Seven Dimensions for Documenting Teaching

by

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  • Service
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Seven Dimensions for Documenting Teaching

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Abstract

There are many ways in which teaching may be documented. Each of the seven dimensions documents from a slightly different perspective. Be selective, each document should illustrate some significant and specific aspect of your development as a college teacher. The bottom line is to develop a paper trail, or sometimes a media trail, to chronicle significant aspects of your teaching career.

What are some questions you might consider answering about your teaching? What artifacts should be presented to illustrate the essence of your qualities as a teacher? How can you best reflect your scholarship of teaching?

The goal is to describe, through documentation, over an extended period of time, the full range of your abilities as a college teacher

Seven Dimensions for Documenting Teaching

1. Document what you teach
   • content of each course
   • skills and performance abilities
   • attitudes and feelings
   • values and philosophies

2. Document how you teach
   • repertoire of teaching skills and models
   • specific instructional skills
   • use and/or preparation of instructional materials
   • preparation of materials for students

3. Document changes in your teaching and course activities
   • evolution of change
   • innovations: successful and unsuccessful
   • additions to each course
   • Deletions from each course

4. Document rigor in your academic standards
   • standards for grades
   • efforts at improving test validity
   • congruence of testing to what you are teaching

5. Document student impressions of your teaching and their learning
   • use of formative feedback
   • accommodation of individual students
   • end-of-course trends on selected data

6. Document developmental efforts to enhance instructional skills
   • participation in faculty development programs and conferences
   • efforts at increasing personal awareness and reflection on teaching
   • research and publications related to teaching/learning

7. Document collegial assessments of your teaching
   • visitations
     • departmental peers
     • cross discipline peers
   • administrative evaluations
Seven Dimensions for Documenting Teaching

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Promotion, tenure, and reappointment are generally based on judgements of adequacy or excellence in the areas of teaching, research, and service. Documenting the content and quality of teaching has been a particular problem for many faculty. The following seven dimensions for documenting teaching were formulated from personal experience and an analysis of institutional statements related to teaching, published criteria for teaching excellence, and literature on the evaluation of teaching competencies.

Seven Dimensions for Documenting Teaching
1. What you teach
2. How you teach
3. Changes in your teaching and course activities
4. Rigor in your academic standards
5. Student impressions of your teaching
6. Developmental efforts to enhance instructional skills
7. Collegial assessments of your teaching

Documentation of Teaching

Each of the seven dimensions may be documented through a variety of artifacts; your artifacts should trace the evolution of each course that you have taught. Each document should illustrate some significant and specific aspect of your development as a college teacher. The bottom line is to develop a paper trail, or sometimes a media trail, which will chronicle significant aspects of your teaching career.

There are many ways in which teaching may be documented. In the sections that follow, each dimension of documentation is subdivided to suggest (1) questions to consider and (2) the types of documents or artifacts which might help faculty committees and administrators charged with evaluating your teaching. What are some questions you might consider answering about your teaching? What artifacts should be presented to illustrate the essence of your qualities as a teacher? How can you best reflect your scholarship of teaching?

Different fields and courses lend themselves to different types of documentation. An introductory freshman lecture course with 100+ students is dramatically different from a graduate seminar or a studio course. Be selective in the design of your teaching portfolio. The goal is to describe, through documentation, over an extended period of time, the full range of your abilities as a college teacher.
SEVEN DIMENSIONS FOR DOCUMENTING TEACHING

1. DOCUMENT WHAT YOU TEACH

Questions to consider

- What is the content of each of your courses?
  - Cognitive knowledge?
  - Skills or performance abilities?
  - Attitudes and feelings?
  - Values and philosophies?

- How has the content of a particular course changes over time?
- What are the purposes and objectives of each course?
- How have course goals and/or objectives changed over time?
- What is the range of cognitive levels intended for students?
  - Knowledge?
  - Comprehension?
  - Application?
  - Analysis?
  - Synthesis?
  - Evaluation?

Possible types of documents and artifacts

- List sources from which course content has been derived
  - Bibliographies or relevant literature
  - Textbooks: assigned and those used as references
  - Personal contributions such as monographs and publications
- Provide content overviews
  - Syllabus: objectives, topical outlines, assignments
  - Prepare a conceptual map of major concept topics
- Include samples of study guides, review sheets
- Collect examples, photos, color photocopies, and/or videos of student work or performances illustrating important content elements of the course

Art is different than mathematics which is different from economics which is different from nursing which is different from physics

What are students expected to learn?

