

Portfolio Guidelines
Adjunct Faculty Teaching Excellence Award
George Mason University
(Updated Fall 2024)

An effective teaching portfolio captures the scope and complexities of your teaching, documenting the various approaches, successes, ongoing refinement, and excellence of your educational work. It is a carefully crafted document that presents your teaching through a particular lens, which you define. This is an opportunity to share what is unique about your teaching in relation to your discipline and the learning of your students—your goal is to capture what makes your work worthy of recognition. Most important is evidence of the impact you have on your students’ learning and achievement. The four criteria that will be used to evaluate your teaching portfolio are described later in these guidelines.

Your portfolio must include the following sections, submitted via PDF (see notes below).

The ATEA committee **takes page limits seriously**. These limitations are designed to help nominees focus on key issues and to help committee members compare multiple candidates’ statements—and so the committee will consider disqualifying a faculty member whose portfolio or section exceeds the designated length.

Please present written materials in standard formats, typically 11-12 point font with 1” margins; not all sections need to use the exact same format. Single-spaced text is acceptable. Appropriate use of pictures, graphics, and charts can help make the material easier to understand.

You may include a very limited number of external items that don’t “fit” into a text-based portfolio (e.g., link to an instructional video or student-created website assignment), but we recommend that you provide a brief summary and/or screen-shots in the body of the portfolio in case committee members cannot access the material. Please also aim to stay within the spirit of the page limits, providing less written text in sections where you are expecting reviewers to consider online items.

Portfolio Sections

- 1. Principles Statement on Teaching and Mentoring (*maximum 3 pages*):** This document should identify the principles and practices that shape your teaching and include a reflection on your professional growth and development as a teacher.
- 2. Teaching Vita (*maximum 3 pages*):** This document should include your contact information and employment history with a list of courses taught at Mason; you may also list any students you mentored, any curriculum projects you participated in, and/or any scholarly presentations or publications you created that are directly related to course design or pedagogy.
- 3. Course as Case Study (*maximum 30 pages*):** Pick one George Mason course that you can use to best illustrate how you meet all four teaching excellence criteria. In addition to the syllabus (*required, but does not count as part of your page limit*), documents that you might provide include prior iterations of portions of the syllabus; a discussion of your approaches to course development and evolution; illustrative course materials such as major assignment descriptions, exercises, activities, student resources or handouts, exam questions, or homework assignments; and/or samples of feedback to students.

It is vital that you provide commentary that contextualizes your materials, explains how they serve as evidence for the evaluation criteria, and discusses how they illustrate key principles and practices of your teaching. The committee advises that you look for ways to ***interweave evidence with explanations*** rather than relying on a single narrative section that refers readers to multiple attachments. Not every

document needs a separate explanation; some explanations might take the form of short headnotes, margin comments, annotations, or text boxes.

4. External Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness:

1. *Summary table* of student ratings (all questions for reports from Blue, Fall 2020 & after; last two questions for reports prior to Fall 2020) from all available university SETs (student evaluations of teaching) for your most recent 6 semesters at George Mason. Your summary should indicate class sizes. (*maximum 6 pages*)

- The committee understands that adaptations made to cope with the pandemic and the new evaluation system will affect faculty's ability to provide multiple semesters' worth of student evaluations of teaching, and/or to provide course ratings that have a strong response rate.
- Evaluation reports that have met the response threshold since Fall 2020 can be downloaded from GMU's [OIEP site](#). If you are off-campus, you will need to use the campus VPN to log in--or contact your department for assistance. Your department should also provide support in accessing reports from courses taught prior to 2020. The committee appreciates being able to see a multi-year perspective on student responses as one part of the portfolio evidence. However, we recognize that there may be gaps in the information available to you.
- If you have any other information that will help us contextualize your SETs, please provide brief explanations (your five-year-old data may come from a course that had not yet been revised, e.g.). Please come as close as possible to providing the requested data, and add any explanatory notes needed to account for missing or low-response student ratings.

2. *Two support letters*: At least one letter must be from a colleague or administrator (department chair, program director, teaching unit coordinator, dean, etc.) if possible, this letter should be informed by observations of your teaching and/or course materials. The other letter may be from another George Mason colleague or administrator or from a current/former George Mason student or mentee. (*maximum 4 pages*)

5. **Closing Statement** (*maximum 2 pages*): Reflection and commentary on the overall portfolio.

Note about PDF Portfolios: We strongly prefer submissions as PDF portfolios—in total, or with one or two supplemental artifacts that cannot be PDF'd. Because “flipping back and forth” in a PDF document can be challenging, the committee's advice about **integrating explanations and evidence** in each section and subsection is even more relevant. We recommend that you create a formal Table of Contents that is clickable in PDF; you are welcome to take advantage of any Bookmarking option supported by your software. For more information on creating your document, **please [see additional instructions](#)**.

