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CHAPTER SEVEN

The Honors Professional Development Portfolio: Claiming the Value of Honors for Improvement, Tenure, and Promotion

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All of us working in honors face a similar challenge when we are asked to account for the value of our efforts as teachers or leaders in our honors programs or colleges. Much of what we do is invisible to all but the most discerning and appreciative eyes: hours spent designing new courses and pedagogical approaches; advising students on curricular, career, and personal matters; coordinating faculty and student development opportunities; forging beneficial alliances across campus to grow and strengthen our institutional areas; collaborating with students on research projects; drafting grants and other proposals; maintaining alumnae relations; leading students to academic conferences; managing multiple databases;

serving on numerous committees and task forces; handling budget and financial responsibilities; playing a key role in recruitment and retention efforts; keeping up individual scholarly agendas; and—don't forget—teaching our own classes. How do we showcase the often unseen and unrewarded dimensions of our professional investment in honors when our roles are so complex that they virtually require a bit of madness, the ingenuity of an entrepreneur, the integrity of a seasoned professional, the enthusiasm of an engaged teacher, and the patience of Job?

Most of us work at institutions where the prevailing—sometimes only—method of evaluating faculty is a heavy reliance on student ratings. SETs (Student Evaluations of Teaching), as they are often called, are a valuable and appropriate component in any sound, comprehensive system of faculty evaluation, and the mounds of long-term research on student ratings, despite ubiquitous faculty complaints and suspicion, affirm the reliability and validity of such feedback. (See Abrami, d'Apollonia, and Cohen; Arreola; Berk; Braskamp and Ory; Cashin; Centra; Cohen; Feldman; Marsh and Roche; McKeachie; Seldin and Associates, *Changing Practices and Evaluating Faculty Performance*; Theall, Abrami, and Mets; and Theall and Franklin.) Frequently, when student ratings come under fire, the problems and failures are due not to the ratings themselves but to the ways in which they are designed and administratively used within flawed evaluation systems. Furthermore, relying solely on student ratings of instruction for information about the multi-dimensional complexity of honors faculty performance produces a narrow, incomplete, and simplistic picture of our work. Once we add to the picture the diverse initiatives, responsibilities, and accomplishments of the honors enterprise, we can see right away that we need a better tool for improving and documenting—if not justifying—our honors positions.

The honors professional development portfolio is a compelling process and document that effectively help us to engage in meaningful critical reflection about our roles, responsibilities, achievements, and goals. At the same time, it produces a strategically organized and representative collection of selective information that is tied to

a specific purpose and made coherent by a concise reflective statement of teaching and/or administrative philosophy. One essential factor for achieving the goal of producing an honest and comprehensive portfolio is finding a knowledgeable portfolio mentor who will keep the honors teacher, director, or dean accountable and focused on producing a portfolio that is consistent with the writer's purpose and core philosophy. The combination of reflection, mentoring, and the necessary evidence that illustrates and supports values and claims made in the reflective narrative portion of the portfolio results in a much fuller, richer, and more practical profile of our honors commitments for assessment purposes. Because a portfolio, by definition, consists of diverse artifacts or outcomes from multiple sources of information, it offers honors educators and leaders an effective means of documenting the many activities that define our work for personnel decisions. Of course, the chief benefit of portfolio development is the improvement that derives from its reflective and collaborative components.

The portfolio method of tying reflection to rigorous evidence and collaboration enables honors instructors and leaders to articulate and document a dynamic professional path that includes teaching, scholarship, service, administration, and more. No more invisible honors work! Seldin's earlier model of the teaching portfolio, which has evolved into his recent advocacy of the more inclusive "academic portfolio," offers a strong, proven approach for the honors professional development portfolio. Seldin's approach inspires us to think critically and strategically about the diverse components of our professional development and to collect judicious, selective documentation of our practice. With the help of a mentor, we can clarify in the portfolio how honors figures into our contributions to the professoriate and to our institutions. It provides a framework for our philosophy of teaching, scholarship, service, and academic leadership as a coherent vision tied to detailed, representative evidence for ongoing assessment and for evaluation and advancement purposes. In other words, the honors professional development portfolio is a vehicle for personal and intentional enhancement, meaningful self-awareness, performance evaluation, integration of

compound responsibilities, formulation of challenging goals, and continuous improvement.