Consider also the “seven intelligences”:
- Linguistic
- Musical
- Spatial
- Body-kinesthetic
- Logical-mathematical
- Interpersonal
- Personal

Identify the unique qualities of your discipline.
2. DOCUMENT **HOW YOU TEACH**

**Questions to consider**

- What might an observer hear or see when you are doing your best teaching?
- What specific instructional skills do you have?
- What is your repertoire of teaching models or skills?
- What principles or models of learning do you use and how do students respond?
  - mastery learning — cooperative learning — small group work
  - individualized — self-directed — instruction — tutorials
  - studio projects — creative products — inquiry — problem solving
  - laboratory learning — clinical learning — simulations — case studies — field studies
- What special uses do you make of instructional technology?
- What kinds of media typify your instruction and/or assignments?
- How do you use audio visual materials, models, charts, videos, films, etc.?
- Have you prepared or designed special materials for your use or for student use?
- How do you attempt to engage students in the learning process?

**Possible types of documents and artifacts**

- Lists or outlines of the teaching models and skills which you use.
- Sample lesson plans showing your use of teaching models and skills.
- Descriptions or video tapes of special teaching strategies.
- Notations or summaries which explain how you integrate particular models.
- Samples of audio visual materials used such as overhead transparencies, actual copies — in full color — or the masters, videos, audio tapes, and computer software.
- Photographs or color photocopies of charts, models, and other self-designed media.
- Exemplary audio tapes or video tapes of your teaching.
- Descriptive letters from faculty classroom observers.
  - faculty from within your department or specialty area
  - faculty who are respected teachers from any discipline
  - administrative observations and evaluations
- Well written student letters or notes praising your instructional skills.
- Summaries of student course evaluation items **on teaching skills**.
3. DOCUMENT CHANGES IN YOUR TEACHING AND COURSE ACTIVITIES

Questions to consider

- What significant improvements have you made in your teaching?
- What have you done to keep your teaching fresh?
- What has been the time frame of change?
- What have you tried and eliminated that did not work out?
- What new teaching strategies have you developed or studied over your career?
- What student learning or study activities have worked well?
- What do you do to keep students motivated?
- What have you tried to encourage students to major in your discipline?

Possible types of documents and artifacts

- Note additions to and deletions from your teaching activities for specific courses
  - √ select lesson plans with changes noted from year to year
  - √ contrast your first try efforts with your present—practiced—efforts
- List innovations—both successful and unsuccessful attempts
  - √ briefly describe what you have tried and how you decided to keep or eliminate innovations
  - √ select copies of new learning exercises or materials for use by students
  - √ describe new laboratories, clinical experiences, studio work, etc. that you have created
- Note new or improved uses of technology in your teaching
  - √ copies or descriptions of computer exercises and/or software developed or obtained
  - √ copies or descriptions of audiovisual materials obtained or developed
4. **DOCUMENT RIGOR IN YOUR ACADEMIC STANDARDS**

*Questions to consider*

- What are your standards and how do you apply them?
- What are the special problems of evaluating student learning in your courses?
- How do you know your tests evaluate what they are supposed to?
- What have you done, over time, to improve your testing?
- How do you check to insure an equitable sampling of course content?
- How do you test—assess the learning of values, philosophies, performance skills, etc.?
- How well are students attaining the levels of learning you aspire for them?

*Possible types of documents and artifacts*

- Statement of your philosophy of appropriate standards
  - explain any special circumstances specific to each course you teach
- Composite of grading standard statements from course syllabi
  - written test sampling of cognitive knowledge levels
  - skills, performance abilities, unique psychomotor skills
  - attitudes, value systems
  - attendance, perseverance, effort
- Test examples
  - include samples of written tests and quizzes, etc.
  - provide lists of performance indicators or observational checklists for skills
- Efforts to improve test construction and validity
  - include any data on item reliability or validity checks
  - include item error rates and changes over time
  - prepare test item tables of specifications which illustrate congruence between course objectives and test items
- Mastery learning testing or second chance testing strategies
  - describe your philosophy of mastery learning and mastery learning testing
  - describe mastery learning standards
  - describe student remediation and/or corrective efforts
  - provide graphs of before and after student grade improvement
5. DOCUMENT STUDENT IMPRESSIONS OF YOUR TEACHING AND THEIR LEARNING

Questions to consider

- When do you ask for different kinds of student feedback about your teaching?
- What use have you made of student feedback to improve your courses?
- In what ways are you sensitive to and accommodate the needs of individual students?
- What end-of-course student evaluation patterns are present?
- What use have you made of end-of-course student data?
- What are the patterns of student responses to specific questionnaire items:
  - √ in one course, over time?
  - √ on one item across various courses?

