

## AN ANALYSIS OF TIP PORTFOLIOS: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR PORTFOLIO PREPARATION

PORTFOLIO ANALYSIS COMMITTEE:

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### SUMMARY

This committee examined a sample of winning portfolios from the 1993 TIP competition to answer two questions: 1) Is it advisable to develop (some) common guidelines for portfolio development across Colleges? and 2) If common guidelines seem advisable, what guidelines could help faculty prepare portfolios which provide clear evidence about the quality of their teaching?

We found great variability in the quantity, quality and coherence of evidence presented in the portfolios. By analyzing the content of portfolios, we were able to identify the components of persuasive portfolios. We drew on portfolios in which applicants with different teaching styles included powerful evidence of effective instruction to develop eight guidelines for portfolio preparation. The resulting guidelines are broad enough to accommodate a variety of teaching styles yet specific enough to provide guidance to individual applicants.

### BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

In 1993 the University of Florida received slightly over one million dollars to conduct a pilot Teaching Improvement Program (TIP). Funding for the state-wide program was approved by the Florida legislature in late June 1993. By December, 1993, TIP awards of \$5,000 each were added to the base salary of 168 University of Florida faculty.

The program's implementation time line was short. At UF, college and department committees used the 1993 Teaching Improvement Committee Report and the TIP guidelines distributed by President Lombardi to develop teaching evaluation procedures for their units. Each college or department evaluation system included a description of the substance and format for faculty portfolios, a required component of the program. Faculty submitted three-year portfolios documenting the quality and quantity of teaching. College and/or departmental review committees read the portfolios, assessed the quality of evidence recorded there and made recommendations to deans who nominated a pre-determined number of faculty members for TIP awards. The Provost and President reviewed nominations and announced award winners.

TIP committees had little time to develop evaluation procedures. Some committees provided explicit portfolio guidelines while others let faculty decide what they would include in portfolios. (See Teaching Improvement Program Continuation Report for 1994 for copies of these plans.) In addition, faculty members applying for the awards were working on a short time line and had to document the quality of their teaching over the past three years. Understandably, the amount of evidence, the kind of evidence, and the quality of evidence in portfolios varied widely.

During the pilot effort, colleges and departments were unsure how best to evaluate teaching. Most opted to maximize portfolio options and minimize standardization. While this was important for the pilot effort, common guidelines for portfolio development might improve the ability of faculty to provide thorough and persuasive evidence about their teaching. However, before consideration of common guidelines, it seems important to examine the nature of portfolios produced during the pilot effort. The variable nature of the teaching context and mission within specific colleges or departments may make common guidelines for portfolio development ill advised.

President Lombardi asked this committee to examine a sample of winning portfolios developed during the first TIP competition to answer two questions:

- 1) Is it advisable to develop (some) common guidelines for portfolio development across Colleges?
- 2) If common guidelines seem advisable, what guidelines could help faculty prepare portfolios which provide clear evidence about the quality of their teaching?

In doing this work, committee members were guided by five assumptions (See Table 1).

**Table 1: Committee assumptions**

1. The purposes of the TIP include both the improvement and evaluation of teaching performance.
2. TIP awards are of sufficient magnitude that the University should have clear documentation of the quality and quantity of teaching.
3. Portfolios are a good method for documenting the quality of teaching by faculty.
4. Well prepared portfolios allow teacher-scholars to present evidence that demonstrates what they have taught, how they have taught, and what their students have learned.
5. All award winners in the first competition are excellent instructors.

To develop our report, we reviewed 73 of the 168 award-winning portfolios. Our work included portfolios from each college that participated in the program. A summary of the methods used by the committee in analyzing portfolios is provided in Appendix A.

### SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR PORTFOLIO DEVELOPMENT

A common set of guidelines for the preparation of teaching portfolios seems both desirable and feasible. The portfolios we read provided numerous examples of extraordinary teaching. All portfolios presented some evidence of excellence: some presented overwhelming evidence of instructional innovation and commitment to student learning. Nevertheless, there was tremendous variability in the quantity, quality, and coherence of the evidence presented in the portfolios. Some portfolios provided a clear picture of what professors did and what students learned. In others, the nature, quantity, and quality of teaching were not clearly presented.

We detected significant differences in teaching style, but these differences were related more to teaching conditions (e.g. class size, role of a course within a program) and personal philosophy than to college or departmental affiliation. Within our sample, we reviewed portfolios in which applicants with different teaching styles had included powerful evidence of effective instruction. From these portfolios, we developed portfolio guidelines broad enough to accommodate a variety of teaching styles yet specific enough to provide guidance to individual applicants.

In preparing this report, we have drawn on portfolios that present systematic evidence of excellence in teaching. Such evidence should be useful to future TIP award committees. We have developed guidelines that colleges might use to assist faculty in the preparation of portfolios. The guidelines call for systematic data about the nature, quantity, and quality of teaching.

