyer, president of the Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (see *Scholarship Revisited*, 1990); and Lynne Cheney, chairman of the National Endowment for the Humanities (see *Tyrannical Machines*, 1990).

The teaching portfolio concept has gone well beyond the point of theoretical possibility. It has been used in Canada (where it is called a teaching dossier) for nearly 15 years. Today it is being adopted or pilot-tested in various forms by an increasing number of American institutions.

Although reliable numbers are hard to come by, it is estimated that as many as 400 colleges and universities in the United States are now using or experimenting with portfolios. That is a stunning jump from the approximately 75 institutions thought to be using portfolios just two years ago. Among the current users or experimenters with portfolios are: Texas A&M University, Columbia College (South Carolina), University of Maryland, Miami-Dade Community College (Florida), St. Norbert College (Wisconsin), New Community College of Baltimore (Maryland), the University of Nebraska, and Murray State University (Kentucky).

THE IMPORTANCE OF COLLABORATION

Should portfolios be developed by the professor working alone, or should they be collaborative efforts? From mounting experience, we know now that they are best prepared in consultation with others. The reason, says Seldin (1991) and Bird (1989) is because portfolios prepared by the professor working alone do not include the collegial or supervisory support needed in a program of teaching improvement. And, importantly, there is none of the control or corroboration of evidence that is essential to sustain personnel decisions. That is why portfolio development should involve interaction and mentoring in the same way that a doctoral dissertation reflects both the efforts of the candidate and the advice of the mentor.

Who might serve as a mentor? A department chair, a colleague, or a faculty development specialist could fill the role. They discuss with the professor such key questions as: Which areas of the teaching-learning process are to be examined? What kinds of information do they expect to collect? How is the information to be analyzed and presented? Why are they preparing the portfolio?

One caution: Whoever serves as portfolio consultant/mentor must have wide knowledge of procedures and current instruments to document effective teaching. In this way, the consultant can assist the faculty member by providing suggestions and resources, and maintaining support during the preparation of the portfolio (Seldin, 1991). This point is discussed in detail, this volume, in the chapter by Annis.

A second caution: Because faculty members and institutional contexts differ widely, there is no one "best" way to structure the collaboration. Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan (1991) offer these approaches:

1. A buddy system in which two faculty pair up for a semester to visit each other's classes, talk to their students, confer on syllabi, exercises, and exams, and then assist each other in documenting their teaching in their respective portfolios.
2. A mentoring system where the older, more experienced professor works directly with a younger colleague in assisting them as they develop their portfolio.
3. A department-based portfolio project in which discussions about teaching can be more sharply focused and richer because they are focused on the discipline.

Since "teaching tends to be a private, solitary activity," Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan (1991, p. 51) conclude that "collaboratively designed portfolios are an antidote to this isolation and a way to promote collegial exchange focused on the substance—the scholarship—of teaching."

Although some professors will prepare their portfolios in collaboration with their department chair, experience tells us that most will end up working with someone else. Therefore it is of special importance that a periodic, written exchange of views between the chair and the professor take place about: (1) teaching responsibilities; (2) other duties related to teaching; (3) the general content and structure of the portfolio; and (4) how teaching performance is to be reported. "Otherwise," cautions

Seldin (1991, p. 6) "there is a danger that the department chair may erroneously conclude that the data submitted overlook areas of prime concern and may even cover up areas of suspected weaknesses."

SIX STEPS TO CREATE A TEACHING PORTFOLIO

Experience suggests that most faculty members rely on the following step-by-step approach in creating their portfolios. It is based on the work of Shore and others (1986), Seldin (1991), and O'Neil and Wright (1992).

Step 1. Clarify Teaching Responsibilities. Typically, this covers such topics as courses currently taught and those taught in the recent past, teaching-related activities such as serving as faculty advisor to student organizations, or advising individual graduate or undergraduate students. It is based on the exchange of memos between the department chair and the faculty member.

Step 2. Select Items for the Portfolio. Based on the teaching responsibilities described in Step 1, the professor selects items for inclusion in the portfolio which are directly applicable to their teaching responsibilities.