WHAT IS AN HONORS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO?

The honors professional development portfolio is an evidence-based written document in which a faculty member reflects on, concisely organizes, and documents selective details of teaching, scholarship, service, leadership, and other professional responsibilities and achievements. Selectivity is important because the portfolio should not be construed as a huge repository of indiscriminate documentation but rather a shrewd, critical, purposeful analysis of roles, responsibilities, performance, evidence, and goals. It must be the kind of reflection and keen scrutiny of achievement and future directions that leads to genuine professional development, authentic assessment, and sound evaluation.

Most effective professional portfolios written as a wide profile of teaching, scholarship, service, and administrative efforts are about eight to ten pages of narrative reflection, complemented by a chosen bank of evidence arranged in supportive appendices. The explosive use of digital technology today makes the construction of portfolios even more interesting because electronic media allow us to embed links that lead readers and evaluators to increasingly more detailed sources of information. For instance, in a paper portfolio, the writer normally would add a reference to evidence in an appendix in a parenthetical note following a description of a teaching method, a mention of a syllabus or assignment, an analysis of student ratings, the claim of an award or some administrative success, or a summary of honors presentations or publications. Here is an example from my own portfolio:

I have incorporated student-mediated midterm assessments, online threaded discussions, reflective learning portfolios, and other new methodologies into recent honors courses (see sample syllabi and assignments in **Appendix C**). Meanwhile, I have served as a first or second mentor to a number of honors senior projects, and I

have collaborated frequently with students in making presentations at regional and national honors and disciplinary conferences (see **Appendices F and J** for list in *Vitae* and details of faculty/student presentations).

In an electronic portfolio on disk or on the web, a link would open layers of supportive documents, audio files, videos, or other evidence. Each link could allow readers to move from one type of evidence to another to create a complex picture of one's practice, capturing information that might otherwise be lost in a less sophisticated and comprehensive review system. Overkill is, of course, a danger in any portfolio, especially an electronic version, reminding us of the imperative of offering a fair, representative selection of items, a task made easier by the discriminating help of a collaborative mentor.

Faculty are commonly held accountable as professionals for demonstrating achievement and growth in teaching, scholarship, and service—the fairly universal trio of domains in faculty evaluation systems—but each faculty member's profile is unique because of differences in purpose, disciplines, philosophies, styles, job assignments, institutional cultures, and other personal factors. Consequently, every portfolio has an individualized signature, and the information revealed, analyzed, and documented in the narrative and the appendix bears a unique stamp that personalizes the portfolio process and resulting product. For honors professionals, the signature quality of a portfolio is a special boon, allowing us to highlight and document the special dimensions of our honors careers.

Nevertheless, given the common standards for faculty evaluation in higher education, nearly all faculty professional development portfolios address, among other possible choices, the following seminal areas of professional activity, although arrangements and priorities may vary from time to time depending on purpose and external requirements:

- Statement of professional responsibilities (honors teaching load, advising, internship supervisions, thesis mentoring,

institutional leadership, leadership in honors and other professional organizations, coordination of college or community service projects, fundraising, data management, assessment).

- Philosophy of teaching, scholarship, and service (with a focus on how the three endeavors are integrated and interdependent, how each informs the others, and what difference involvement in honors makes to each).
- Strategies and methods in professional accomplishments (including reflections on unique approaches to honors teaching, research/publication/creative performance, and institutional/professional/community service).
- Development of materials for professional and program effectiveness (course syllabi, classroom handouts, online lecture notes and study guides, assignments, scholarly web resources, workshop exercises, databases, lab software, conference presentation slides, civic group/local school/college trustees presentation packets, assessment/annual reports).
- Products or outcomes of student learning, scholarship, and service functions.
- Evaluations of performance (student course ratings, peer assessments of teaching, annual honors program chair or college dean evaluations, sample reviews of research/publications/grants, letters of appreciation from institutional/professional/community sources).
- Awards, recognitions, prestigious appointments in teaching, scholarship, and service; invitations to present/publish in honors and in disciplinary field; keynote addresses and workshops; consulting or external program reviews.
- Improvement efforts, professional development, personal growth (especially valuable when framed within the context of the relationship between honors and institutional mission and priorities).