- **GUIDELINE 1**

**The three-year running portfolios of teaching should include, but not be limited to, the following:**

- A description of the instructional context
- A teaching statement
- A description of recent efforts to improve teaching
- Evidence to support claims of excellence in teaching and student learning
- A commentary that explains each piece of evidence and links that evidence back to the applicant's teaching statement

Additional components might be added to reflect the distinct needs of departments or colleges. Although organized slightly differently, the portfolio components we recommend are similar to those recommended by the 1992 TIP committee. Our organization reflects the emphasis and organization of evidence within the portfolios we reviewed.

- **GUIDELINE 2**  
**Instructional context data should be standardized.**

Context data will help award committees compare teaching loads, understand why a faculty member organizes a course in a certain way, and what students might get out of the course. For example, the context data provided by one faculty member described how his courses fit into a sequence of courses designed to give students basic knowledge and opportunities to apply that knowledge. The instructional format of an auditorium-sized course early in this sequence was, of necessity, quite different from the format of later small, seminar classes. A clear understanding of context is revealed when faculty do the following:

- List all courses taught over the past three years. For each course, specify the level of the course, when the course was taught, the number of students, the instructional format (e.g. seminar, televised lecture, combination lecture and discussion), whether the course is required, the nature of the student population of the course (e.g. majors, non-majors, both), and the average student grade in the course.
- Briefly summarize the content and goals of each course (or a representative sample of courses).
- Briefly describe the role each course (or sample course) plays in the curriculum and/or mission of the department or college.
- Briefly describe all instructional responsibilities not represented in the course load (e.g. theses and dissertations supervised, clinical supervision responsibilities, supervision of graduate teaching assistants).
- Include a letter from the department or program chair describing how the candidate's teaching serves the needs of the department or program.
- Include quantitative student evaluation data from all courses taught during the past three years (See guideline 3).

- **GUIDELINE 3**  
**Quantitative student evaluations for all courses taught should be included as part of context data.**

As the legislature extends the TIP to include graduate instruction, TIP award committees will have to assess instructor effectiveness in a variety of contexts. During this year's competition, some TIP portfolio plans required that faculty present student evaluation data from all courses that had been evaluated; others required data only from undergraduate courses. A more comprehensive picture of an instructor's overall effectiveness was obtained when portfolios included complete student evaluation data. Consequently, our recommendation is that faculty planning to submit TIP portfolios request and subsequently submit student evaluations from every course taught during the three year period. These data could be used to document efforts to improve instruction and as evidence of excellence in teaching.

Moderate or low evaluations in a course do not necessarily undermine claims of excellence in teaching. For example, in one portfolio we reviewed, the instructor noted his low evaluations within one course, provided an explanation of why he believed evaluations were low, described the professional development activities in which he had engaged, and documented subsequent improvements in the course.

- **GUIDELINE 4**  
**Portfolios should include a teaching statement that answers four key questions.**

All portfolios in the 1993 TIP competition required a teaching or philosophy statement. In their teaching statements, many applicants explained their beliefs about teaching, aims for students and why they believe these aims are important. The best teaching statements provided detailed examples of classroom processes that enabled readers to see how teaching methods fit the instructor's aims and the "context" factors that surrounded the course.

Useful teaching statements included answers to four key questions:

- 1) What do you want students to learn and why is this learning important?
- 2) How do you believe students best learn the course material?
- 3) What do you do to help students learn? (Here the instructor provided descriptions of in-class and out-of-class teaching strategies. Specific examples were particularly helpful.)

- 4) Why did you select these teaching strategies? This is. how are these strategies linked to your aims and beliefs about student learning?

Teaching statements varied in length and organization. We recommend that colleges and departments discuss page limits. Length limitations seem advisable, but the limits must be flexible enough to allow faculty to fully describe their beliefs and practices. Teaching statements that included clear examples of classroom practices provided powerful evidence for the reviewer. (Appendix C provides examples of the ways faculty described their teaching practices.)

- **GUIDELINE 5**  
**Instructors should present evidence of recent efforts to improve instruction.**

Portfolios that presented specific evidence of recent efforts to improve instruction were especially powerful. In these portfolios applicants documented and explained recent innovations and/or included descriptions of professional development activities and description of how these activities had changed their teaching. These portfolios provided evidence of on-going commitment to teaching and to student learning by detailing instructional innovations and the reasons for those innovations. (See Appendix D for examples of the kinds of evidence faculty presented to document instructional improvement.)

- **GUIDELINE 6**  
**Instructors should present evidence from multiple sources to support claims of excellence in teaching.**

The provision of evidence was a challenge for the 1993 competitors. The award was conferred for teaching in prior years. Some faculty had saved evidence about their teaching, others had not. The strongest portfolios presented evidence from multiple sources about the faculty member's teaching processes and student learning. Although faculty did not provide multiple sources of evidence to support each claim, within the portfolio they cited evidence from several sources. Sources of evidence used by faculty included self-evaluation, external evaluation (e.g. alumni evaluation, external review boards), student evaluation, and peer observation/evaluation. This evidence verified the applicant's claims of excellence.

