The Multicultural Teaching Portfolio

Matt Kaplan, *University of Michigan-Ann Arbor*

Derived from the artist's portfolio, the teaching portfolio is "a factual description of a professor's teaching strengths and accomplishments. It includes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a professor's teaching and performance" (Seldin, 1997, p. 2). It is, in addition, a venue for faculty to reflect on teaching.. The teaching portfolio is now a familiar part of higher education. In 1997, Seldin estimated that approximately 1,000 institutions were experimenting with teaching portfolios or a variant, up from about 10 in 1990 (p. 2).

Despite this proliferation, little has been written about the specific use of teaching portfolios to document faculty work with multi-culturalism. Although variably defined, multiculturalism for this essay includes topics such as diversifying the curriculum, social justice education, civic engagement, and creating a positive learning environment for a diverse student body. In this essay I first outline the rationale for multicultural portfolios and then discuss strategies faculty can use to develop such portfolios.

Rationale Creating the multicultural portfolio enables faculty to represent their work towards several goals:
• promoting reflection on multicultural teaching and student learning,
• documenting the scholarship of multicultural teaching,
• documenting multicultural teaching for administrative decision making, and
• sharing work with colleagues.

Perhaps the most compelling purpose for such portfolios is for faculty to document how they are enacting institutional priorities. An increasing number of colleges and universities are making multiculturalism/diversity a part of their core curriculum. The American Association of Colleges and Universities reports that almost two thirds of the 543 colleges and universities polled now have a diversity requirement or are in the process of developing one (Humphreys, 2000, 1). More than 90% of campuses surveyed agree that students need to be prepared for life in a diverse democracy. These data indicate that all faculty will want to address multicultural issues to some extent in a generic teaching portfolio. However, faculty who devote significant amounts of time to multiculturalism need focused documentation so that they can be recognized and rewarded and so that   colleagues can build on their work.

By creating multicultural portfolios, faculty can ensure that their teaching is evaluated in context. Such context is necessary because it can be a challenging undertaking to engage students with multicultural issues and get them to work with peers who have very different backgrounds and experiences. Students are often resistant to ideas and practices that challenge their assumptions, and this resistance could lead to lukewarm or even hostile reactions to multiculturalism, especially for faculty from underrepresented groups who can be seen as "pushing an agenda" (see Griffin, 1998; Bell, Washington, Weinstein, and Love, 1997). By having access to a portfolio, administrators can examine evidence beyond student ratings when evaluating faculty efforts to foster multicultural teaching and learning.

Creating a Multicultural Portfolio A portfolio should never be exhaustive, nor simply a collection of documents. Instead, it needs to be representative, including selected samples of faculty work along with reflective materials that set that material in context. In addition, a multicultural portfolio focuses on documenting efforts and accomplishments specifically related to multicultural teaching. Creating the portfolio involves five activities: collection, reflection, selection, completion, and revision.

Collection In this early stage of development, you collect documents related to multicultural teaching and learning. To ensure that you are

gathering a complete picture of this work, consider whether you have materials that relate to the four dimensions of multicultural teaching described by Marchesani and Adams (1992): knowing the students, course content, teaching methods, and knowing oneself as instructor. "Knowing the students" might include assignments and classroom assessment techniques that help you get to know the individuals in your classes (e.g., journaling, background learning styles questionnaires); efforts to increase enrollment of underrepresented groups; and mentoring/working with multicultural student groups on campus.

"Course content" might include development of new courses on multicultural topics; syllabi for the same course before and after multicultural development; readings lists, bibliographies, websites, and other resources representing diverse perspectives; student papers or assignments that show a multicultural approach to the material; letters from colleagues who have examined your syllabi and course materials; and lists of honors projects, masters theses, or dissertations focused on multicultural topics.

Under "teaching methods" you could include sample activities and assignments designed to promote learning among students with diverse learning styles, course policies that emphasize multiple perspectives and inclusiveness (such as ground rules for discussion); and letters from colleagues who have observed your class.

Documents that address the category "knowing oneself as an instructor" include a reflective statement on multicultural teaching, a list of activities undertaken to increase knowledge/skills in multicultural teaching, reflections on student comments or peer evaluations about your work, and plans for development as a multicultural teacher.

Reflection For a portfolio to be more than a compendium of documents, you will need to reflect on items collected and make explicit the underlying assumptions, beliefs, and principles that guide your approach to multicultural teaching. Some questions to consider include: How do you define multiculturalism? How have you developed your multicultural perspective? In what ways does your work with students, course content, and teaching methods reflect

your definition? What aspects of multicultural teaching and learning do you and your students struggle with? How do you create an atmosphere to help students examine these difficulties? What is your role in the classroom around multicultural topics: enlightener, advocate, agitator, organizer, change agent, skill developer, empowerer? How do you hope to develop as a multicultural teacher?

Answers to these questions should lead to the creation of a statement of teaching philosophy focused on multiculturalism. This statement will provide an organizing principle for selecting documents to include in the portfolio. It will also help clarify the rationale for your teaching goals and methods for colleagues and administrators, which is particularly important because there is no single definition of multiculturalism. Explaining your approach allows others to evaluate your work in a more accurate context, and it can open up a productive conversation among colleagues. Such conversations can help departments think deliberately about curricular reform, the recruitment and retention of underrepresented students and faculty, and multicultural faculty development.

Selection Once you express your multicultural teaching philosophy, you can return to your collection of documents and start selecting items to include. You might decide to organize the portfolio by course, with all related items (syllabus, assignments, handouts, student work, student evaluations) in one section; or you could create topical sections on students, curriculum, teaching methods, and your own growth as a multicultural practitioner, with each section comprising representative materials from a variety of courses. The body of the portfolio could consist of descriptive narratives for each section, with original materials included as appendices. Or you could introduce each section of original materials with a short, context-setting explanation.

Completion A portfolio should be easy to construct and to read. This means setting realistic time and page limits. Although it is an evolving document, you will need a deadline for completion. The experience of graduate students creating portfolios at the University of Michigan has shown that most of them can complete a portfolio in 15-25 hours. You will also need to think carefully about how to make

the document as accessible as possible for readers. Suggestions include a very clear table of contents and section dividers, continuous pagination, clear copies or retyped versions of any original materials, and a clear rationale for the selection of items you have included.

Revision Most of the faculty and graduate students with whom I have consulted insist that the portfolio we are discussing is "a work in progress"; and so it is. Just as it is important to complete a given version of your portfolio, you should return to the document to consider needed revisions (see Zubizaretta, 1997). Writing a multicultural philosophy, examining teaching materials on multiculturalism, and setting goals for the future do increase your reflection about your teaching. In addition, as you develop your courses and meet new students, you continue to learn more about yourself and your ideas about multiculturalism. As your approaches and experience change, you can update the portfolio to better reflect your current practices and thinking.

Matt Kaplan (Ph.D., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), is Assistant Director of the Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, at the University of Michigan.

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