- Short-term and long-term professional goals, with projected dates.

The list of categories is suggestive rather than prescriptive, and each faculty member will adapt the areas to fit individual professional engagements and institutional requirements. My most recent draft of a professional portfolio addresses the categories above in my own fashion and strives to integrate the sometimes competing dimensions of my work as an honors director, a faculty development director, and an English professor. In the portfolio, I pull together my teaching, scholarship, service, and leadership in a narrative of eight single-spaced pages organized by the following table of contents and identified appendices:

Honors Professional Development Portfolio
Spring 2017

John Zubizarreta
Professor of English
Director of Honors and Faculty Development
Columbia College

Table of Contents

1. Portfolio Preface and Rationale
2. Roles and Responsibilities
3. Philosophy of Professional Engagement: Teaching, Scholarship, Service
4. Honors, Faculty Development, and English as Professional Nexus
5. Materials for Teaching and Administrative Leadership
6. Evaluation and Improvement of Professional Performance
7. Significant Honors and Professional Initiatives and Achievements

8. Professional Development Goals

9. Appendices

- A. Reflective Narrative on Teaching/Advising in Honors
- B. Faculty/Administrative Service on Campus and in Professional Venues
- C. Honors Course Materials: Syllabi, Handouts, Slides, Assignments, Exams, Projects
- D. Administrative Leadership Materials: Annual Reports, Assessment, Grants, Committee Initiatives and Minutes, Newsletters, Announcements
- E. Faculty/Administrative/Professional Awards in Teaching, Scholarship, Service
- F. *Curriculum Vitae*
- G. Presentations, Publications, Keynotes on Honors Education, Improving College Teaching and Learning, and Academic Leadership
- H. Consulting Materials and Workshops for Honors and Faculty Development
- I. Commendations and Acknowledgements from Professional Sources
- J. Faculty/Student Collaborative Research in Honors and Discipline
- K. Professional Improvement Efforts in Honors, Faculty Development, and Discipline
- L. Evaluations and Feedback: Student Ratings, Peer Reviews, Annual Evaluations, Professional Publications Reviews, Conference Presentation/Workshop/Consulting Feedback

M. Sharing Professional Insights and
Recommendations: Letters Written for
Colleagues and Honors Students

Regardless of purpose and items that individualize each portfolio, the narrative body of the portfolio offers a faculty member an opportunity to reflect on key questions that nourish vigorous, successful professional development:

- What are your clear responsibilities as a professional in an increasingly complex and demanding professoriate?
- How do you go about your complicated work to meet the challenges of your multiple roles in honors and in your discipline? What are your professional work strategies and priorities?
- What tools, materials, or devices have you developed and used to help accomplish your work effectively?
- What evidence do you have of professional expertise, efficacy, and vitality in honors and in your overall career path?
- How are your honors and other professional endeavors reviewed by others?
- What are you doing for continuous professional improvement and growth?

One of the chief benefits of portfolio development is that the process empowers the honors teacher, director, or dean to make visible how and why honors is a significant dimension of one's professional development and institutional contributions. Moreover, the reflective process at the heart of professional portfolio development mirrors the same process used in institutional strategic planning and assessment: we identify the mission or philosophy of the institution, we study how well programs implement the mission and goals, we examine evidence of efforts and achievements in programs, we see where improvements have been made or are needed, and we posit goals for the future. In a sense, then, honors portfolio development is strategic planning on the individual,

professional level. It is a comprehensive articulation of mission or philosophy, a current assessment of competencies, a statement of objectives, a map of how to achieve improved performance, and a bank of supportive documentation. Developed as a digital production in electronic media, individual professional e-portfolios can establish instantaneous, seamless connections with departmental and institutional assessment and improvement projects. This kind of planning results in clearer, more specific acknowledgement of professional purpose; better communication among faculty and administrators; and a more supportive, constructive, rewarding process of professional evaluation of our honors endeavors.