- **GUIDELINE 7**  
**All evidence presented in the portfolio should be explained.**

The strongest portfolios included a running commentary to guide the reader through the evidence. Two types of commentary are useful. The first provides information about the source of the evidence. For example, a list of student comments from a course evaluation would be interpreted differently if the list included all comments from all students in the course and not a set of the most positive comments from select students. Similarly, letters from graduates are more easily interpreted if the faculty member explains the nature of his/her relationship with the graduate and the circumstances under which the letter was written.

A second type of commentary links the evidence back to the applicant's teaching statement. The commentary answers such questions as: What does this evidence demonstrate? How does the evidence link to the instructor's aims? to the instructor's view of learning? to the instructor's claims of excellence or innovation? We found it difficult to interpret unexplained syllabi, examinations, and assignment descriptions. In portfolios where the instructor framed the evidence with commentary, however, the significance of the evidence was apparent. For example, telling why a syllabus has changed over time, why a particular costume is used during a particular lecture, why an assignment has been added to a course, or why deadlines are strictly enforced helped us see how the evidence supported specific claims.

Commentary about evidence was organized in different ways. For example, one instructor referred to each piece of evidence as she wrote the Teaching Statement. In this way she introduced and explained the significance of the evidence. Another included all evidence in appendices and included a cover page for the appendices which described the relationship between each appendix and ideas presented in the Teaching Statement. Similarly, a third instructor attached a brief explanation to each piece of evidence included in the portfolio.

- **GUIDELINE 8**  
**The quantity of evidence presented should be limited.**

Given the number of recommendations we have made, we believe this guideline is important. The strongest portfolios were comprehensive and provided a great deal of information, but they were not necessarily the longest portfolios. More is not necessarily better. In fact, a long portfolio can be less effective than a shorter one because the reader may get lost in a long and poorly presented case. We are not recommending a specific page limit. Length is an issue for colleges and departments to determine. We do note, however, that a small quantity of well selected and well explained evidence can carry an applicant's case.

#### **APPENDIX A**

##### **METHODS USED IN REVIEWING PORTFOLIOS**

(deleted, not relevant for this purpose)

#### **APPENDIX B**

##### **TIP PORTFOLIO STUDY ANALYSIS DOMAINS**

(deleted, not relevant for this purpose)

#### **APPENDIX C**

##### **EXAMPLES OF THE WAYS FACULTY DESCRIBED THEIR TEACHING PRACTICES**

- Detailed descriptions of how instructional strategies are implemented. For example, one instructor included a description of a computer simulation activity used to explain complex mathematical concepts.
- Description of general instructional principles (or practices) with specific examples from one or more courses
- Description of development of unusual course or course assignment
- Descriptions of student assignments and their purposes
- Descriptions of the nature of faculty accessibility to students
- Descriptions of how aims or general instructional principles are adapted to the needs of particular courses and/or particular students

#### **APPENDIX D**

##### **EXAMPLES OF THE KINDS OF EVIDENCE FACULTY PRESENTED TO DESCRIBE INSTRUCTIONAL IMPROVEMENT**

- Providing two syllabi for the same course and pointing out reasons for differences over time
- Taking a course on college teaching and describing resultant changes in teaching
- Conducting an analysis of quantitative and/or qualitative student evaluations and describing resultant changes in teaching
- Conducting and publishing studies of student learning in an instructor's courses

- Writing a textbook for a course because no appropriate text existed
- Applying for and receiving a grant related to teaching and describing resultant changes in teaching
- Providing examples of student papers to demonstrate effectiveness of changes in assignments
- Describing changes in assignments and reasons for the changes
- Describing innovative instructional practices and the reasons for each practice

**APPENDIX E**  
**EXAMPLES OF THE KINDS OF EVIDENCE PRESENTED TO SUPPORT CLAIMS OF EXCELLENCE IN TEACHING**

Evidence documenting the quality of teaching practices:

- Letters from graduates, colleagues, or external consumers which provided vivid descriptions of the faculty member's teaching
- Reports from peer observation that provided description and/or evaluative data about teaching
- Sample lesson plans
- Sample course materials such as handouts, descriptions of student assignments, syllabi, exams
- Samples of instructor developed materials that are directly linked to instruction (e.g. computer programs, texts, workbooks, slides)
- Student comments from course evaluations
- Quantitative course evaluation data
- Sample student papers which demonstrate the substance of instructor feedback to students
- Research studies conducted by the instructor or others that support the use of particular strategies

Evidence documenting the quantity and quality of student learning:

- Letters from graduates, colleagues, or external consumers which provided vivid descriptions of the results of the faculty member's teaching
- Sample student products
- Studies which document student learning within the course
- Information gained from exit interviews with students upon graduation in which students identify the instructor or course as significant in their learning
- Sample student publications or awards that are directly linked to work with the instructor