



## **The Academic Portfolio: A Practical Guide to Documenting Teaching, Research and Service**

Peter Seldin, J. Elizabeth Miller; Jossey-Bass, 2009

*Reviewed by Raluca I Rosca, Pennsylvania State University*

**I**f you plan to read only one book about portfolios, buy this one. Peter Seldin is the author or co-author of over 16 books about faculty development and evaluation. His most recent books explored the use of portfolios in evaluating teaching or administrative performance. This one is dedicated to the use of the same tool in documenting all three components of a faculty work life, and is addressed both to the preparer and to evaluator of an academic portfolio.

The first chapter of the book describes the concept of an academic portfolio as a collection of representative evidence of professional performance completed with personal narratives on the evidence's significance to the institution, profession and to the faculty member. The second chapter follows with the description of items that can belong in a portfolio. A hierarchical structure is suggested, with (1) a preface, sections describing (2) teaching, (3) research, (4) service, and (5) integration of professional work and goals, followed by (A) an appendix of supporting evidence. The chapter proceeds to discuss the usual subsections in each section, as well as questions to answer in order to help with the selection of material. For all these sections, it is recommended to cross-reference the evidence in the appendix and to connect one's performance and accomplishments to the institution's mission and goals. The use of simple, clear, jargon-free language is especially recommended especially for tenure and promotion portfolios, where much of the audience is outside one's discipline. A typical academic portfolio table of contents is presented on page 28.

Chapter 3, Preparing the Portfolio, would be better titled Key aspects to preparing a successful portfolio. Four such keys are presented: (1) the value of self-reflection (one part that absolutely cannot be outsourced!) when writing the narratives and selecting the evidence, (2) the importance of collaboration with a peer or an experienced mentor, (3) discussing specific expectations (both with the department chair, the mentor and other tenured faculty) about what and how faculty performance is to be reported and (4) gaining institutional acceptance of the academic portfolio concept. From the reviewer's point of view, while the first three keys stay with the faculty member, the fourth one stays with the institution and the faculty member can at most recognize its existence, or in time, participate in its creation.

Chapter 4 presents practical suggestions for improving both the content and the appearance of the portfolio, as well as the suggestion to update and revise the portfolio at the end of each academic year. The audience of Chapter 5 changes from the preparer to the evaluator, as the chapter answers the question of "what personnel committees should look for when they evaluate teaching, research and scholarship, and service performance from an academic portfolio". Both audiences would benefit from using the checklist of items for evaluating portfolio on page 49. Chapter 6 presents answers to frequently asked questions from professors and administrators.

The last and longest chapter of the book contains current portfolios (Fall 2008) from 18 faculty members belonging to 16 academic disciplines and 10 different institutions. Those portfolios illustrate the narratives and the types of interpretation of evidence used in different disciplines/types of institutions; but the evidence itself (student evaluations, scientific papers, recommendation from other faculty etc.) is not reproduced in the book. The reader is reminded that 'sample portfolios from other

disciplines and institutions often provide helpful information and insights applicable' to one's own position but also that 'there are differences among the disciplines in terms of both faculty practice and methodology', and of course that 'there are differences in the weight that institutions give to teaching, research, and service.' This reiterates the warning given in Chapter 2.

The portfolios are arranged alphabetically by discipline and as such, the comparison of two portfolios belonging to the same discipline is facilitated for Education and Political Science. A comparison across disciplines of portfolios from the same institution is much harder to do, as neither the table of contents nor the index record mention the institutional membership.

Readers of Seldin's 1993 book 'Successful Use of Teaching Portfolios' would recognize the name of Clement A. Seldin and John Zubizarreta; comparing their sample portfolios, at a 15 years distance, allows one to observe first hand how some parts of the portfolio (for example, the teaching philosophy) can stay mostly unchanged, while others (such as the list of courses most recently taught and innovations in teaching) lend themselves well to periodical review and improvement. Similarly, even the most faithful of Seldin's readers will find new and updated content among many familiar themes, as well as a change of focus from the evaluator to the preparer of an academic portfolio.

The anecdote at the end of Chapter 6 is telling about the authors' opinion (and by now, the reviewer's opinion as well): the time to begin preparing an academic portfolio is now. Start by reading this book to find out why and how!