If you already have the skills and you prefer to create a web-based online portfolio—following roughly the same page-limit guidelines (~300 words = one single-spaced page)—we are happy to review materials in that structure. Please create a PDF that includes your identifying information (Name, Department, GMU email, Course number and title for your case study) and the direct link for your online site.

Remember that the purposes of the portfolio are to record your efforts and achievements as an educator, to evidence your reflective practice and consequent improvement of both your teaching and student learning, and to document your teaching for external reviewers. Your portfolio should paint a compelling picture of you as a teacher while demonstrating evidence of the evaluation criteria for the portfolio.

Your portfolio should speak to the following questions, in relation to the four criteria described in the following pages:

- How have you learned to become an effective educator? What has contributed to your growth, development, and identity as an educator?

- How do you engage students within and outside the classroom to facilitate their learning?
- How do you know what your students are learning and achieving, in and/or beyond your courses?

If you have any questions about the preparation of your portfolio, please contact the Stearns Center for Teaching and Learning at stearns@gmu.edu.

Criteria for Evaluation Teaching Excellence Award Portfolios

Below are the descriptions for the **four** criteria that will be used to evaluate your teaching portfolio and that should be demonstrated throughout your portfolio, particularly in your course as case study. The selection committee will be paying special attention to the quality of your evidence, so be deliberate and selective in your choices. You should **use your commentary throughout the portfolio** to identify why you made these choices and how they demonstrate for your readers your achievements related to the criteria below. For ideas about the diverse ways to provide this evidence, please see the online resource at stearnscenter.gmu.edu under “Documenting Your Teaching.”

The selection committee will also be looking for clarity in the communication and documentation of your claims, so please keep in mind the following as you frame your case for teaching excellence.

- **Consider your audience.** The selection committee consists of faculty members from diverse backgrounds and disciplines who share your enthusiasm for teaching but may not share your expertise. Committee members often appreciate a little guidance about how a teaching strategy is not just appropriate for but outstanding in your field.
- **Be authentic.** Just as in the classroom, being yourself in your portfolio is critical. Excellent teachers vary in how they design and implement learning opportunities for their students, and excellent portfolios can likewise vary in tone (formal/personal), emphasis, structures, and types of evidence.
- **Balance principles with practices.** Your framework of *why* you choose a teaching approach and your specific examples of *how* you implement a teaching approach are equally valuable.
- **Stay focused on key ideas.** While there is no preferred structure or writing style, readers who are not familiar with your teaching will benefit from your direct analysis and articulation of central points about your teaching. It is important to portray a clear sense of purpose, engagement and passion while consistently communicating your key ideas. The best portfolios are not just a collection of documents, but a thoughtful and cohesive guide to the factors that distinguish you as an excellent educator.

Note: This criteria list is meant to be suggestive, not exhaustive; nominees are not expected to address every bullet point.

Identity, Growth, and Reflective Practice as an Educator
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Offers evidence of growth, risk-taking, and/or development as educator, over time and/or in relation to a single course • Shows self-awareness of his/her educational values, goals, strengths and weaknesses • Seeks out and builds on new knowledge to support his/her teaching • Seeks out and builds on feedback on his/her teaching, from colleagues and/or students • Articulates a distinct, integrated educational identity, pathway, or plan
Support for Student Learning via Assignments, Activities, and Feedback
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Designs course materials to connect students with crucial aspects of a subject, field, and/or profession

- Links student learning to big-picture, real-world, and/or individually relevant situations
- Facilitates students' active learning, participation, excitement, and exploration, in and beyond the classroom, via a range of strategies and modalities
- Works to create inclusive, engaging, ethical, respectful, and flexible spaces for student learning, to reach a range of students
- Uses scaffolding, collaborative learning, guided inquiry, and/or project-based learning to move students into more complex understandings or achievements
- Provides a variety of systematic, ongoing feedback to students to support their confidence and growth as learners and their increasing competencies in the subject area

Identification and Measurement of Student Learning

- Demonstrates a broad view of student learning, including knowledge mastery, procedural competencies, creative capabilities, emotional engagement, and/or reflective understanding
- Defines a range of goals for learners within courses, including subject-matter goals, personal goals, and/or professional goals
- Is transparent in sharing goals, criteria, and assessment processes with students
- Employs a range of strategies to assess student learning, in-process and/or for final products
- Chooses and adapts assessment strategies to match specific activities, assignments, courses, goals, and/or student groups

Impact of Teaching In and Beyond the Classroom

- Elicits positive responses from students and/or from faculty peers
- Mentors graduate or undergraduate students, and/or mentors other faculty members
- Engages in curriculum design or revision, or participates in educational program leadership
- Designs, integrates, and/or supports extracurricular or off-campus learning experiences
- Shares educational knowledge and experiences with other instructors
- Engages in scholarship of teaching and learning
- Includes two support letters, and they make a strong case for teaching effectiveness