Most importantly, however, the honors professional development portfolio—whether on paper, on disk, or online—stimulates faculty to ponder an array of profound, value-laden *why* questions: *why* we teach in honors; *why* we serve as we do in honors administrative positions; *why* we choose certain priorities in teaching, scholarship, and service; *why* we publish in this or that field or in honors; *why* our evaluations are affirming or disheartening; *why* an administrative or other role in honors is a positive challenge or a frustrating drain; *why* a profession in honors education is a positive vocation or a routine job. The emphasis on reflection—on constructing not only a coherent, penetrating, meaningful inquiry into *what we do* and *how we do it* but also an essential philosophy of *who we are* as honors professionals—is a fundamental, critical process culminating in writing that has its own intrinsic worth in enriching our professional identity and clarifying new and satisfying directions.

THE IMPORTANCE OF COHERENCE, UNITY, CONNECTIONS

The honors professional development portfolio must demonstrate explicit coherence among the various components of its reflective portion by exploring the connections between philosophy—the core of the portfolio—and the different areas highlighted in the narrative's table of contents. In the most recent version of my own portfolio, I reflect on the interplay between my values as a teacher and my work as a scholar, academic citizen, and honors

professional. In the philosophy section of the portfolio, the vital heart of the process, I begin by articulating a philosophy of teaching and how it serves as the hub of my entire professional career. Subsequently, I move on to use contemporary revaluations of scholarship and service to organize my thinking about how I try to integrate my diverse professional roles as honors director, faculty development leader, and English professor. Rather than separate teaching philosophy from scholarship and service as isolated entities, I borrow from Ernest L. Boyer's reconsiderations of priorities of the professoriate for the language I need to offer an integrated vision of my identity and purpose as an honors faculty professional. Here is an excerpt from the portfolio's section on scholarship within my personal philosophy statement:

The professor must demonstrate competency and currency by actively engaging in the public, professional venues of scholarly publications and presentations at professional conferences. The *scholarship of teaching* is also a crucial dimension of change in higher education, and it should complement and enrich the traditional arena of disciplinary research and publication or the *scholarship of discovery*. Another appropriate expression of the professional work that validates expertise among communities of scholars is the *scholarship of integration*, an important aspect of honors work that spans across diverse functions of an institution and an honors professional's contributions. Such charges are crucial in fulfilling the responsibilities of tenure and promotion, and my portfolio offers abundant evidence of the central role of honors in my career path. **Appendices A, B, J, and K** contain additional comments on the integration of teaching, scholarship, and leadership in honors and faculty development. **Appendices G, H, and L** have selected samples of scholarship related to fostering a climate of professional collaboration and reflective practice on my own and other college campuses. With three recent books, several periodical publications and chapters, and numerous papers and conference presentations in honors education,

faculty development, and my home discipline of English, I have tried to live out my view that such scholarly work is essential to my role as an academic professional with honors, faculty development, and disciplinary affiliations.

The philosophy component of the portfolio is heavily loaded with values and beliefs, the kinds of priorities that should drive the decisions I make about what, how, and why I teach; what kinds of scholarship, research, and publications I pursue and why; and when, how, and why I engage in professional development activities related to honors and my other commitments. In other words, philosophy prompts us to work from a mindful, deliberate center, helping us to locate our honors work as an indispensable facet of our professional identities: we become reflective practitioners and professionals. Because of the depth of reflection involved and the challenge of trying to connect *who* we believe we *are* with *what* we *do*, discovering and articulating an honors professional philosophy are often the most difficult steps in portfolio development.

In addition to tying philosophy and practice within the narrative, the portfolio must also bridge the personal and powerful reflective nature of the narrative and the concrete documentation in the appendix. The integrated references (or digital links in an e-portfolio) to various appendices in the sample excerpts I have shared provide a good example of how an author can connect claims and descriptions in the narrative to the hard evidence necessarily collected in the appendix. Both forms of coherence—A) unity of philosophy and practice in the reflective narrative and B) consistent, transparent connections between the narrative and documentation—are central to the integrity of the portfolio and to establishing a reliable base of information for both improvement and evaluation purposes. (See, for example, Zubizarreta, “Evaluating Teaching.”)

