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THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO AWARD
FOR
GRADUATE STUDENT INSTRUCTORS OF FIRST-YEAR WRITING SEMINARS

Annual award

Each year the John S. Knight Institute for Writing in the Disciplines gives one award of \$750 for the most outstanding teaching portfolio submitted by a graduate student instructor of First-Year Writing Seminars. Applicants should have taught FWSs for a minimum of one year and may have had other teaching experience at Cornell that they wish to document. Applications for the award must be submitted to the Knight Institute office (101 McGraw Hall) by June 12, 2009.

Why work on a teaching portfolio?

- Gathering materials for a teaching portfolio can help you to become a better teacher. Good teachers continue to improve their teaching throughout their careers, and self-reflection can be an important part of that process. You can maintain and develop a portfolio, then, for your own learning and record-keeping purposes.
- Maintaining a teaching portfolio may help you get a job, or get promoted.

How to develop a teaching portfolio:

- ***Start work on your portfolio early—as soon as you have begun teaching.***
- For each class you teach, put everything into a three-ring binder as you go, and keep it in order—as much as you can! (At the very least, dump everything into one box for later contemplation.) At the end of the semester, organize the materials and write up any final thoughts about the course. This collection becomes easily available material for later use.
- Get permission from students to use papers that you may want to include in a portfolio as evidence of how you respond to student essays.
- Save all your evaluations, good and bad. Write up summaries of them while they are fresh in your mind (not later, when you've forgotten the students and the course).
- Make sure that each time you teach a course, someone observes you once or twice during the semester and writes up a report.
- Make sure a faculty mentor looks at your syllabus and sample assignments carefully.
- Make sure a faculty mentor looks over papers on which you have commented.
- Get a letter or report for your teaching file from every faculty member who works with you.
- Keep a journal, as a private place for reflection and self-evaluation. At the beginning of the semester note your goals. What will students learn about the subject? What do you hope they will still know ten years from now? What is the purpose of each reading and writing assignment? As the semester progresses, keep a record of your classes and assignments: record the mistakes, the discoveries, the changes you want to institute next time. This material can be invaluable when you must provide a statement of teaching principles at some later point in your career. Just as important, it will help you to develop a teaching philosophy and a teaching style.

What a good portfolio looks like:

A good portfolio will be easy for the reader to use because of features such as a table of contents, tabs for different sections, and summaries of what appears in each section. It will include only carefully selected representative materials. No one will take the trouble to sort through an inflated collection of poorly identified and badly organized materials.

Nevertheless, there isn't any "right" format or one "right" collection of materials. Like anything else, you have to develop your teaching portfolio to suit your own purposes and then shape it appropriately for different audiences and occasions. If an institution at which you are seeking a job asks for a teaching portfolio or for evidence of your teaching, your choice of representative materials and of presentation should suit that particular teaching position.

*Materials to include in a portfolio:*¹

- *a table of contents*
- *a curriculum vitae*
- *a statement of your teaching principles, commitments, goals.* (Two or fewer pages will probably suffice.)
- an *introductory statement* for each section that explains why you included the materials and what principles of teaching they illustrate.
- *selected course syllabi/ descriptions.* Include a chronological list of the courses you've taught, followed by a statement in which you comment on the range of courses and explain the principles you've used to organize them and the changes you have made. You might choose to include a syllabus from each (different) course you have taught, perhaps including several examples of syllabi from courses you have taught repeatedly to show how you improved the course.
- *descriptions of courses you have not yet taught.* It may be useful to develop descriptions of different kinds of courses you might be able to teach at different levels (graduate level, survey course, writing course, undergraduate). If you normally work on non-canonical texts, these kinds of course proposals can suggest your flexibility in working with traditional materials--for instance, you might develop an *interesting* canonical survey in a traditional period.
- *sample assignments and handouts.* In the introductory statement, you might explain your approach to making assignments. If you have revised an assignment, you might annotate the newer version of the assignment sheet, indicating your changes and the reasons for them. At least one chair of a distinguished English department says that when reviewing materials from job applicants, he pays more attention to assignments than he does to syllabi. They tell him more about what kind of teacher you are and how you actually work.
- *sample student papers or other work.* A selection of student papers or projects can demonstrate your aims in the concrete, your standards of evaluation, and methods of responding to students' writing. In your introductory comments, you might explain your criteria for the assignment, the procedures you used for evaluation, and the goals you had in mind when you wrote comments on papers. You might wish to include a "case study" of a set of one student's papers over the course of the semester, indicating what progress the student made and what you learned from his or her writing process that helped you in your teaching.
- *a summary of course evaluations.* For each course you've taught you can include a tabulation of ratings from course evaluations and a sampling of student comments, including enough of a range to show that you are attentive to students' concerns or criticisms. You can briefly interpret these evaluations and point out any trends in student ratings.
- *reports from observations of your teaching.* On one page you might list any observation reports or letters that contain evaluations of your teaching. Observation reports from course leaders or peer collaborators can also be included in the portfolio. You might include a short paragraph on what you learned from each observation and the follow-up discussion.
- *descriptions of training in teaching.* Note and describe any courses or training you have received in teaching—take care to use accurate titles and descriptions.
- *descriptions of professional development programs.* in which you have participated such as the Peer Collaboration Program or the Essay Response Consultation Program. You might find it informative to include reports and your comments on your participation in these programs.
- *teaching awards* or other recognition of your teaching (or results of your teaching). Have your students won awards for their essays? Gone on to be majors in your field because of your influence? Have you won awards for teaching, for assignment sequences, for writing exercises? Provide descriptions, and commentary as appropriate.

¹The materials in this section have been copied with modifications from instructions written by Christine Ferris of Indiana University.