Teaching Portfolio/Philosophy Workshop  
September 26, 2005

Teaching portfolios are a way to set you apart in a very competitive job market. Think about marketing yourself not only as a great scholar but also as a great teacher. Develop one early in your teaching career and update it as you progress through graduate school.

Creating a Teaching Portfolio  
Get started early:

- **Save all syllabi**, handouts, and assignments from courses in which you teach. Make sure to make a note of questions, exercises, and materials you developed yourself.
- **Request letters from professors** who have employed you to teach, particularly those who have observed your teaching and/or read over your comments on student work. Ask for these letters while the professors’ memories are fresh.
- When course grades are submitted and there is no appearance of impropriety or favoritism, **consider asking a student or two for a letter of recommendation**. You can direct them to the Bok Center web site for instructions and maintain them in your recommendation dossier at OCS. For further information, see http://bokcenter.harvard.edu/docs/port.evals.html.
- **Have a section (or if you give a guest lecture, the lecture) videotaped** as part of a consultation with Carrie Endries, the Lead TF Consultant in History, or someone else at the Bok Center. Ask to keep a copy of the tape. Watching yourself teach on tape, especially in consultation with a Bok Center staff member, can be a springboard to reflecting on and articulating your teaching philosophy.
- **Keep all student evaluations of your teaching**. Mid-semester evaluations (using forms you develop or forms available from the Bok Center), combined with final CUE evaluations, make a good package. Your CUE scores are sent to course heads at the end of the semester, and the portion pertaining to your teaching may be detached from these. A shortage of storage space and concerns about confidentiality limit access to your CUE scores, but you do have a right (and responsibility!) to examine them. If the course head does not pass them along to the TFs, ask them for copies.
- **Participate in Professional Development**. The Bok Center runs a number of programs to help you reflect on and improve upon your teaching. These include the Graduate Writing Fellow program and the Christensen Discussion Leading Seminar for Faculty and Advanced Teaching Fellows.
- **Explain the “Harvardese.”** You will need to elaborate on such concepts as the “Core” and “tutorials,” etc., so that readers of your portfolio will understand it.

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Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement

If you haven’t done much teaching:

• Think about great teachers you’ve had; what did you like about their styles? How were they effective in capturing your attention and respect?
• What did not work for you as a student?

If you have taught at least several classes, here are some concrete questions to ask yourself:

• What do you believe about teaching? What do you believe about learning? Why? How is that played out in your classroom? How does student identity and background make a difference in how you teach?
• What do you still struggle with in terms of teaching and student learning? From your experience teaching, what did you learn about being an effective teacher?
• Present a picture of yourself with students in a classroom. How have students reacted to some of your teaching methods? What did you learn from that? How do you delineate your responsibilities vs. your students’ responsibilities?

For everyone:

• **Do your homework.** What is the target school’s mission and how does it value teaching? What kind of classes does it offer? Does it emphasize experiential learning? Multimedia? Team teaching? Do they have traditional age students? What kind of backgrounds are they from? The search committee will want to know that you understand what kind of work you will be expected to do at their institution. Tailor each portfolio/statement you make to the type of school (i.e. small liberal arts college, large state university, major private research university, etc.)
• **Don’t rehash your CV.** Don’t just discuss your CV again but think about how you like to teach. Use specific examples to illustrate your broader philosophies. For example, how do you involve quiet students in your classroom? How do you encourage them to collaborate? Be specific to history as well. **Why** should students study history?
• **Integrate your research into your teaching.** Show how a specific concept or field you have studied can be conveyed to students through innovative teaching methods.
• **Nuts and Bolts:** It should be well-written and proofread. Have others copyedit.
• **Don’t be afraid** to talk about how you learned from teaching errors you have made; you sound more humble and as if teaching is a continual learning process.
• **Get feedback on your statement** from a variety of people – faculty, peers and career counselors. Think of it as a work in progress.

Many ideas here were taken from Gabriela Montell, “How to Write a Statement of Teaching Philosophy.” *Chronicle of Higher Education* March 27, 2003.

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Job Interview Questions Related to Teaching

Preparing for the interview:
- **Again, do your homework** on the types of classes and students at this institution.
- **Prepare specific answers** with examples to their general questions.
- **Have sample prospective syllabi** with you (and even copies of your full teaching portfolio).
- **Make your ideas for classes sound engaging** for the types of undergraduates you would encounter at this institution. (Is this a school that likes trendy, catchy names for classes? Is it conservative?)
- **Sound flexible.**
- **When they ask you for questions, see it as an opportunity** to say a bit more about yourself. For instance, “I ran a graduate student workshop on dissertation writing at Harvard. Do you think there would be any interest in a similar endeavor (or, for an undergraduate-only institution, for seniors writing theses in history) at your institution?” Or, “I noticed that you have a Humanities/Gender Studies/Teaching and Learning Center here. How involved are department faculty with this outside institute?”

**Popular Questions for Harvard PhDs in History**
1. What kinds of classes would you like to teach in your specialty?
2. How would you go about teaching a survey?
3. What kinds of texts (articles vs. books vs. primary sources, films, etc.) would you use?
4. You’re accustomed to Harvard students. How would you teach students like ours?
5. How would you teach a world history class?

**Other Possible Questions**
1. Tell us how your research has influenced your teaching. In what ways have you been able to bring the insights of your research to your courses at the undergraduate level? How do you balance teaching and research?
2. How do you use technology in the classroom?
3. Describe your classroom environment.
4. How do you teach writing? What kinds of essays do you want students to write? How do you know you’ve been successful?
5. Describe your best teaching experience.
6. How will you teach nontraditional students? Non-native speakers?

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