PORTFOLIOS AND HONORS PROFESSIONALS: WORKS IN PROGRESS

Honors professional development portfolios, just like professionals themselves, are works in progress. We begin our professional

lives in earnest, eager to advance in our fields, ready to accept new intellectual challenges, and wanting to make a difference in our students' learning, our institutional cultures, our disciplinary organizations, our communities. As we navigate tenure, promotions, new responsibilities in honors or other roles, shifting scholarly interests, evolving institutional priorities, and the altered seasons of professional life, the portfolio emerges as a living document, changing with time in richness, scope, documentation, and complexity.

But in actual practice, the portfolio, even as it evolves, as a document, should maintain its succinct format. As new materials are added, old ones are deleted. In fact, one of the ways in which the portfolio comprises selective information is that both the narrative and the appendices are focused on relatively current accounts of one's responsibilities, philosophical values, methodologies, evaluations, goals, and other features of portfolio development. If the portfolio's purpose is specifically to reflect on and document only the honors portion of our overall practice or only one particular honors course or seminar, then the selectivity is even tighter (Zubizarreta, "Using Teaching Portfolio Strategies"). In any case, the end product remains consistently concise over time and multiple revisions. When I mentor colleagues in intensive portfolio development workshops designed to produce nearly finished portfolios, with appendices, in three or four days, I generally urge them to keep their documents confined to one or two-inch binders, never more. Of course, electronic media options open up an array of other possibilities for creating an increasingly sophisticated web of linked information, but one still should be careful about excess and about the lure of digital glitz over selective substance.

Professional portfolios do need periodic updates and revisions. I recommend a fresh reconsideration of the portfolio every year, perhaps at the end of the academic calendar. If one has taken advantage of the ready-made repositories of stored documentation in the portfolio's appendix, then finding new information for revisions becomes an easy task. Throughout the year, as new professional opportunities, assignments, achievements, bits of evidence, and insights emerge, the faculty member can simply store the items

in the appropriate section of the portfolio for later review. In this way, the portfolio remains current and dynamic, reflecting a vigorous, engaged professional career. Such diligence in maintaining the currency of the portfolio allows for timely selection of parts or versions of the portfolio for varying purposes, such as departmental or institutional assessment, supporting information for a grant proposal, tenure and promotion considerations, new position applications, or, when necessary, justification of the value added to one's career because of the engagement as teacher/scholar/leader in honors. A revised, updated portfolio is always ready at hand for multiple purposes, and maintaining its currency is relatively easy and obviously offers practical benefits.

One of the portfolio's often unrecognized benefits is that in maintaining its currency through diligent, active revisions, we engage the power of critical reflection to describe, understand, and, if necessary, defend pedagogical or administrative experiments that result in disappointing outcomes of our work. Without the current and contextualized information included in a portfolio, which is information that typically transcends the limited value of quantitative data in prescribed survey instruments, such attempts at innovation in teaching, scholarly work, or leadership may be viewed simply as failures. The critically reflective dimension of a portfolio can provide an analytical framing, with evidence of regular efforts to improve practice, that allows for multiple perspectives in making high-stakes summative judgments about our complex work as teachers, disciplinary scholars, and honors professionals. Keeping the portfolio current through revisions is an essential facet of the portfolio as an ongoing process, not just a print document or showcase electronic production. Through its dynamic qualities, the portfolio represents an honors professional who is dedicated to continuous improvement.

TIPS FOR MAINTAINING THE PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIO

- Use the appendix as a convenient, self-defined filing system for hard copy or digitized information and documentation.

For example, the portfolio should have an appendix for materials such as teaching handouts, recent publications, or evidence of new professional service responsibilities or awards. As new materials are acquired in the areas of teaching, scholarship, service, honors leadership, or other areas, place them into the appropriate appendix or digital file for future assessment.