Step 3. Prepare Statements on Each Item. Statements are prepared by the professor on activities, initiatives, and accomplishments on each item. Backup documentation and appendices are referenced, as appropriate.

Step 4. Arrange the Items in Order. The sequence of the statements about accomplishments in each area is determined by their intended use. For example, if the professor intends to demonstrate teaching improvement, such activities as attending faculty development workshops and seminars should be stressed.

Step 5. Compile the Support Data. Evidence supporting all items mentioned in the portfolio should be retained by the professor and made available for review upon request. These would include, for example, letters from colleagues and students, original student evaluations of teaching, samples of student work, and invitations to contribute articles on teaching in one's discipline. Such evidence is not part of the portfolio but is backup material placed in the appendix or made available upon request.

Step 6. Incorporate the Portfolio into the Curriculum Vitae. Lastly, the portfolio is then inserted into the professor's curriculum vitae under the heading of "Teaching" or "Instruction." Departmental guidelines will determine its precise location in the c.v. in relation to the sections on "Research" and "Service."

CHOOSING ITEMS FOR THE PORTFOLIO

There are many possibilities from which items can be selected that are especially relevant to the professor's particular teaching situation. The items chosen also depend, to some degree, on whether the portfolio is prepared for purposes of improvement or personnel decision, and on any format or content requirements of a professor's department or institution.

Based on empirical evidence, it is clear that certain items turn up in portfolios with much more frequency than others. From a personal review of more than 400 portfolios prepared by professors in both public and private institutions, the writer can assert that certain items appear again and again.

Material from Oneself

- Statement of teaching responsibilities, including course titles, numbers, enrollments, and a brief description of the way each course was taught.
- Representative course syllabi detailing course content and objectives, teaching methods, readings, and homework assignments.
- Description of steps taken to improve teaching, including changes resulting from self-evaluation, reading journals on teaching improvement, and participation in programs on sharpening instructional skill.
- Instructional innovations and evaluation of their effectiveness.
- A personal statement by the professor describing teaching goals for the next five years.

Material from Others

- Student course or teaching evaluation data which produce an overall rating of effectiveness or suggest improvements.
- Statements from colleagues who have observed the professor in the classroom.
- Documentation of teaching development activity through the campus center for teaching and learning.
- Statements from colleagues who have reviewed the professor's teaching materials, such as course syllabi, assignments, testing and grading practices.
- Honors or other recognition, such as a distinguished teaching award.

The Products of Good Teaching

- A record of students who succeed in advanced study in the field.
- Student publications or conference presentations on course-related work.
- Testimonials from employers or students about the professor's influence on career choice.
- Student scores on pre- and post-course examinations.

These are the most commonly selected items, but by no means are they the only ones to appear in portfolios. Some professors, for reasons of discipline or institution or personal predilection, choose a different content mix.

Some Items that Sometimes Appear in Portfolios

- Description of curricular revisions, including new course projects, materials, and class assignments.
- Self-evaluation of teaching-related activities.
- Contributing to, or editing, a professional journal on teaching the professor's discipline.

- A statement by the department chair assessing the professor's teaching contribution to the department.
- Invitations to present a paper on teaching one's discipline.
- A videotape of the professor teaching a typical class.
- Participation in off-campus activities related to teaching in the professor's discipline.
- Evidence of help given to colleagues leading to improvement of their teaching.
- Description of how computers, films, and other nonprint materials are used in teaching.
- Statements by alumni on the quality of instruction.
- Examples of graded student essays, along with the professor's comments on why they were so graded.

How much information and evidence is needed to fairly represent a professor's teaching performance? There is no simple answer. Each professor must set the balance scale between "too much" and "not enough" information. However, for most professors, six to eight pages plus supporting appendix material is sufficient.

The appendix material needs careful attention to be sure all the statements on teaching accomplishments are adequately supported. In deciding what to include, it is best not to engage in overkill. O'Neil and Wright (1992) suggest that the professor maintain a file of all relevant records on teaching. The best examples should be chosen for the portfolio and evaluators informed that additional evidence is available upon request.