Possible types of documents and artifacts

- Copies of the various forms and techniques used to collect student feedback
- Timeline of course adjustments made based on student feedback
- Summaries of individualization which you provide through conferences, etc.
- Office hours and a log showing the use that students make of your office hours
- Note the types of individual assistance which you arrange: tutors, etc.
- Copies of student end-of-course evaluation forms
- Summary tables, graphs of end-of-course data over time
- Copies of non-solicited letters and notes from students.
- Copies of letters from students solicited as a part of follow-up studies
6. DOCUMENT DEVELOPMENTAL EFFORTS TO ENHANCE INSTRUCTIONAL SKILLS

Questions to consider

• What efforts have you made to improve your instructional skills?
• What efforts have you made to expand your teaching repertoire?
• What efforts have you made to become more aware of your own teaching?
  ✓ Have you made and viewed video tapes or audio tapes of your teaching?
  ✓ Have you participated in any faculty consultation programs?
• What have you shared with others about your teaching?

Possible types of documents and artifacts

• Describe new teaching strategies or models that you have mastered
• Describe how you went about refining, developing, or improving your skills
  ✓ development through self-directed study
  ✓ attendance at teaching workshops, seminars, or colloquia
• List and describe faculty development workshops you have conducted
• Provide descriptions of sessions you have attended at professional conferences
  ✓ conferences dealing with teaching in general
  ✓ sessions on teaching related to your discipline(s)
  ✓ lists of papers or sessions which you have presented on teaching
• Enclose copies or lists of research you have done or are doing on teaching/learning
  ✓ lists and copies of studies you have published
  ✓ descriptions and/or copies of studies, monographs, and papers not published

7. DOCUMENT COLLEGIATE ASSESSMENTS OF YOUR TEACHING

Questions to consider

• What use have you made of collegial visitations: being visited or visiting others?
• What use have you made of administrative comments on teaching?
• What kinds of collegial assessments data might you collect over the years?

Possible types of documents and artifacts

• Citations of teaching awards and honors for teaching excellence
• Reports and letters resulting from periodic peer visitations
  ✓ observations by departmental/discipline peers or by cross-discipline colleagues
• Annual evaluation reports made by university administrators
  ✓ summaries of comments over time
• Copies of classroom observation records made by trained observers
  ✓ interaction analysis—Flender's type coding—or transcript coding—of class sessions
Each dimension of a portfolio on teaching gathers information from a slightly different perspective and provides different kinds of opportunities to demonstrate, through documentation, the full range of your teaching skills. Care needs to be taken that any special instructional or learning requirements of the discipline and course assignments are reflected in your documentation. Only you know what you do, and only your students know how immediately helpful your instruction is.

It is unusual for members of faculty committees or administrators, in most universities, to have personal knowledge of your teaching behavior in the classroom, laboratory, or studio. Judgements about your teaching skills depend in large part on the quality of the documents that you provide.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Types of Documents and Artifacts Frequently Used</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Samples of Teaching Documents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>syllabi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lesson plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>study guides</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reading lists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>course schedules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>lecture notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>quizzes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>bibliographies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>review sheets</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tests</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>handouts</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Samples of Instructional Materials</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>transparencies</td>
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<tr>
<td>other media</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>concept maps</td>
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<tr>
<td>simulations</td>
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<tr>
<td>slides</td>
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<tr>
<td>project requirements</td>
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<tr>
<td>computer software</td>
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<tr>
<td>case studies</td>
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<tr>
<td>charts</td>
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<tr>
<td>course contracts</td>
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<tr>
<td>tables of specifications</td>
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<tr>
<td>demonstration videos/films</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Samples of Student Work Documenting Your Effectiveness With Students</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>papers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>photographs</td>
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<tr>
<td>audio recordings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>project photographs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>performance videos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>test profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>course grade profiles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>during-course feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>end-of-course evaluations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Samples of Academic Products Related to Teaching</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>publications</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>monographs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Over documentation is as unwise as too little documentation. Overkill is often viewed suspiciously by promotion and tenure committee members, as well as making their review task unduly laborious. Beware of padding. A friend or mentor with experience in preparing dossiers and a sharp blue editing pencil can be quite helpful in making decisions as to what documents to include or exclude.

Under-documentation, of course, keeps vital information about your teaching from being considered.
Sometimes documents need to be introduced by brief notes of explanation of significance. Your explanation may be essential so that faculty in other disciplines might fully appreciate the nuances of the specific teaching requirements of your field and areas of course responsibility. A teaching portfolio should chronicle your development as a college teacher, highlight the very best of your teaching skills, and record the learning achieved by students.

