



A-Z University Teaching & Learning

Teaching Portfolio

“Teaching portfolio” – a broad term

While in the arts “portfolios” refer to folders of work samples (often for application purposes), in the financial world a “portfolio” is understood as a stock of securities. This wide range of definitions may be confusing, but it actually outlines the possibilities and limitations of a teaching portfolio quite accurately. In a “teaching portfolio” lecturers can reflect on and document their teaching. They collect important documents from their teaching activities and put them into a systematic context which expresses their understanding of learning and teaching. A teaching portfolio thus becomes a record of their teaching achievements - and in this sense represents their assets as a professional instructor.

A distinction is made between a teaching portfolio and a learning portfolio, in which students systematically collect materials related to their studies and critically reflect on them.

The context of a teaching portfolio

There are two aspects - among others - which emphasize the importance of teaching portfolios in the context of university teaching:

1. It is becoming apparent that university teaching cannot be defined solely on the academic subjects (contents) that are conveyed. A degree program focuses on the learning processes of students and – in direct conjunction with this - the concrete teaching efforts of lecturers. Thus, in the appointment process increasing emphasis is also being placed on how someone practices university teaching (not only what someone teaches).

2. Universities are generally committed to unite teaching and research. A teaching portfolio is first of all an attempt to create proof of teaching achievements, comparable to documenting research achievement (e.g. publication lists, funding received, etc.). Moreover, a teaching portfolio can also explicitly present the link between teaching and research: When lecturers critically discuss their research with students, for example, or involve students in their research, this is an exchange in the scienti-

fic community and contributes to new scientific insights. The teaching portfolio shows how research activity and research-based learning are didactically related.

Functions of a teaching portfolio

Due to its openness in terms of form and content, a teaching portfolio can fulfill different functions:

- Career path overview: The portfolio accompanies lecturers throughout their teaching career, reflects their personal development, and derives implications for the future.
- Documents for the application process: The portfolio is a more assessable record of teaching experience and teaching achievements.
- Peer collaboration: Teaching portfolios can form the basis for collaboration between instructors within an institute or department. Thus, they also contribute to the quality assurance of teaching.
- Combining teaching and research: Teaching portfolios are the starting point for teaching-based research (and thus also for research-based learning).

Structure of a teaching portfolio

Because teaching portfolios are designed individually, there is no standard format. A survey of the literature and successful case studies reveals five key components:

- Teaching philosophy: the framework and anchor for the other parts; summarizes one’s personal concept of teaching and learning processes.
- Personal teaching practice: describes the implementation of one’s own university teaching philosophy with concrete examples that are discussed in context.
- Further teaching activities (e.g. participating in educational committees, working on syllabuses, etc.): documents the wider context of one’s teaching and combines teaching/learning processes with structural aspects of educational processes.
- Outlook on focal points for future teaching activities: indicates which focal points are being considered for the next phases of teaching and why.

A-Z University Teaching & Learning

Teaching Portfolio

- Important records and documents as a supplement.
A teaching portfolio should not contain too much detail, especially when it is meant for specific target groups (e.g. as part of a job application process).

Quality criteria of a teaching portfolio

2

The first criterion for the quality of a teaching portfolio is to what extent it allows for the development of one's own individual teaching. In this respect, the teaching portfolio must be tailored to the individual. Nevertheless, there are some general qualities that make a teaching portfolio effective. Two aspects are especially important:

1. Documents and reflections on teaching and learning processes should reference the findings of good higher education. This includes the interaction between curriculum elements (framework, learning objectives, didactic concept, lesson execution, assessments), the psychological foundations of learning, as well as the conditions of university education processes. A teaching portfolio thus makes academic teaching skills fully visible.

2. A teaching portfolio should make clear how teaching and learning processes can be integrated into and utilized by specialist research processes.

Electronic teaching portfolio (e-portfolio)

In addition to the conventional paper portfolio, electronic forms - so-called "e-portfolios" - are becoming increasingly important. They also make it possible to incorporate various documents (e.g. video sequences) and link them effectively to the text portion of the portfolio. The Center for University Teaching and Learning provides access to a standard software (Mahara) for creating e-portfolios.

Literature for further study

A standard reference containing many examples:
Seldin, P. (2003). *The Teaching Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Improved Performance and Promotion/Tenure Decisions* (3rd edition). Bolton: Anker Publishing.