

The Teaching Portfolio: The Concept and Resulting Successes and Shortfalls of Introducing it at Clemson University

Dennis R. Decoteau

Department of Horticulture, Box 340375, Clemson University, Clemson, SC 29634-0375

Many horticulture faculty at land grant universities have split appointments in research, teaching, and extension. Effectiveness in research is traditionally demonstrated by listing publications, grants, graduate students, and presentations. While these measures may be effective for evaluating research activities, they are not necessarily appropriate for evaluating teaching or extension activities.

To illustrate the importance of university teaching and the need for appropriate evaluation, Ernest Boyer of the Carnegie Foundation has suggested that the 1990s will be "the decade of undergraduate education," and that the "degree to which this push for better education is achieved will be determined, in a large measure, by the way scholarship is defined and, ultimately, rewarded" (Boyer, 1990).

The teaching portfolio is a promising approach for demonstrating teaching effectiveness that may be more useful than some of the more traditional methods (i.e., student evaluations, peer visits, teaching awards). The teaching portfolio is a description of a professor's teaching strengths and accomplishments, and it is currently being used or field tested at many universities and colleges across the United States, including at Clemson Univ.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE PROFESSORiate-AT-LARGE

A 1989 national survey of faculty from U.S. universities and colleges by the Carnegie Foundation indicated that nearly 70% of faculty members surveyed consider their primary interest to lie in teaching (Boyer, 1990) and nearly two-thirds believe that teaching effectiveness should be the primary criterion for promotion of faculty. Faculty at doctorate-granting institutions, such as at the land grant universities, were equally split as to whether teaching effectiveness should be the primary criterion for promotion. This result suggests the extent of the division among faculty at

many of our own institutions as to how they feel they should be evaluated.

A consequence of these concerns is that many faculty believe that the real or implied pressure to publish reduces the quality of their teaching. According to the Carnegie survey, this concern was more prevalent with the younger than with the older, more established faculty. Boyer interpreted this division to suggest that the pressure to publish may "stifle the creativity of young faculty in areas besides research as they try to publish to keep their jobs and strive toward acquiring tenure" (Boyer, 1990).

PERCEPTION OF TEACHING BY FACULTY IN THE COLLEGES OF AGRICULTURE

The results of a survey of agriculture faculty regarding their perceptions of college teaching and evaluation indicated that a majority of the faculty indicated that teaching and research activities should be appropriately evaluated and weighed according to percentage of appointment in each category (Simerly, 1989). While student evaluations were used for teaching assessment by 96% of the departments surveyed, a majority (60%) of the faculty believe that students were not the best judges of how well professors taught and that departments relied too heavily on student evaluations in determining teacher effectiveness.

According to the survey, receiving outstanding teaching awards was the second most often used teaching evaluation method used by departments (43%). About 70% of the administrators viewed receiving outstanding teaching awards as being helpful or very helpful in evaluation of teaching, while 62% of the non-administrative faculty viewed receiving teaching awards as the least helpful of the teaching evaluation methods used by departments.

Only 40% and 30% of the agriculture faculty indicated that their departments used informal or formal peer evaluations, respectively, to evaluate teaching performance. Such evaluations were the most highly regarded procedures by professors, with 88% of College of Agriculture faculty rating them as very helpful.

The problem in using and enforcing measures of teaching competence arises not only in determining which evaluation method(s) to use, but in the lack of continuity of method(s) used among the tier units of the university peer and faculty evaluation system (i.e., promotion and tenure committees, department heads or chairs, deans, provost, and president). Results from surveys on sources of information used

by peer evaluation committees from 1983 to 1993 in their assessment of teaching effectiveness of faculty indicated that the percentages of student ratings, classroom visits, teaching materials, and self evaluations used by the committees have all increased during these 10 years (Peter Seldin, personal communication). These results may indicate that the peer evaluation committees are "casting a broader net" in trying to make fair and effective teaching evaluation decisions, but without much focus on determining the most effective or finding a more reliable assessment method.

REASONS FOR RENEWED INTEREST IN EVALUATION OF TEACHING

Besides the underlying need for better evaluation methods, other reasons for the renewed interest in evaluation of teaching at universities may include 1) faculty members who once disagreed with previous evaluation policy are now in administrative positions and are willing to make some changes, 2) increases in tuition have parents and students more concerned about quality education, and 3) the insistence by faculty that teaching is scholarship (Boyer, 1990). Probably one of the more important reasons for reconsidering how teaching at universities is evaluated is the demands of accountability in the performance and workloads of college faculty from a wide range of groups, including state legislatures (Cage, 1995) and the media.

My particular interest in teaching evaluation was a result of participating in the USDA Experiment Station Committee on Policy/Academic Committee on Policy Leadership Program. I represented Clemson Univ. in this program from 1993-95. As a requirement of this leadership program, I was to develop and implement a leadership project at Clemson Univ. My intended project was to reassess how faculty were evaluated at Clemson Univ.

While at a conference on "The Comprehensive Faculty Evaluation" in Orlando, Fla., in 1994, I attended a special session on the "Teaching Portfolio." One of the first exercises asked of the participants by the instructor of the session, Peter Seldin (Distinguished Professor of Management, Pace Univ.), was to review our resumés and determine how much of our resumé was devoted to teaching as compared to research. My resumé had only four lines of the three pages of text devoted to teaching activities, even though I had a 40% teaching appointment at Clemson Univ. This exercise effectively illustrated the need to better document my teaching responsibilities and

Received for publication 24 June 1996. Accepted for publication 27 Aug. 1996. Technical Contribution No. 4210 of the South Carolina Agricultural Experiment Station, Clemson Univ. I gratefully acknowledge the support of T. Ross Wilkinson, Jim Fischer, the South Carolina Experiment Station, and the College of Agriculture, Forestry and Life Sciences (formerly College of Agricultural Sciences) at Clemson Univ. The cost of publishing this paper was defrayed in part by the payment of page charges. Under postal regulations, this paper therefore must be hereby marked *advertisement* solely to indicate this fact.

accomplishments. My experiences in this workshop suggested that the teaching portfolio may be a way of accomplishing this goal.

