

THE PORTFOLIO PROCESS

(Revised December 1, 2008)

All student teachers in the Hope College Teacher Education Program are required to develop a professional portfolio (in either a paper or electronic format) which summarizes their experiences throughout the program and represents growth towards becoming a reflective practitioner. The portfolio is a project that synthesizes academic and field work across the teacher preparation program and is created to demonstrate progress in teaching and to use as a tool in the search for a teaching position. Many school districts recognize portfolios as a useful component in the hiring process.

TYPES OF PORTFOLIOS

Building a portfolio is a process, leading to a product. Throughout one's college career, a student may encounter several types of portfolios. Confusion can arise regarding the varying types of and expectations for portfolio development. The portfolio that students have most often developed is called a "process-portfolio" or "working portfolio." This type of portfolio generally documents growth in certain skills and abilities as the student progresses through a course or experience. It includes a collection of "artifacts" or evidence that provides proof of growth and development within a certain course or limited time period.

The second type is called the "professional" or "presentation" portfolio. It will generally be organized towards the end of the teacher education program and is designed to synthesize the student's experiences and growth throughout the program. It is used primarily in the interview process to document and highlight skills and experiences for the person(s) conducting the interview. A student may choose to create either a paper portfolio, an electronically formatted portfolio, or both.

DEVELOPING THE PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

Since most interviewers have limited amounts of time for review of the portfolio (5-10 minutes), it is suggested that the final version be limited to those documents that best exemplify the student's work, experiences and accomplishments. Students should spend a considerable amount of time determining the organizational format and selecting the artifacts that best represent skills and knowledge that are the result of growth in the teacher education program. Although a number of formats might be considered, it is highly important that a definite pattern of organization is recognizable within the portfolio. Several organizational patterns might be utilized, but it is best to include sections such as: "Personal Information," "Achievements/Honors," "Professional Development" "Related Experiences," "Performance Samples," or "Educational Background."

In addition to these more traditional headings, students may instead choose to organize their portfolios around the outcomes or professional abilities defined within the program. In the Hope College Teacher Education Program, six different professional abilities have been identified, emphasized and assessed. They specify the skills and knowledge

that a student should be able to demonstrate upon completion of the program. A student might wish to structure the portfolio around these abilities and then provide documentation or artifacts in each area. Within each ability area, a student might include information about personal and/or professional experiences that have led to achievement of the various abilities. The professional portfolio might alternately be organized in this manner:

- A. Personal/Background Information
- B. Professional Abilities – Communication Focus
 - 1. Effective Communicator
 - 2. Professional Collaborator
 - 3. Curriculum Developer
- C. Professional Abilities – Critical Thinking Focus
 - 1. Problem Solver
 - 2. Decision Maker
 - 3. Scholarly Educator
- D. Awards/Honors/Accomplishments

Documentation would specifically support the professional abilities listed in sections B and C. Students might include unit/lesson plans, behavior management contracts, parent letters, pictures of bulletin boards, case studies, and/or videotapes of teaching segments.

SELECTING ARTIFACTS AND DOCUMENTATION

Narrowing the artifacts to a manageable number is often the most difficult task that the student will face while developing the professional portfolio. At this point, the student will want to select items that will most impress the interviewer. “Best work” will be the key, although in some cases, students may want to specifically document growth over time with a certain series of assignments. The student needs to be cognizant, however, of the interviewer’s limited time and the importance of “the first impression.”

Examples that suggest growth in designing, communicating, and monitoring curriculum and instruction might include artifacts such as concept maps, photographs, videotapes, belief or philosophy statements, relevant quotations, letters, and evaluations.

Among the other items that a student might choose to include are:

- Resume
- Field placement evaluations
- Lesson plans
- Autobiography
- Article summaries
- Technology skills
- Philosophy of education statement

- Student Teaching evaluation(s)
- Unit Plans
- Pictures (must secure parent permission if students are shown)
- Anecdotal records
- Bulletin boards (photos)
- Awards/Honors
- Literature Logs/Journal entries
- Peer critiques
- Behavior management plans/philosophy
- Position papers
- Sample parent letters
- Letters of recommendation
- Videotapes/audiotapes
- Examples of authentic and varied assessment tools used to evaluate student learning (e.g., portfolios, anecdotal records, student work samples, oral, written, and performance exam, quizzes, or tests)
- Experiences in diverse settings or with diverse populations
- Examples of differentiated instruction for all students.
- Examples of ways the student has worked effectively with parents, community, and professional organizations.
- Personal belief statement (for a religiously-affiliated school only)

A short rationale or explanation should be attached to the artifacts that quickly summarize or explain why the item has been included in the portfolio.

PRESENTATION

The finished portfolio should be an attractive, well organized, and substantive presentation of the student's growth and learning. It is important that a professional and tasteful binder or carrier is selected (for the paper portfolio) to hold professional materials. For the electronic portfolio, the student must be careful to design a format that is not only visually appealing, but is also easy to navigate. In the end, the portfolio **must** be both professional and visually appealing.

Students must take **extreme care** to eliminate **all** errors in typing, printing and writing. Obviously, errors that originally occurred within assignments will have to remain. However, any items that have been created primarily for the portfolio (e.g.-resume, rationales, autobiography, etc.) should be carefully proofread and absolutely error-free.

Attention to other visual information should be carefully monitored as well. Students should choose resume or scrapbook quality paper for the portfolio (if creating a paper portfolio). Borders should be cut accurately and pictures carefully aligned. Color and/or a theme should be included whenever possible, particularly for those wishing to teach at the elementary level. **A laser-quality printer should be used for all documents created for the portfolio.** Evidence of technological skills can be inferred in a paper portfolio by creating tables, borders, and organizers, etc. Every detail should be checked and double-checked. Finally, several individuals with strong proofreading skills should examine and critique the portfolio before it is shared with an interviewer.

FINAL THOUGHTS ON THE PROFESSIONAL PORTFOLIO

Purposes - The professional portfolio should:

- provide a “snapshot” of the student and his/her growth in the program
- include samples of best work
- be well-organized, neat and professional
- demonstrate strengths
- be flexible and not “cast in stone”
- provide easy access to all of its components

Pointers - The student should:

- begin saving early in the college career
- collect items such as badges, program, pictures, awards, etc.
- use page protectors and dividers to separate sections
- use good quality paper and a professional-looking binder
- proofread and double-proofread everything placed in the portfolio
- be selective when putting the final product together
- use items that give the audience a “5-minute” picture - personally and professionally
- look at the portfolio thoroughly when preparing for an interview – It can provide a strong tool for review and a chance to synthesize information and details.
- bring the portfolio into the interview OR leave it after the interview, thus providing reason for an additional contact
- send a thank-you note after the interview

Finally, a reminder.... While developing the professional portfolio can be a lot of work and will demand a good portion of time and energy, it also provides a unique opportunity to reflect on one’s experiences and celebrate one’s growth as a professional. The student should be sure to take time to enjoy the process on the way to creating the product. ☺