“Care Webs” Show Student Learning in Health Care Course Portfolio

Assistant Professor Deanna Reising’s course portfolio for Alterations in Health II provides an evidence-based example of using portfolios to document and showcase teaching innovation and to analyze teaching and learning effectiveness through student work. In addition to traditional assignments, students construct 10 “care webs” throughout the semester on selected health alterations. In addition to completing the webs, students must determine the priority problem presented by the alteration in health, write patient outcomes, and specify the interventions they would use to meet the outcomes.

“These care webs are samples from the same student over the course of a semester,” Reising explains in her portfolio. “What is particularly interesting with these two webs is that the first (Cushing’s), is a web of a more complex patho-physiological problem than the second web (Mastectomy). Care of the patient with Cushing’s disease is covered right after midterm and care of the patient with a mastectomy is covered at the end of the course. While Cushing’s is more complex, this student demonstrates gains in understanding the full picture of a health alteration as the semester progresses, with more connections being made in less complex care situations.”

Reising observes, “I was very satisfied with the quality of care webs and the number of connections students were able to make among the problems each health alteration caused. Near the beginning of this semester, students tend to muddy interventions across different outcomes. As the semester progressed, students developed more intricate webs with more connections, and were better able to pinpoint the priority problem with specific outcomes, and appropriate interventions.”
What Can a Course Portfolio Document?
Perhaps the best way to ensure that we recognize, value, and reward teaching is to demonstrate its effectiveness and excellence in a format easily reviewed by peers. A course portfolio can make a nuanced yet efficient means for a faculty member to document both the intellectual work of teaching a particular course and the student outcomes it generates. As in Professor Reising’s portfolio, the author can present the design and implementation of one course and reflect on the effectiveness of his or her teaching strategies by including evidence of student learning. In this way, colleagues who may never have the opportunity to observe a class or speak with students can understand and comment on the quality of the teaching involved and the level of student achievement.

Course Portfolios: A Vehicle for Faculty Voice, a Study of Student Learning
As a genre, course portfolios provide a vehicle for a faculty member’s voice as he or she reflects on experience with and questions about teaching and learning in a particular course. They prompt the author to situate teaching practices, learning objectives, and course outcomes in a rich context. From that foundation, the individual professor can articulate the learning goals for students and examine the evidence of student progress toward those goals. Feeding these discoveries back into the course can contribute to better, more meaningful student learning and greater faculty satisfaction with teaching. A course portfolio also provides a concise, effective way to demonstrate instructional strategies and course quality for promotion and teaching dossiers. For the larger scholarly community, course portfolios contribute to what we know about the relationship between teaching and learning, strengthening practice within disciplines and sharing across disciplines.

How Can Course Portfolios Help Evaluate Teaching?
Course portfolios have the potential to generate momentum for changing the way we evaluate teaching. A course portfolio can provide a comprehensive account of approaches to teaching from classroom pedagogy to learning outcomes and provide access for independent review. Thus, course portfolios can contribute to:
- Shifting the primary basis for assessment of teaching from student questionnaires to evidence of student work
- Maintaining rigorous standards for teaching and learning
- Raising expectations for documentation of teaching effectiveness

Why Construct a Course Portfolio?
Faculty members and graduate students can use course portfolios to exhibit teaching effectiveness, cultivate scholarship, and convey efforts and accomplishments in teaching. This form of documentation can help them:
- Reflect on pedagogy and teaching activities in a specific class
- Recognize elements critical to student success
- Explain and document learning outcomes
- Showcase teaching excellence and innovation for employment and award opportunities
- Study the effectiveness of changes in teaching methods and practices
- Assess teaching via the peer review process
The Appeal of Reviewing Course Portfolios and Scholarship of Teaching

As Ernest Boyer explains in *Scholarship Reconsidered*, the peer review process offers a way to more accurately evaluate and recognize a full range of scholarship. Peer review assumes that more traditional research questions as well as scholarship of teaching can be best evaluated by people working with similar questions and constraints. The peer review of teaching as it is facilitated through course portfolios, in particular, lets us more fully recognize the wide range of intellectual activity in our teaching and learning community. It also allows faculty members to begin to bridge the teaching-research divide in many innovative and productive ways.