Keep in mind that the portfolio is a living document that changes over time. New items are added. Others are removed. Updating a portfolio becomes a simple matter of dropping items pertaining to teaching into a file drawer just as is now done for research and service. Little time or effort is involved. When the research and service sections of the curriculum vitae are being updated, simply do the same for the teaching section.

USING THE PORTFOLIO FOR PERSONNEL DECISIONS

Because each portfolio is unique, like a fingerprint, no two are exactly alike. The content and organization differ from one professor to another. This approach works well if the portfolio is used for improvement purposes. But it works less well if the portfolio is used for personnel decisions.

One way, says Seldin (1989), to lay the problem to rest is to require those portfolios used for tenure and promotion decisions, or for teaching excellence awards, to include certain mandated items along with the elective ones. Among the institutions adopting this approach are Murray State University (Kentucky), Pace University Business School (New York), Marquette University (Wisconsin), and the University of Colorado at Boulder. At Murray State University, for example, all faculty are expected to include in their portfolios: (1) a reflective statement; (2) course syllabi; (3) examinations; (4) graded assignments; and (5) student rating reports.

At the Pace University Business School, faculty are urged to include: (1) a statement of teaching philosophy, (2) student evaluations and comments, (3) teaching awards, (4) innovative course materials and technologies, (5) course syllabi and exams, and (6) evidence of the integration of contemporary business theory and practice into classroom instruction.

Since teaching is now being taken more seriously, professors looking for recognition as superior teachers stand to benefit by providing tenure and promotion committees with their teaching portfolios. It provides evaluators with hard-to-ignore information on what they do in the classroom and why they do it. And by so doing, it avoids looking at teaching performance as a derivative of student ratings.

Does the teaching portfolio approach really make any difference? See the chapter by Shackelford in this volume and consider the typical comments from professors whose portfolios were used for purposes of personnel decisions:

A history professor in New Jersey: "Teaching is more important here now. My promotion to full professor was largely due to my portfolio. It gave the P&T committee an analysis, prioritizing, and valuing of what I do in the classroom."

A sociology professor in California: "I knew I was a good teacher, but no one else did until they read my portfolio. I got tenure!"

A foreign language professor in Nebraska: "In the last two years I've won three teaching awards at the state and international level. Without the portfolio, none of this would have happened."

How do members of promotion and tenure committees feel about teaching portfolios? Consider the following comments from members of committees:

A committee member in Georgia: "It took time to learn how to evaluate portfolios. But once we did, the richness of the data on teaching made our job a hell of a lot easier."

A committee member in Texas: "No doubt about it, we just make better tenure and promotion decisions with portfolios."

It is important to keep in mind that use of the portfolio for personnel decisions is only occasional. Its primary purpose is to improve teaching performance.

USING THE PORTFOLIO TO IMPROVE TEACHING

It is in the very process of creating the collection of documents and materials that comprise the portfolio that the professor is stimulated to: (1) reconsider personal teaching activities; (2) rethink teaching strategies; (3) rearrange priorities; and (4) plan for the future (Seldin and Annis, 1990). Agreement comes from Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan (1991), who say that portfolios possess a special power to involve faculty in reflecting on their own classroom practices and how to improve it.

There are three important reasons why the portfolio is such a valuable aid in professional development: (1) It is grounded in discipline-based pedagogy, that is, the focus is on teaching a particular subject to a particular group of students at a particular time; (2) the level of personal investment in time, energy, and commitment is high (since faculty develop their own portfolios), and that is a necessary condition for change; and (3) it stirs many professors to reflect on their teaching in an insightful, refocused way. (See the section on Gordon College by Raymond, this volume, for further discussion on portfolios as an aid in faculty development.)

