

Building Your Teaching Portfolio

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Shannyn Snyder received her Bachelor of Arts in Political Science and Master of Interdisciplinary Studies in Anthropology and Global Health, both from George Mason University. She also received a post-graduate certificate in Women and Gender Studies from George Mason University.

Her research interests focus on the importance of multiracial intersectionality and environmental practices.

At Mason, Shannyn regularly teaches upper-level undergraduate GCH & SOCW courses, on topics such as Social Determinants of Health; & Health Ethics, Leadership, and Advocacy.

Shannyn received 2018 Adjunct Teaching Excellence Award from Stearns Center.

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What I've Tried

- Whether it is a deliberate approach to collaboratively redesign a course or to simply try something new the next semester, from altering one assignment to changing up how we learn or discuss an entire topic, this can prevent both instructor burnout and student disconnect. Students have to see that you are excited about conveying the information, and they will often challenge you with current events or what they have learned in another class or at work, to ensure that the information is up to date. In our field, we cannot be stagnant, and I am always looking for new ways to teach even the most stable, historical, or theoretical information.

Examples of What I've Tried in My Teaching:

- I have collaboratively redesigned a course (GCH 376) for a more active learning approach.
- I have included experiential learning assignments with required community engagement (GCH/SOCW 445).
- In my GCH 360 course, I place a strong emphasis on practical experience in the field, offering countless (optional) opportunities for students to engage in environmentalism in the community.

To Explore

- 1) Consider a topic or unit that you have been teaching for three or more semesters which has remained fairly consistent in terms of PowerPoint(s), lecture spiel, lecture style or assignments. Should it be updated? How do you determine when to do so? What are some of the ways you self-check your approach?
- 2) Are there any formative discussions, debates, role-playing, or other participatory activities that have fallen flat in your class? Do you think this was due to lack of student participation, perhaps because they were tired or because they didn't understand what was being asked of them? How did you combat this? Did you change the activity on the spot, cancel it, or explain it in a different way? Was the result better?
- 3) What is one activity or assignment that you have used to connect students with "real life" experience or opportunities to network, connect, or grow outside of the classroom? Is this something that is intuitive to your course, or something "extra" you do to ensure students can put what they have learned into praxis?
- 4) What are some approaches that you might use to engage students from the first few minutes of class time, so that they are ready to learn and participate? Do you have any "tricks" that you utilize, even mid-class, to check for understanding or ensure they are alert and attentive?

Best Practices & Tips

- **Keep building your tactile portfolio and resume, even beyond the classroom.** Take advantage of conferences, community partnerships, continuing education, and networking.
- **Get to know your students.** Help students find connections with community partners.
- **There are other ways to test, other than "the test."** Using the Checking for Understanding ideas sheet or even running through the list of Blooms/SLOs for ideas on how to otherwise "test" where students are in their comprehension can alleviate some of the anxieties that students have about memorizing everything so that they can do well.

Faculty Conversations About Teaching: Building Your Teaching Portfolio

Brian Fitzpatrick, M.F.A., Term Faculty, Department of English, Composition Program, College of Humanities & Social Sciences (CHSS)



Brian Fitzpatrick received his Bachelor of Arts in Psychology from George Washington University, and his M.A. (Literature) and M.F.A. (Creative Writing, Poetry) from George Mason University.

At Mason, he has taught a range of writing classes, including ENGH 101 and ENGH 302.

Brian is the co-founder of the Archive of Workplace Writing Experiences (www.workplace-writing.org) and co-recipient of the Conference on College Composition and Communication's (CCCC) Emergent Researcher Award in 2018.

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What I've Tried

- **Professional:** If you have the time and energy, there are a lot of ways that you can both grow your portfolio/professional development and be a part of the university community. I learned a lot of things about research and publishing, about curriculum development, about labor conditions, etc. that I'm really glad to know and has helped me improve my portfolio and my versatility.
- **Pedagogical:** I worked closely with colleagues to collectively build Mason's first entirely online First Year Composition program. We've been piloting/teaching 101-DL now for 2 years and each semester it is a new learning experience. This is work that I feel made me a stronger teacher and work that I felt made my portfolio a better representative document to my teaching. If we aren't good advocates for ourselves and for one another, a lot of our accomplishments can be overlooked. On paper, in my portfolio, this all might just look like I switched from teaching a class face to face to teaching online, but we need to find room in the portfolio to make our labor narratives clear.

What I'm Exploring

- **Research and pedagogy:** My current research project is the Archive of Workplace Writing Experiences – an archive focused on writing transfer from classroom to workplace. I've been spending a lot of time using my research to help develop course work and lesson plans that can emphasize more authentic writing forms to better prepare students for the kinds of writing modes they might experience in the workplace. I've also been exploring the different roles that reflective and metacognitive writing can play in transferability.
- **Professional:** As part of the Term Faculty Task Force, I am a big proponent of developing clear and consistent pathways for growth and promotion for contingent faculty. It's really important that non-tenure faculty can view their work as a career – this means clear career paths and room for growth for our teachers.

Tips for Building Your Portfolio

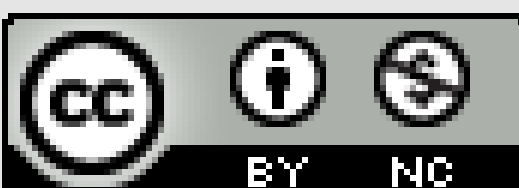
- **Advocate for yourself and your strengths!** There are a lot of ways of being a great teacher; your portfolio should shine light on your way.
- **Find space in the portfolio documents or your framing documents to emphasize all the work you do that contributes to your teaching, service, and/or research!** Even if they are in informal capacities and not in your contract. Your time is valuable and the things you do to fill it are valuable too.
- **Find a new, small way to be active in your community.** Observe a colleague. Sit in on a colleague's class and learn something new about their style or texts or classroom presence. Make connections and keep growing.

TRY IT!

How might you apply these ideas, tips & best practices?

What additional information or resources might you need in order to try it?

For info and guidance, please contact the Stearns Center for Teaching & Learning (4th Floor, Innovation Hall)



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