WHAT IS THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO?

The teaching portfolio is to teaching what lists of publications are to research (Seldin, 1993). It is a description of a teacher's strengths and accomplishments. The teaching portfolio includes documents and materials (e.g., teaching philosophy, summaries of student evaluations, statements from students and/or peers) that collectively suggest the scope and quality of the professor's teaching performance. Typically, the teaching portfolio is six to eight pages long and may have supporting exhibits or appendices (e.g., samples of syllabi, tests, or student projects). The teaching portfolio should be updated periodically, but the teaching portfolio should never be lengthened. One of the benefits of the teaching portfolio is its brevity.

The teaching portfolio can be used for personnel decisions, job applications, award packages, and to improve teaching (Murray, 1995). Developing a teaching portfolio appears to improve teaching by providing an introspective view of why and how we teach (Seldin, 1991). The teaching portfolio is also becoming more popular with professors who are planning to retire and wish to leave a document behind that reflects on their experiences in teaching for reference by future instructors.

The teaching portfolio concept is not new. It has been used in Canada for more than 15 years and is referred to as the teaching dossier (Seldin and Annis, 1992). The teaching portfolio is relatively new in the United States and has seen a rapid growth in its use in the last few years. A few years ago there were fewer than 75 institutions experimenting with the concept, while, more recently, more than 400 institutions (including several land grant universities) are experimenting with it or using it in some form (Seldin, 1993).

INTRODUCING THE TEACHING PORTFOLIO AT CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

I brought back to Clemson Univ. many aspects of the teaching portfolio that I especially liked and began working on my teaching portfolio with the College of Agricultural Sci-

ences Academic Dean as my mentor. This approach provided us with a hands-on example to learn about the teaching portfolio and to discuss the pros and cons of the concept.

Once we were comfortable with my teaching portfolio and the overall concept, I presented the concept to the Provost's meeting of the university's Academic Council of Deans, and subsequently to tenure-track faculty in other colleges of the university.

During the fall semester of 1994, Peter Seldin, an authority on the teaching portfolio, delivered a campus-wide lecture on his experiences with the teaching portfolio and also presented the concept, in a smaller setting, to the university President, Provost, and Deans.

Negative reactions to the teaching portfolio concept soon began to emerge. A common negative reaction that surfaced in discussions with faculty was their concern that the teaching portfolio would be another required university document without any end-result reward. There was also some concern by faculty about the ambiguity on how the teaching portfolio would be enforced (mandatory or voluntary) and evaluated.

Also, about this time Clemson Univ. began its major restructuring of university functions. As a result of restructuring, a common feeling among faculty was that they had more immediate concerns about the newly developing university structure than how teaching was going to be evaluated in the future. Regardless, the university's Teaching Effectiveness Committee secured adequate funds to bring a group of consultants for in-depth training of selected faculty to serve as teaching portfolio mentors.

As a result of introducing the teaching portfolio to Clemson Univ., faculty are informing me about their attempts and successes in using the teaching portfolio during the evaluation process for tenure and promotion. As might be expected, these experiences are as unique as the individual portfolios. At least one of the recently prepared teaching portfolios of a faculty member from another college is being used as a model for her colleagues. She credits the teaching portfolio for playing a large role in achieving tenure.

CONCLUSIONS

The teaching portfolio concept is still alive, but not officially mandated for teaching fac-

ulty at Clemson Univ. The teaching portfolio will probably be used primarily by faculty who prefer an alternative or supplemental method of documenting their teaching activities and/or wish to improve their teaching effectiveness.

If an organization is interested in introducing the teaching portfolio, the following guidelines (Seldin, 1993) should be followed: 1) begin by building a climate of acceptance at the institution, 2) start small, 3) field test the portfolio concept (may take a year or two), 4) use faculty volunteers (make them widely available), 5) establish open communication (i.e., avoid rumors), and 6) consider an outsider as a facilitator. As a result of my experiences at Clemson Univ., I would add one additional suggestion: avoid introducing the teaching portfolio if your university is undergoing reorganization—especially immediately before reorganization is instituted.

While working with the teaching portfolio has been rewarding, it also has been challenging. I feel the teaching portfolio has merit as a method of evaluating teaching performance and that it should be considered as an alternative to some of the more traditional teaching evaluation methods. While the teaching portfolio can be used for evaluation, it can also be an important improvement tool used by concerned teachers.

Literature Cited

- Boyer, E.L. 1990. *Scholarship reconsidered: Priorities of the professoriate*. Princeton Univ. Press, Lawrenceville, N.J.
- Cage, M.C. 1995. Regulating faculty workloads. *The Chronicle of Higher Education* 41:A30.
- Murray, J.P. 1995. The teaching portfolio: A tool for department chairpersons to create a climate of teaching excellence. *Innovative Higher Education* 19:163-175.
- Seldin, P. 1991. The teaching portfolio: A practical guide to improved performance and promotion/tenure decisions. Anker Publ. Co., Bolton, Mass.
- Seldin, P. 1993. Successful use of teaching portfolios. Anker Publ. Co., Bolton, Mass.
- Seldin, P. And L. Annis. 1992. The teaching portfolio. *Teaching Excellence* 3:1-2.
- Simerly, C.B. 1989. Faculty perceptions of teaching in colleges of agriculture: Implications for improving instruction. *NACTA J.* 33:26-29.