

Notre Dame de Namur University
ED 191 Senior Seminar PORTFOLIO ASSIGNMENT*

Real learning gets at the heart of what it means to be human. -- Peter Senge

Background: One commonly accepted definition of a portfolio is the one put forth by the Northwest Evaluation Association:

A portfolio is a purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievement in one or more areas. The collection must include student participation in selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection.

Two important facets of that definition are the emphases on student involvement: **student participation** in the process and **student self-reflection**. It is partly this student involvement that gives portfolios their potential, because each student's responsibility and ownership of his/ her own learning is acknowledged and made a central part of the process and the outcome. A portfolio is an appropriate tool for looking at long-term progress and growth, such as the growth you have made in your four years of college. Because each person is unique, each portfolio will reflect the uniqueness of its creator.

Goals and Purposes: A portfolio is a purposeful collection; that means the purposes for which it is being collected need to be clearly articulated. The purposes for our portfolio are:

- To create a vehicle to see long-term progress and growth
- To create an opportunity to learn more about one's own learning
- To create an opportunity to value one's own work
- To create an opportunity to foster professional development
- To offer evidence of ability to think clearly and critically
- To offer evidence of ability to integrate ideas from different realms
- To offer evidence of ability to reflect on and evaluate oneself

In addition, those of you who intend to be a classroom teacher may want to consider this an early version of an ever-growing professional portfolio. Lee Shulman and others have begun to elaborate on the kinds of categories that should be represented in a professional portfolio:

- Pedagogical Subject Knowledge
- Intellectual Abilities and Problem Solving Skills
- Pedagogical Skills
- Curriculum Knowledge, Insight, and Skill
- Knowledge about Learners and Learning
- Attitudes and Dispositions

While it is too early in your career to adequately document some of these, it gives you an early glimpse into your long-term goal. Both these categories and the purposes listed above might be considered as you do your reflections.

Audience: You are your own primary audience and those with whom you choose to share your portfolio. A second audience is our class, who are involved in the process primarily to help and support you as you make your choices and reflect on what they say about you. A third audience is me and those people both inside the University and from outside agencies who might look at your portfolio as evidence to evaluate the quality of both your learning and our program. A final audience is the potential employers with whom you might eventually share some of the pieces of your professional portfolio as you interview.

Contents: This portfolio, at this point in time, should contain at least six entries, five of which are more or less prescribed (explanation below) and one of which is your choice. (You may have more entries if you choose, but the emphasis is not on quantity. The point is to offer evidence of your learning and to meet the purposes above.) Each of the subject area and choice entries should be accompanied by what is sometimes called a caption, an explanation for why it has been included (probably 1/4 to 1/2 page in length). Some questions to consider as you write each caption are:

- *Why did I choose this piece for my portfolio? What does it show about my learning?
- *What new knowledge did I gain? Why is that important to me?
- *What did I learn about myself in doing this piece?
- *What process did I go through as I worked on this piece? Was that important?
- *Who or what influenced me as I created this piece?
- *What risks did I take? How did I stretch?
- *Does this piece leave me with questions?
- *If I were to redo this piece, what might I do differently?

(This list of questions is illustrative only, not required and not exhaustive. You should try to make your caption hang together as a piece in itself and not a laundry list of responses to questions.)

Pieces you might choose to include are papers from other classes, projects, creative works, a journal, a work that has gone through several drafts, etc. (For those of you who plan to be teachers, your portfolio will probably eventually include lesson plans, video tapes, student work samples, letters to parents, evaluations, pictures, etc. as well. You may not be in the place to include these yet.)

The first four prescribed entries should reflect your understanding of the variety of subject areas that are taught in the elementary school. Thus for each area you should choose a piece which represents your growing knowledge within that area. Your caption might address how you rate your knowledge within that area, what plans you have for further learning, how your interest and skill might affect your future students, and other related thoughts. The four subject areas for captions (one for each) include:

- (1) literature and/or language studies
- (2) mathematics and/or natural sciences
- (3) history and/or social sciences
- (4) human development, including artistic and physical development

The final prescribed entry is **(5) a personal statement of your values and aspirations**. If you plan to be a teacher, this should be an answer to the oft-requested application questions: Why do you want to be a teacher? and What do you bring to teaching? It might include a statement of what is important to you and how you continue to pursue that, as well as an evaluation of your strengths and an acknowledgement of limitations and how you are learning to overcome and/ or compensate for these, and might include important personal experiences. It is intended to build on a careful analysis of your own experiences and stories. (Most future employers will not read more than one page; it could be single spaced.)

The choice entry should be reflective of your personal talents/gifts/interests/hobbies. It should provide insight into your uniqueness.

Criteria and Standards: These will necessarily grow from the goals and purposes. We will look at a draft of these together before finalizing them. Your original drafts will be read and critiqued. Suggestions for improvements will be offered. The portfolio should contain polished captions.

Progress Deadlines:

Subject area #1 & #2: entry selection & caption rough drafts due as listed in Syllabus.

Personal Statement: rough draft due as noted in Syllabus.

Subject area #3 & #4—entry selection & caption rough drafts due as identified in Syllabus.

Personal Statement final draft due as specified in Syllabus.

Portfolio (personal statement, choice entry, and caption revision), plus 10 minute presentation, due final class period.

*** The Portfolio Assignment is considered to be a “work in progress.”**

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Personal Statements

Some ideas for helping to develop your personal statement of values and aspirations:

You might try first a free write about your values and aspirations.

Look back at:

- The personal stories and/or dilemmas we have been sharing each week
- The portfolio entries and captions you have done thus far
- The work you did for ED 136
- Think about other incidents that come to mind (jot them down?)
- Valuable work / service experience you have had (jot down?)

Then try to think about what these together say to you and about you:

- Look for common patterns and themes
- Classify events into categories
- Compare / contrast different experiences in your life
- Summarize events
- Intuit relationships among different experiences or values
- Juxtapose seemingly unrelated ideas or experiences
- Ask questions and begin to look for answers
- Use relevant background knowledge

One important point of this is to see how different aspects of your life can be synthesized and integrated and how these past events speak to your values, aspirations, etc. for the future (i.e., professionally and personally).