- Don't reinvent the wheel. If year-end self-reports are part of one's evaluation system, then combine the narrative revision of the portfolio and its assessment of quantitative information in the appendix with the required report. Don't let your honors affiliation become a burden because of additional, slavishly repeated work. Find ways of making required institutional assessment and evaluation activities integral dimensions of honors portfolio revisions.
- Focus on selected areas for enhancement. Narrow the scope of improvement efforts and the amount of information analyzed in a revision. One year, for instance, concentrate on teaching: identify one particular assignment in one course and the role of periodic, written feedback on the work of three students of varying abilities. Next year, work on scholarship: describe a new research and publication agenda and the challenges and achievements of reaching into new intellectual territory. Over time, the portfolio will become a living record of an engaged, vigorous professional journey without excessive demands of time for revision.
- Keep revisions detailed and specific. Conceiving of revision as a complete reshaping of all the fundamental components of a professional portfolio is intimidating and unnecessary. Rarely do we undergo such dramatic revaluations of philosophy and practice that the entire portfolio must be recast. Remember that the portfolio is a *process of continual analysis and improvement*. Revise deliberately, a step at a time.
- Take advantage of faculty development staff to identify areas for improvement and suggest specific revisions of portions

of the portfolio. Faculty development experts can introduce new modes of analyzing our practice, which may prompt ideas for revisions of the professional portfolio. In addition, many faculty development programs also offer support for research, publication, creative endeavors, grant writing, enhancement of academic leadership skills, issues of balancing career demands, and other factors in professional development. I frequently advocate that honors faculty, directors, and deans establish synergistic relationships with faculty development professionals in teaching and learning centers. The two-way benefits of such collaboration are numerous. Honors, after all, is a form of faculty development, inspiring colleagues to rethink and redesign course design, methodologies, assessment, and scholarly pursuits.

- Entrust a mentor to help guide the development of a portfolio through its various revisions. While collaboration with an experienced colleague outside one's institution is often best in the initial stage of creating a professional portfolio, teaming with a knowledgeable peer either from within or outside the academic department or the honors area can help create a useful perspective on the portfolio, which stimulates worthwhile revision.

PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT PORTFOLIOS AND THE CASE FOR HONORS

The professional development portfolio is not the only means of describing and documenting our engagement, growth, and achievements in honors, but it is the only instrument I know that simultaneously helps us assess and evaluate our performance as honors teachers, scholars, and administrators; nourishes our professional identity and vision; and improves our professional work and influence through the process of reflection combined with rigorous assessment and collaborative mentoring. In developing a portfolio, we are empowered to think about a wide range of important concerns that affect our success in honors:

- The place of honors education in our professional priorities, accomplishments, disappointments, dreams.
- The choices we make daily to achieve our best work and to contribute to our institutions, disciplines, and honors organizations.
- The burdens and triumphs of finding integration and coherence among the diverse responsibilities of teaching, scholarship, service, and honors endeavors.
- The challenge of finding balance in our multi-dimensional professional and personal lives.

Such reflection and coached analysis of the evidence of our professional agency are vital components of professional success and personal growth, especially when we encounter pressures to explain and document our honors involvement and its value to our institutions. Going far beyond numerical rating systems or reductive rubrics, the portfolio's process of written reflection invokes the power of narration and contextualization, the ability of writing to make the often unrecognized dimensions of our honors professional lives visible and understood. In becoming reflective practitioners, we are more intentional in generating evidence of achievement, articulating improvement efforts, assessing the quality of our work, and making a strong case for honors in our professional careers.

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APPENDIX 1

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APPENDIX 2

Selected Online Resources

Innumerable resources on professional portfolios are available on the web. Here are a few useful sites. While they focus on the more specific “teaching portfolio,” the information is adaptable to the honors professional development portfolio.

<<https://cte.cornell.edu/resources/documenting-teaching/portfolio/index.html>>

<<http://ucat.osu.edu/read/teaching-portfolio>>

<<http://www.cs.tufts.edu/~ablumer/portfolio.html>>

<<http://www.washington.edu/teaching/teaching-resources/self-reflection-on-teaching>>

<<http://teaching.usask.ca/teaching-support/teaching-portfolios.php#About>>

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