DON’T LEAVE YOUR FUTURE TO CHANCE:
Build Your Teaching Portfolio Now

“Preference will be given to applicants with a strong record of successful teaching.”
“Evidence of strong commitment to undergraduate teaching required.”
“The best candidate will have a record of successful teaching at the undergraduate level.”

(Quotes from recent job postings in the Chronicle of Higher Education, 2012)

It’s a badly kept secret: even Research I universities are increasingly interested in the teaching ability of job candidates, and statements such as those above are common in ads for faculty positions. So, how will you demonstrate your commitment to effective teaching and your success in working with students?

One way to begin the process—and to set yourself apart from a pool of applicants—is through a portfolio that documents your effectiveness as a teacher. The language you construct and the data you gather will be readily useful in your job application. And even if you do not have the opportunity to share a full portfolio with every institution you apply to, the process of constructing the portfolio will make you more articulate about your teaching when you interview.

What’s in a Teaching Portfolio?
The **reflective teaching statement** (or “teaching philosophy”) is the anchor of your entire portfolio. This short (1-2 page) highly individualized narrative explains your beliefs about teaching and learning and why you teach the way you do. It communicates what a visitor to your classroom might see you and your students doing on any given day. Most importantly, a teaching statement SHOWS your reader who you are as a teacher through specific examples of your classroom practice.

Your teaching statement needs to stand out from the pile and avoid empty platitudes. Here are some questions that might help you begin to construct a teaching philosophy statement that avoids the slide toward banality.

- **What do I value most about teaching and how is this visible in my classroom?**
- **What do I believe is my role as a teacher and how is this visible in my classroom?**
- **How do I think learning happens and what do I do in my classroom to support this process?**
- **What steps have I taken to learn how to become a more effective teacher, and how are those efforts reflected in what I do in my classroom?**

Documenting your Teaching Practices
The evidence regarding your teaching effectiveness appears through specific examples and reflection. The key will be making good, strategic choices about examples that best represent your strategy and convey your practices.

**The range of your experience:** You’ll need to compile some basic information about your teaching experience so a reader can get a picture of your experience at a glance. Some information that you might want to convey here includes:

- A list of courses you have taught. Include format (Lecture? Recitation section? Lab? Seminar?) and number of students in each section. You might group these by introductory courses,
courses for majors, or courses within and outside your research interests.

- Make sure that your responsibilities in each course are clear (e.g., Grader? Instructor of Record? Teaching Assistant?) Titles aren't consistent across institutions, so make sure to describe your roles with specificity.

**Detailing your experience:** Hiring institutions want to see that you take a thoughtful, reflective approach to your teaching. Here are some documents you might include:

- Descriptions of your teaching methods
- Artifacts/examples of techniques that reflect your strengths, emphasizing innovations and best practices (e.g., sample assignments, lesson plans, in-class activities, excerpts from syllabi with course policies, etc.)

Any set of documents or examples that you include should be introduced by a short narrative statement that gives your reader a guide to interpreting the artifacts. Writing the narratives will also provide you with an opportunity to reflect and to emphasize how these documents fit with your teaching statement—as well as preparing you for interview questions!

**Your vision for your future:** Show that you are thinking ahead to being a faculty member and continuing to develop as a teacher. Here are some things to consider:

- Your goals for yourself as a teacher (i.e., Where would you like to grow and improve?)
- Evidence of professional development and other activities related to improving your teaching (workshops, courses in teaching, books you’ve read on teaching, teaching-related conferences, mentoring, etc.)

**Documenting Your Effectiveness**

Whenever possible, let other people (e.g., your students and colleagues) tell your story. The challenge is to choose the data that demonstrate the quality and impact of your teaching while maintaining a balanced view. For example, newer teachers may have lower overall student evaluations that improve as they gain more experience. If this is the case, reflect on that trajectory and explain how you responded to the negative feedback with changes to your approach.

Some of the artifacts that you might use to demonstrate your effectiveness include the following:

- Summaries of student evaluations presented graphically
- A representative collection of open-ended student comments
- Unsolicited statements or letters from students
- Testimonials from people who have observed your classes and/or reviewed your course materials
- Data showing evidence of student learning
- Sample student work

**The Process of Building a Portfolio**

This is not a linear journey. As you work on your portfolio you will find that you keep returning to earlier steps with new insight (as represented in the visual to the left). Here are the basic steps:

- Clarify teaching responsibilities and values
- Assemble materials
- Write teaching statement
- Reflect on data
- Summarize data for presentation
- Share and get feedback

The first draft of your teaching portfolio may not feel as “finished” as you would like, but that’s why you should start early, long before you hit the job market.

Begin by assembling some of the most basic elements; you will find that just the process of putting all of these materials in one place will spark several ideas for continued reflection.

As you begin putting your portfolio in final form, make sure to organize the information for navigability. You want to enable a busy search committee member to skim the document easily.

In addition to the benefits of having a teaching portfolio in place for the job search, building your portfolio will get you into the habit of documenting your teaching, an invaluable tool for your faculty career. Everything you do now will help you later as you build your case for tenure and promotion.

Please contact ITLA L if you would like help in building or refining your portfolio.

See the front page of this newsletter for more information about Spring 2012 Teaching Portfolio Award Program.