

PORTFOLIO GUIDELINES
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, to capture what makes your work worthy of recognition. Most important is **evidence** of the ways you support your students' learning and document their achievement.

Remember that the purposes of the portfolio are to record your efforts and achievements as an educator, to chronicle your reflective practice and consequent improvement of both your teaching and student learning, and to document your teaching for external reviewers. **Whatever material you include as evidence of teaching excellence should be accompanied by an explanation or reflection**; be sure that the reason(s) that you have included particular materials is/are clear to your readers. In the case of this teaching award, please remember that your readers share your interest in quality teaching but do not usually share your understanding of your field or courses: both of these qualities make them eager for specific details about both the *what* and the *why* of your teaching!

Portfolio Criteria

Your portfolio should paint a compelling picture of you as a teacher, using whatever organizational or structural framework makes sense to you. You might elaborate on themes that emerged in your teaching statement, engage in a case study approach to a particular class or learning situation, build on a narrative or metaphor, or choose another approach. It's important keep in mind and directly address the evaluation categories for the portfolio:

- **Criterion 1:** Evidence of growth and reflective practice as an educator
- **Criterion 2:** Evidence of support for student learning and engagement, via assignments, activities, and/or feedback
- **Criterion 3:** Evidence of identification and measurement of student learning
- **Criterion 4:** Evidence of teaching effectiveness and impact

See more information on these criteria below.

Portfolio Structure Guidelines

Before we start, two important notes:

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

The TEA committee recommends **explaining as you go to indicate how your documents show your achievements relevant to the four criteria** as the number one piece of advice they can provide you. You'll see mention of this rather frequently during the instructions below. Often this is a particularly effective use of a meeting with a portfolio consultant: they can provide informed feedback on one or two examples to help you decide if your explanations are generally making your goals and achievements clear.

Please format written materials using reasonable fonts and margins (generally 11- or 12-point font and 1-inch margins; not all selections need to use the same precise format). Single-spaced text is acceptable. Appropriate use of pictures, graphics, and charts can help make the material easier to understand. Most portfolios come to us as PDFs compiled out of multiple documents and images, with perhaps a few links to materials that don't fit well into PDF. (See more below.)

Your portfolio must include the sections listed below.

1. **Introduction / Cover Letter** (*maximum 1 page*)
2. **Table of Contents**
3. **Teaching Statement** (*maximum 5 pages, same as—or revised from—the October version*)
4. **Teaching Vita** (*maximum 5 pages, same as—or revised from—the October version*)
5. **Main Body of Portfolio: Evidence and Reflections** (*maximum 100 pages; see “Notes” below*)

The main body of your portfolio should speak to *all four* evaluation criteria:

1. How have you learned to become an effective educator? What has contributed to and represents your growth, development, and identity as an educator? (Criterion #1)
2. How do you engage students within and outside the classroom to facilitate their learning? (Criterion #2)
3. How do you measure and know what your students are learning and achieving? (Criterion #3)
4. How do you map the impact of your teaching and your teaching-knowledge beyond the course-based learning of individual students? (Criterion #4).

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.

See more information below about organizing this section.

6. **External Evidence of Teaching Effectiveness** (*maximum 13 pages*)
 1. **Required: 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 Mason. Your summary should indicate class sizes. (*maximum 6 pages*)
 1. 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.
 2. 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.
 3. 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. **Optional: Testimonials**, which may include solicited and/or unsolicited letters of support from students (graduate and undergraduate), colleagues, department chairs/deans, or other collaborators internal or external to the institution; **other student responses**, which may include student emails, informal mid-

semester surveys of student experience, comments from course evaluations, or thank you letters; other evaluations, which may include reports of peers and administrators about your teaching, coaching/mentoring, advising, or teaching-related administration (*maximum 8 pages*).

7. **Required: Closing statement**, with reflection and commentary on evidence in this portfolio (*maximum 2 pages*).

Overall, you are asked to use discretion and selectivity: *more* is not by itself *better*.

NOTE for PDF Portfolios: Because “flipping back and forth” in a PDF document can be challenging, the committee’s advice about *integrating explanations and evidence* is even more relevant.

Please use Styles & Headings to create your document and a linked Table of Contents. This is not difficult! (See [linked guidelines](#).)

If you use a PC, your links should remain clickable when you export to PDF. Creating a clickable PDF may require additional settings on a Mac (see linked guidelines).

Other portfolio formats: If you already have the skills and wish to submit a web-based online portfolio, the committee welcomes you to do so. Please do stay within the spirit of the page limits and guidelines (~300 words = one single-spaced “page”).

All portfolio documents are stored in a secure online folder with limited access. If you have any questions about the preparation of your portfolio, please contact the Stearns Center at stearns@gmu.edu.

Organizing Your Portfolio

You don’t need to organize the main body of your portfolio to go Criterion by Criterion, though you may choose to do that; we understand that criteria sometimes overlap in ways that make easy separation impossible.

Sometimes faculty find it easier to organize by creating a few course-based case studies, by identifying themes of growth or development articulated in their teaching statement, or by identifying specific categories or stages in their work as teachers.

However, you will always help readers by *indicating how different documents connect to criteria* and how each supports your argument that you meet one or more criteria.

To that end, the committee notes that portfolios which **interweave evidence with explanations** are generally more effective than portfolios that rely on a single narrative section that refers readers to multiple attachments or clusters of evidence. You don’t need to write a long essay for each section; your explanations might take the form of one or more of the following:

1. Briefly annotated tables-of-contents for sections that help reviewers see why Document X was included and how it showcases evidence of teaching differently from or complementary to Document Y
2. Short paragraph headers or bullet-lists that highlight key features of the syllabi or other documents that follow
3. Show-and-tell sections that intersperse brief explanations or narratives with short syllabus excerpts, screen shots, student commentary, or assignment prompts
4. Annotated assignments or student work, where headers, margin comments, or textboxes identify places where reviewers can see teaching or learning happening (student work should be anonymized where possible, but since portfolios are internal, confidential documents, if some names or identifying material is retained, that does not violate local or federal regulations)

We wish that your excellence were self-evident from the course materials you have already prepared, since that would be easier for everyone, but across time and space and disciplines, that isn't possible. The committee thanks you for your time helping us see and understand your work!

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. The selection committee will be paying special attention to the quality of your evidence, so be deliberate and selective in your choices. For each section of evidence—which may or may not be organized by major criteria—you should provide a brief commentary about why you made these choices and what they illustrate for your readers. For ideas about the diverse ways to provide this evidence, please see the online resource at stearnscenter.gmu.edu under “Teaching at Mason à 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. Also, none of us can read your mind—and your syllabi rarely “speak for themselves.”
- Be authentic. Just as in the classroom, being yourself in your portfolio is critical. There is no one right way to create a strong portfolio!
- Write with as much clarity as possible. It is important to portray a clear sense of purpose, engagement and passion while consistently communicating your key ideas. Your portfolio should be coherent and present a lucid and cohesive picture of you as an excellent educator.
- Consider “teaching” to be broadly defined: You may be doing crucial work “teaching” that is not captured by what you do in a classroom or in an LMS site. In addition, you should consider “excellence” to be a highly contextual achievement: a teaching approach considered normative in one field or situation may have required significant effort, innovation, persistence, or resources in another. Since committee members don't stand in your shoes or teach in your discipline, you may need to fill us in on some crucial details.
- Integrate principles with practices. Your framework of *why* you choose a teaching approach and your examples of *how* you implement a teaching approach are equally valuable. Readers should be able to identify which principles are relevant to which practices, and vice versa.

Note: This 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, 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