When used for improvement purposes, the portfolio contains no mandated items. Instead, it contains only items chosen by the professor working in collaboration with a consultant/mentor. The

professor may decide, for example, to improve one particular course and include such items as: (1) a summary of instructional methods used; (2) specific course objectives and the degree of student achievement of those objectives; (3) a full-period videotape of a typical class; and (4) student ratings containing both diagnostic and summative questions. (See the Barber and Perry portfolios, this volume, for examples of portfolios prepared for teaching improvement.)

The bottom-line question, of course, remains. Do portfolios actually improve teaching? The most candid answer is frequently yes but not always. Experience on campus after campus suggests that if the professor is motivated to improve, knows how to improve, or where to go for help, improvement is quite likely. Consider these comments:

A marketing professor in Oregon: "I hadn't really thought about my teaching before. But preparing a portfolio made me think about why I do what I do in the classroom. Now I'm breaking out of the old, tired examples and cases. I'm trying new things."

A biology professor in South Carolina: "I confess I was very skeptical at first. But the portfolio led me to rethink my entire approach to teaching. For the better, I must add."

A mathematics professor in Illinois: "I only wish I had learned about the portfolio concept 20 years ago. It sure would have improved my teaching."

An educational psychology professor in Florida: "I believe that every new and experienced faculty member can improve their teaching by preparing a portfolio. It's not a quick-fix approach. But it sure is helpful."

USING PORTFOLIOS FOR OTHER PURPOSES

Some professors prepare portfolios in order to take them on the road as they seek a different teaching position. Generally, the portfolio is submitted in advance of an interview as an aid to presenting a more complete teacher to the institution. And some institutions are now requiring portfolios from professors applying for teaching positions.

Portfolios are now widely used to help determine winners of awards for outstanding teaching or for merit pay consideration. And excerpts from portfolios are increasingly used in successful faculty grant applications.

GAINING ACCEPTANCE OF THE PORTFOLIO APPROACH

To say that the teaching portfolio approach is useful is one thing, but to get the approach off the ground is quite another. To begin with, there are social and attitudinal problems. Some professors automatically resist by evoking various academic traditions. They say that faculty members are not comfortable as self-promoters, don't need to raise "defensive" documentation, and have neither the time nor the desire to keep a record of their classroom achievements. O'Neil and Wright (1992) dispose of these arguments by pointing out that the world of college and university teaching is undergoing change. In an age of accountability, the portfolio is an instrument focused on effective teaching, and that professors: (1) must produce better evidence of contributions; (2) need "positive" documentation to support accomplishments; and (3) need to convey those accomplishments clearly and persuasively to third-party inspection outside their immediate fields.

Caution: Not only do some professors decline to embrace the portfolio concept, but some administrators also enlist as naysayers. Administrators at some institutions are immediately negative at the sight of strangers bearing new ideas, and the portfolio concept is no exception. People being people, some operate comfortably in well-worn grooves and resist almost any change. Others resist out of an unspoken fear that somehow they are threatened.

If the portfolio approach is ultimately to be embraced, an institutional climate of acceptance must first be created. How can that be done? The following guidelines are based on years of practical experience and the work of Edgerton, Hutchings, and Quinlan (1991), Millis (1991), Seldin (1991), and O'Neil & Wright (1992). They should be helpful in creating such a climate of acceptance.

1. The portfolio concept must be presented in a candid, complete, and clear way to every faculty member and academic administrator.
2. Professors must have a significant hand in both the development and the operation of the portfolio program. They must feel, with justification, that they "own" the program.
3. The primary purpose of the portfolio program should be to improve the quality of teaching.

