

Creating the developmental teaching portfolio

A great tool for self-assessment

by Ann Lally and Ninfa Trejo

At the University of Arizona (UA) Library it is known that "The new academic library will be a teaching library."¹ Therefore, when a doctoral candidate approached us about participating in her research project at the UA on language, reading, and culture—in which a portion of her research is focusing on the use of teaching portfolios by academic teaching librarians—we enthusiastically agreed.

This project required a commitment to meet once a month for eight months for two hours and was designed to assist us in creating a developmental teaching portfolio, which we could use to improve our teaching.

This was a unique adventure that included anticipation, fear of the unknown, anxiety, and hard work as we progressed. The group of ten librarians discussed two types of teaching portfolios: summative and developmental. A summative teaching portfolio features the teacher's best work and is often used for assessment of job performance by the teacher when applying for a job. A developmental teaching portfolio features components that help a teacher assess his or her own performance and identify areas for improvement.

With the researcher's guidance and facilitation, we worked on exercises that included: the sampling of literature on portfolio creation, small group discussion, observation, learning classroom

assessment techniques, reflection, etc. Each of us was able to begin developing a unique, personalized portfolio for growth and reflection. In developing a teaching portfolio, "The first organizing principle calls for a deep, thorough assessment on both a teacher's belief system and practices to see how well they match, the second for an assessment of past practice that can be used to improve the future."² We had to examine our motives for teaching, what we brought to the students' learning experience, and how we wanted the students

to experience learning. As part of this process, we asked ourselves the following questions: What do I want to achieve with this portfolio? Which components do I want to include to reflect my growth? How should it be structured in order to achieve my goals?

We had to reflect on what was pertinent to us, what best illustrated our philosophy of teaching, and what would lead us toward areas for improvement.

As we asked ourselves these questions, it became clear that we needed to include certain components in order to achieve our goals. Our intention was to use this portfolio to assess our growth, provide us with a mechanism for reflection, and point us toward areas for improvement. To facilitate this process, we decided to include the following items: a curriculum vitae, a teaching philosophy, a statement of teaching responsibility,



Illus. by K. Waugh

About the authors

Ann Lally is fine arts & humanities librarian at the University of Arizona, e-mail: alally@bird.library.arizona.edu; Ninfa Trejo is social sciences librarian at the University of Arizona, e-mail: ntrejo@bird.library.arizona.edu

ties, several teaching artifacts/indices, and written reflection. These items were selected in order to provide us with opportunities for documenting and reflecting upon the quality of our teaching. We will examine each item separately and in detail.

Portfolio contents

We included a *curriculum vitae* to provide a framework for reflecting on our current duties as teaching librarians. The discipline of updating a vitae once a year will help us reflect on our accomplishments as teachers throughout our career. Updating the curriculum vitae will also help formulate the direction we want to take in the future. Unlike a resume, a vitae provides the opportunity to express how proficient we are at our job, rather than simply being a summary of experiences.

Our *teaching philosophy* reflects our beliefs about education and its connection with librarianship. As we wrote our philosophies, we reflected upon the importance of being a librarian and teacher and what that means to us and the learners' future. We also reflected upon how we teach and how it intersects with student learning. This was an excellent way to acknowledge and explore the issues and complexities surrounding the unique variety of situations in which we find ourselves teaching. It also provided us with a philosophical foundation as we prepare for a class or help someone at the reference desk.

We also included a *statement of teaching responsibilities*, which describes the disciplines for which we are responsible, sessions we currently teach, the number of students in each session, and if the faculty member was present. This information was useful as we began to assess and reflect upon our teaching strengths and weaknesses. It was also useful for beginning to identify trends and needs.

Another component of the teaching portfolio is the teaching *artifacts or indices*. These can be lesson plans, assignments, observation reports from a colleague, evaluations from faculty and students, presentations from conferences, or articles you have written about teaching. We chose those artifacts that would help inform us as we reflected on and assessed our teaching.

Once again, because one of the goals was to improve teaching, we reflected on recent teaching experiences and identified areas that needed improvement and chose the artifacts accordingly. The important questions are: What does this artifact help demonstrate about my teaching? and What can I learn from it? It is not important to include



Illus. by K. Waugh

the entire universe of materials or even everything generated from one class, but simply those items that helped us reflect on, evaluate, and improve our teaching.

