



Teaching Concerns

Newsletter of the Teaching Resource Center for Faculty and Teaching Assistants

Hotel D, 24 East Range (434) 982-2815 trc-uva@virginia.edu <http://www.virginia.edu/~trc/>

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The Teaching Portfolio: A Living Document

Manuel D. Rossetti, Department of Systems Engineering

In September of 1994, the Teaching Resource Center co-sponsored a seminar by Peter Seldin, Professor of Management at Pace University, on developing teaching portfolios. As a first-year assistant professor, I was intrigued by the possibility of documenting my teaching efforts, especially in light of the tenure and promotion process. At the seminar, I learned that a teaching portfolio is a reflective document which highlights your teaching strengths and accomplishments. It includes such items as a statement of teaching philosophy, examples of good teaching, information from yourself and others substantiating your performance, and an analysis of your goals and objectives. A teaching portfolio is an assessment tool. Portfolio developers gain a better understanding of their own performance and can use it to improve their teaching. I also learned that the teaching portfolio concept is being accepted by many universities and colleges as a standard component in personnel decisions. It also provides a legacy for colleagues to learn from each other. I thought, "What a terrific idea! Finally, I can document what I am doing." After the seminar ended, I looked at the material and realized that the development of a good teaching portfolio would require a significant amount of time and effort. The academic year wore on. My commitment to the concept was still there, but my motivation had waned. Then

came the announcement of the TRC's Pilot Teaching Portfolio Workshop. Ah! Salvation! Structure and peer pressure! That's what I needed to keep the motivation burning.

Prior to the workshop, I was required to do some background reading on teaching portfolios and to fill out a worksheet designed to identify the purpose of the portfolio and the potential content. The first day of the workshop (Monday) included group activities designed to enhance a better understanding of the teaching portfolio concept and to help identify concrete examples for documenting teaching performance. A key component in the development of a teaching portfolio is the involvement of a mentor. A teaching portfolio mentor is a faculty colleague, not necessarily in the same discipline, who serves as a source for facts, feedback, focus, and encouragement during the teaching portfolio development process. A mentor and my fellow workshop attendees were the support that I needed to successfully complete my portfolio. A draft portfolio was due on Tuesday! I ran out of energy around one in the morning and embarrassingly turned in an incomplete draft to my mentor. It didn't matter. We had all struggled with the same inertia. On Wednesday, more group work on mentoring, kind words from my mentor, and the camaraderie reinvigorated me for revising my draft. The final version was due on Friday. During the week, I had gained a great deal of respect for the teaching awareness of my colleagues. I hoped that my portfolio would reflect my concern for strong, creative teaching. The anticipation was

thick on Friday. The mix of experiences was outstanding. Faculty from the College of Arts & Sciences, Commerce, Engineering, and Education were present. It is difficult to describe the sense of community I experienced when reading the other portfolios. I learned much from the senior faculty and gained a better appreciation for the challenges faced by GTAs. We all shared a common bond. We care deeply about teaching and now we can prove it.

Was it worth it? Yes! Did it require a significant commitment of time and effort? Yes! Did I learn about my own teaching and the experiences of others? Yes! Would I do it again and help others get involved? Yes! The teaching portfolio is a living document. I plan to revise my portfolio on a semester basis in order to capture and reflect upon my previous work. I also hope to serve as a mentor for interested faculty. Thanks should go to the facilitators and all the participants of the workshop. With their help and support, I accomplished my goals amidst many wonderful experiences. Don't just think about your portfolio! Take the leap!