Keep it organized. Keep it concise. Keep it honest!

Bibliography (1990: orginal edition)


An edited version of this monograph has been published as follows:

Reprints from College Teaching are available from Heldref publications, 1319 Eighteenth Street N.W., Washington D.C., 20036-1802

Supplemental Bibliography—1992


## Index: Seven Dimensions for Documenting Teaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Portfolio Dimension</th>
<th>Artifacts</th>
<th>What this artifact illustrates</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. <strong>What I teach</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. <strong>How I teach</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. <strong>Changes in my teaching and course activities</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. <strong>Rigor in my academic standards</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. <strong>Student impressions of my teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. <strong>Developmental efforts to enhance instructional skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. <strong>Collegial assessments of my teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
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<td>8. <strong>Other...</strong></td>
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Some possible portfolio dimensions for service and research.

**Investigation and inquiry**
- individual research projects in the laboratory or library
- student research and independent study direction

**Collaboration**
- Consulting
- Campus-campus
- University-university-agency

**Personal work**

**Collegial work**

**Supervision of student work**

**Work in progress**

**Scholarship & Creative Activities**

**Dissemination**
- Publications
  - Reports
  - Reviews
  - Presentations
  - Performances
  - Shows

**Writing**
- papers for on-campus discussions
- monographs, essays
- journal articles
- books, texts
- essays, poetry
- fiction
- reviews

**Creations**
- works of art
- musical compositions
- computer software
- computer graphics
- play scripts
- dance choreography
- videos, films, slides
- audio tape/CDs

**Presentations**
- on-campus
  - local
  - state
  - regional
  - national
  - international

**Professional recognition**
- professional awards
- invited papers
- invited reviews
- election to office in a professional society

**Editing & refereeing**
- editing of professional journals
- refereeing manuscripts
- reviewing grant proposals

**Professional Society activities**
- attendance at professional meetings
- participation in programs
- panelist
- session chair

**Grants**
- internal awards
- external awards

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**Progress Reports**
- study & contemplation
- current status—updated
- works submitted
- publications pending
- designs and proposals
- new work begun
- work completed or abandoned

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**References**
Portfolios to Prompt Improvement.

The move toward "authentic assessment" has made portfolios a strategy of choice whether for improving student learning or for prompting more collective teaching.

AS9003 — Time Will Tell: Portfolio-Assisted Assessment of General Education. (1990, 20pp.) By Aubrey Forrest and an Exxon-funded study group that included fifteen experts in the field. A comprehensive guide to the implementation and use of student portfolios to assess general-education outcomes at individual and program levels.

AAHE members $7.50, nonmembers $9.00. Shipping additional.

TI9102 — The Teaching Portfolio: Capturing the Scholarship in Teaching. (1991, 72pp.) By Russell Edgeton, Pat Hutchings, and Kathleen Quinnan. The idea of a professional portfolio is not new. Artists, for example, have long kept portfolios to display their best work. But what would a "teaching portfolio" look like? Who assembles it and keeps it? Who sees it, and how is it evaluated?

This monograph suggests one model, in which faculty assemble a collection of carefully selected "work samples" of their performance accompanied by reflective commentary about those samples. • The monograph also gives pointers for getting started with portfolios, a bibliography, and a sampling of current campus practice. • A special section offers eight actual sample portfolio entries by faculty from various disciplines and settings.

AAHE members $10.95 each, nonmembers $12.95 each, for 1-7 copies. Bulk orders, 8-19 copies, $8.95 each; 20+ copies, $7.50 each. Shipping additional.

TI9301 — Campus Use of the Teaching Portfolio: 25 Profiles. (1993, 120pp.) Edited by Erin Anderson. A companion to The Teaching Portfolio (TI9102), this resource book provides detailed but concise accounts (two to four pages each) of what twenty-five campuses are doing with and learning about portfolios. Each profile addresses a set of common questions (purpose, scope of use, portfolio contents, evaluation, impact). Because the stories are still evolving, each profile also names a contact person who can provide updates or further information. Accompanying some of the profiles are materials campuses have developed, e.g., guidelines for developing a portfolio, or checklists used for evaluating them. • An introduction by Pat Hutchings discusses nine cross-cutting issues and lessons that suggest directions for future work.

AAHE members $13.00 each, nonmembers $15.00 each, for 1-9 copies. Bulk orders, 10-24 copies, $12.75 each; 25-49 copies, $12.00 each; 50+ copies, $11.25 each. Shipping additional.

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