Written *reflection* is what ties everything in a developmental portfolio together and helps us assess our abilities and experiences as teachers. As we analyzed the teaching artifacts we had chosen to include, we reflected upon the experience of teaching: How did I perform as a teacher? What were the students like? What went great? What was not so great and why? What do these teaching artifacts say about the experience? Is my philosophy of teaching reflected in how I teach? As we reflected on what we had learned from past mistakes and successes and what changes we would make when asked to teach in the future, we also charted our next steps and considered what we needed to do to implement the changes we identified.

Those who teach know that "the experience of teaching is complex, uncertain and problematic,"³ and is more so for teaching librarians, since we teach a class only once, perhaps twice, if the subject matter permits.

We have to achieve learning in classes with students whose skills and abilities are often unknown to us. Because a teaching portfolio helps us prepare and focus on our teaching, we can better communicate with faculty members. We need to ask for as much information as possible from faculty in order to structure our classes appropriately. We need to find out the current level of students' skills before the class starts to accommodate all the students in this group, approach individual learning styles, and make the class a meaningful experience. It is a challenge and a learning experience to reflect on each teaching experience. The process can provide feedback for growth. A developmental teaching portfolio is not meant to be a static, unchanging document, but a mechanism for continually assessing and improving teaching.

Summary

Why did we want to go through this exciting experience? Although the motivation for each of

The conscientious use of teaching portfolios will help us become partners with faculty for the benefit of the students.

us in the group varied, our purpose was to learn teaching techniques and improve our teaching skills. Librarians want students to find value in the time they spend with us. We want students to find what they learn meaningful and interesting; and we want them to be able to apply their learning to future information-seeking endeavors. We know that we will never be perfect teachers, that there will always be room for improvement, and that our portfolios are tools for continuous improvement. The conscientious use of teaching portfolios will help us become partners with faculty for the benefit of the students.

This was a time-consuming and deeply reflective process through which we were able to develop a more holistic approach to the continuous improvement of teaching. This research project left us with a basic framework from which we can approach the variety of teaching experiences in which we engage for self-assessment; the ability to document and acknowledge the principles and values we possess as teaching librarians; the ability to use reflection as a mechanism to identify areas for improvement; and a structure in which we can anticipate the results of our improved efforts.

Personal development and proactive participation to increase awareness of the library's role as the center of the academic community is certainly an incentive to design, build, use, and improve a developmental teaching portfolio. However, teaching is still only one of many jobs that librarians perform today; therefore, this is an excellent tool for self-assessment.

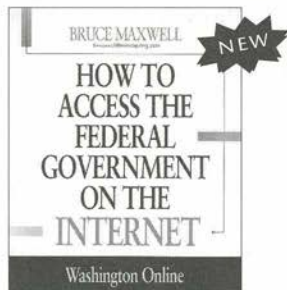
Notes

1. Stoffle, Carla J. and Karen A. Williams. "The Instructional Program and Responsibilities of the Teaching Library," *New Directions for Higher Education* 90, (summer 1995): 64.

2. Murray, John P. "Successful faculty development and evaluation: the complete teaching portfolio." *Higher Education Report* 8:21

3. Brookfield, Stephen D. *The Skillful Teacher*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1990. ■

Get current, accurate information FAST from... Congressional Quarterly



December 1998 • \$26.95

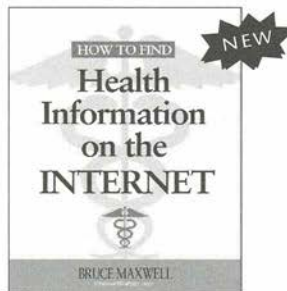
Paperback • ISBN 1-56802-387-1

Detailed descriptions of more than 750 government Internet sites along with step-by-step instructions on accessing and navigating each.

Praise for the previous edition:

"...superior arrangement, layout, and indexing."

—American Reference Books Annual (1996)



July 1998 • \$35.95

Paperback • ISBN 1-56802-271-9

This valuable new guide presents the latest information and evaluates more than 600 online sources for free health information.

"...helps us cut through much of the clutter, providing starting points for answers to virtually every health question."

—Sam Meddis, USA Today (Sept. 1998)

Reference Dept. 8R11 for information or to place your order:

Phone: 800-638-1710

Fax: 800-380-3810

E-mail: bookhelp@cq.com