While reviewers of manuscripts and grant proposals for disciplinary research typically suggest revisions intended to enhance the final product, little opportunity exists for formative feedback on teaching. Course portfolios offer us the chance to describe teaching practices and learning objectives in a way that makes this vital, reflective activity available for critical review and formative discussion by peers. By submitting their work to peer review, faculty members can ask focused questions about teaching and learning and then extend their discussion to a broader community. The critique and rigor involved in peer review will also help to establish scholarship of teaching as serious scholarly activity. Ultimately, peer review of course portfolios extends the potential of the course portfolio beyond private reflection, however useful, to the wider realm of scholarly investigation made public.

Both a SOTL scholar and a course portfolio reviewer, Valerie Dean O’Loughlin, assistant professor of Medical Sciences at IUB, finds a generative relationship between producing her own and reviewing others’ scholarship of teaching. Speaking specifically about her role as a course portfolio reviewer, she explains, “In a traditional research environment, an individual becomes a better researcher by reviewing other research. [Reviewing others’ portfolios] helped me better focus my course portfolio to answer specific pedagogical research questions, and it helped me better document my methods of assessment.”

O’Loughlin notes that scholarship of teaching and research in a lab are not as different as might be expected: “Even though one is based on teaching and one is based on a traditional research project, the format of both is similar. You have to make sure that you speak concisely. You have to make sure your data supports your hypothesis. So I feel that [both kinds of scholarship] provide a nice complement” to each other.
Course Portfolio Exposition: Making Visible the Intellectual Work of Teaching

Friday, February 14, 2003, Frangipani Room, Indiana Memorial Union
Poster Session: 11:00–2:00; Keynote: Noon–1:30 pm
*Refreshments provided from 11:00 am*

On February 14, the SOTL program will feature a poster session representing many of the course portfolios now underway by IU Bloomington faculty and graduate students. The posters may feature a central question, discovery, achievement, or challenge in teaching a particular course. Presenters and their posters will be available for conversation 11:00–12:00 and 1:30–2:00 pm. Course portfolio authors are still being encouraged to develop posters for participation in this event. Those who wish to participate should contact Jennifer Robinson (855-9023, jenmetar@indiana.edu). An optional poster planning meeting will be held Friday, January 31, 3:00–5:00 pm, in Ballantine Hall 004.

Following this hour-long poster session, Professors Leah Shopkow (History) and Andrew Feig (Chemistry) will provide in-depth views of their course portfolios. Shopkow’s portfolio documents the teaching and learning in her freshman Medieval Heroes course. She is especially interested in studying how well students develop the skills of historians and how extensive writing and re-writing can improve student performance. The portfolio process led Shopkow to revise not only her Medieval Heroes course but also others. She finds a course portfolio can be a powerful tool of course analysis for individual faculty members. Feig used his course portfolio as a means of assessing whether the fundamental curricular changes he made to C484 Biomolecules and Catabolism enhanced student learning and engagement. The teaching analysis achieved through his course portfolio helped him to clarify how to approach the problem of teaching assessment, an essential prerequisite for the preparation of any document for external review of the scholarship of teaching and learning. Feig will describe how planning and implementing his course portfolio helped to shape his preparation of a dossier for a national teaching award, a pedagogical publication, and participation in a grant to support experimental curricula at IU.

E-Portfolios: Expanding Portfolio Potential

Scholars can continue to share their teaching and learning findings and extend the potential of course portfolios through a new electronic site. EDUCAUSE National Learning Infrastructure Initiative (NLII), the American Association of Higher Education, and the Electronic Portfolios Action Committee (EPAC) have launched a new website dedicated to creating a community of faculty, administrators, instructional designers, and software developers to “work together to advance the higher education community’s understanding and use of electronic portfolios to promote learning and teaching.” For additional information or to become involved, visit aahe.ital.utexas.edu/electronicportfolios/cop.html

Peer Review of Teaching & Course Portfolio Outreach


“Facilitating the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning with Course Portfolios.” V. O’Loughlin, J. Robinson, and W. Schlegel. FASEB.


Publications


The Course Portfolio: How Faculty can Examine their Teaching to Advance Practice and Student Learning. P. Hutchings, ed., 1998.