4. The institution's most respected faculty should be involved from the outset. That means the best teachers because their participation attracts other faculty to the program. It also means admired teachers who are also prominent researchers because their participation will signal both the value of portfolios and their willingness to go public with the scholarship of their teaching.
5. The portfolio should be field-tested on a handful of prestigious professors. The fact that faculty leaders are willing to try the concept will not be lost on others.
6. Top-level academic administrators must give their active support to the portfolio concept. They must be publicly committed to the program and provide whatever resources are necessary so it operates effectively.
7. Sufficient time—a year or even two years—must be allowed for acceptance and implementation. Use the time to modify procedures, standards, and techniques. But keep moving forward. Don't allow the portfolio concept to stall in a futile search for perfection.
8. The portfolio approach must not be forced on anyone. It is much better to use faculty volunteers.
9. If portfolios are used for personnel decisions, or for determining teaching award winners, all professors must know the criteria and standards by which portfolios will be evaluated. And those who evaluate portfolios must be clear on those criteria and standards and abide by them.
10. It is wise to allow room for individual differences in developing portfolios. Disciplines differ. So do styles of teaching.
11. Encourage collaboration. A mentor from the same discipline can provide special insights and understandings as well as departmental practices in dealing with portfolios. On the other hand, a mentor from a different discipline can often help clarify the institution's viewpoint, the "big picture." That can be significant since portfolios submitted for personnel decisions will be read by faculty from other disciplines.

SOME FINAL THOUGHTS

For the past several years, the writer has crisscrossed the country explaining the teaching portfolio. I've visited scores of colleges and universities of differing sizes, shapes, and missions and discussed with promotion and tenure committees, department chairs, deans, and faculty the place of portfolios in the evaluation of teaching and as a powerful tool for teaching improvement.

And I've had the pleasure of working as mentor to more than 200 professors across disciplines as they prepared their personal portfolios. This extensive involvement, not just as a theorist but also as a practitioner, has led me to conclude that while we are still short many answers to the portfolio puzzle, we have discovered some of the answers and are on the edge of discovering more. Let me share some of what we've learned.

We know that the portfolio concept has gone well beyond the point of theoretical possibility. More and more institutions—public and private, large and small—are today emphasizing, nurturing, and rewarding teaching through portfolios. Some colleges and universities use them to improve teaching. Others use them in tenure and promotion decisions. Still others use portfolios both for improving teaching and for personnel decisions. It's clear that portfolios are being used—and used successfully—in a variety of different ways. (See Chapter 4, this volume, on the varying ways colleges and universities are using portfolios.)

We know that a teaching portfolio cannot gloss over terrible teaching. Why? Because the preparer cannot document effective teaching performance. The evidence is just not there. A fancy cover and attractive printer fonts cannot overcome weak performance in the classroom for a professor any more than it can for a student. On the other hand, for an excellent teacher, the portfolio offers an unmatched opportunity to document classroom practices that have previously gone unrecognized and unrewarded.

We know that portfolio models and mentors must be available to professors as they prepare their own portfolios. The models enable them to see how others—in a variety of disciplines—have put together documents and materials into a cohesive whole. At the same time, since most faculty come to the teaching portfolio concept with no previous experience with the concept, the resources of a mentor, someone with wide knowledge of ways to document teaching, should be made available to faculty.

We know that the portfolio should include selected information. It is not an exhaustive compilation of all the documents and materials that bear on teaching performance. Instead, it presents selected information on teaching activities and accomplishments.

We know that the primary purpose of the portfolio is to improve classroom teaching and only occasionally for personnel decisions. Does it actually help improve teaching? On campus after campus, the answer is, gratifyingly and frequently, yes. The reason is that the very process of collecting and sifting documents and materials that reflect a professor's teaching gets them thinking about what has worked and what hasn't in the classroom. And why they do what they do in the classroom. It forces them to review their activities, strategies, and plans for the future.

We know that the time and energy it takes to prepare a portfolio are well worth the benefits. That is the conclusion from the experience of hundreds of faculty in many colleges and universities in preparing portfolios. The fact is, it usually takes no more than a few days to put together. And, on the plus side, the benefits are considerable.

What are those benefits? The teaching portfolio offers professors the chance to describe their teaching strengths and accomplishments for the record. That is a clear advantage when evaluation committees examine the record for personnel decisions.

But the portfolio concept does more than that. Many professors find that the process of portfolio development, itself, acts as a stimulant to self-improvement. And, importantly, many colleges and universities find that portfolios are a useful means to underscore teaching as an institutional priority (Seldin, 1992).

Especially in light of the national movement to take teaching seriously, I think readers will agree that these are important benefits.

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