

# Portfolios for Preservice Teachers at Union College

**D**uring the spring semester of 1996, the education faculty of Union College (UC) in Lincoln, Nebraska, conducted their first full-scale portfolio assessment of elementary and secondary education students. In conference with their professors, the students described their personal and pedagogical growth that school year. Their portfolios contained prayer journals, photographs of art projects, research papers, and wellness diaries. Attached to each piece of documentation was a caption sheet telling why it had been included.

Our UC education faculty began to use portfolios because of two chronic problems:

1. Education majors complained that they could see little connection between their classes, the teacher-ed components, and their goal of becoming teachers. They often asked questions such as these: "Why do I have to take chemistry?" or "How will philosophy help me be a teacher?" Obviously, our students were missing the big picture!

2. Faculty members often had misgivings about the effectiveness of certain assignments and methods. We needed (and wanted) specific feedback about what we were doing.

About this time, we read a statement by Lee Schulman of Stanford University. He said: "Portfolio assess-

*Shirleetra Roundtree (left), an education student at Union College in Lincoln, Nebraska, discusses her portfolio with Susan Zimmermann, the author of this article.*

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***The portfolio documentation includes a table of contents and caption sheets with the rationale for selecting each piece of evidence.***

BY SUSAN ZIMMERMANN

ment makes it possible to document the unfolding of both learning and teaching over time." This statement, among others, encouraged us that we had discovered something useful, so we began to do preliminary research in the summer of 1989.

Everything seemed to indicate that portfolios held real promise. If we encouraged our education majors to take a more active role in documenting, observing, and reviewing their own progress, they would see connections in the program. They would also learn to examine their own performance, assess their strengths and weaknesses, and seek routes for improvement. Portfolios would allow us as faculty members to observe the quality of their documentation.

It would also force us to reflect on our own practices and seek ways to improve them.

Our in-depth study led us to create a portfolio requirement that reflects our conceptual model, "The Teacher as a Developer of Human Potential." Two major strands are woven through each education major's program—a developmental strand, which encourages teacher candidates to develop their physical, mental, social, spiritual, and professional capabilities; and a pedagogical strand, which focuses on skills such as planning, instructing, managing, and assessing. The portfolio documentation includes a table of

# **The education portfolio . . . is an organized series of entries that focus on the wholistic development and professional competencies needed for effective teaching.**

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contents and caption sheets with the rationale for selecting each piece of evidence.

The education portfolio is more than just a collection of “stuff.” It is an organized series of entries that focus on the wholistic development and professional competencies needed for effective teaching. Metacognition is encouraged by students’ thoughtful response to portfolio questions at the

*Kim Wehling and Rebecca Weaver, Union College education students, attend a regional International Reading Association meeting to fulfill part of the professional requirements for their senior portfolio.*

## **Figure 1 Portfolio Conference Questions**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Please respond to all of the questions and make four copies to bring to your portfolio conference.

1. What are two characteristics of you that are exemplified in this portfolio? In what ways does your evidence show these characteristics?
2. What have you learned by doing this portfolio? How can you tell that you’ve learned?
3. Select one area of your portfolio that you would like to improve. Identify it and talk about what you’d like to improve and why.
4. What is your greatest strength as a future teacher?
5. What do you know and know how to do as a teacher that is shown in your portfolio?
6. What was the easiest part of constructing your portfolio? Why?
7. What was the hardest part?

completion of each year’s portfolio. Explanations of the five components are as follows:

### **1. Portfolio Conference Questions (Figure 1)**

The question sheet contains seven items that seek to develop critical thinking skills. Students must respond to these questions prior to the conference. At the beginning of the conference, the completed question sheets are distributed to portfolio conference committee members. Examples of conference questions are:

*Which two of your characteristics are revealed in this portfolio? How does your documentation show these characteristics?*

*Select one area of your portfolio that you would like to improve. Tell why, and how you plan to do so.*

Answering these questions allows the student to recognize and share his or her need for improvement, and to zero in on areas of successful growth.

**Each year, students are required to document growth in five areas.**

**2. Evidence of Growth in the Developmental Strand (Figure 2)**

Each year, students are required to document growth in five areas. These reflect the program's conceptual framework and are woven throughout the education program.

Our goal throughout the program is to encourage teacher-education candi-

dates to participate in activities that will help them develop their physical, mental, social, spiritual, and professional capabilities.

**3. Evidence of Growth in the Pedagogical Strand (Figure 3)**

During the education majors' junior and senior years, attention continues to

**Figure 2  
Year One - Developmental**

**Physical**

Provide evidence of

- Development and practice of a wellness plan

**Mental**

Include evidence that indicates personal academic growth through

- Quarterly grade sheets
- Works that demonstrate your growth as a reflective and critical thinker
- Minimum documentation

**Social**

Provide evidence of

- Growth in communication skills
- ENGL 111 and 112 and COMM 105 grades
- Participation in extracurricular activities
- Involvement in service for others
- Awareness of social conventions such as manners and appropriate dress
- Personality testing
- Punctuality and reliability
- Background free of criminal acts
- Minimum documentation

**Spiritual**

Provide evidence of

- Definition and evaluation of your personal value system
- Commitment to improving human relations with those of exceptionalities and different ethnic backgrounds

**Professional**

Provide evidence of

- Professional goal setting and self-evaluation for professional education classes
- Ability to use media and technology
- Knowledge of the basic ideas of noted educational thinkers concerning effective schools
- Book Lists Nos. 1 and 2
- Annotated bibliography of books and journals related to your content field
- Reflecting about student differences, instructional procedure, teaching strategies, discipline problems, and classroom management
- Observation records
- Ongoing experience with students of the age you plan to teach
- Application and provisional acceptance into teacher education program (letter of acceptance from the division office)

**Figure 3**  
**Year Four Requirements - Pedagogical**

**Planning**

Provide evidence of

- Growth in the ability to plan instruction to meet curricular objectives, and to select appropriate instructional strategies and materials needed to implement the plan
- Growth in designing questions on all levels of Bloom's Taxonomy
- Growth in the ability to plan for individual and special needs
- Ability to construct and teach units
- Elementary majors—thematic/integrated units
- Collecting and organizing strategies and resources for instructional use

**Instructing**

Provide evidence of

- Ability to implement a pre-designed instructional plan
- Ability to utilize a variety of teaching strategies
- Ability to conduct group discussion using higher-level questioning
- Ability to implement plans for individual differences and special needs
- Ability to balance the use of direct instruction and active individual and cooperative student learning
- Ability to select and use technology in the classroom

**Managing**

Provide evidence of

- Growth in ability to implement a pro-active discipline plan with student accountability
- Growth in ability to establish schedules, classroom routines, and procedures that promote a positive, orderly climate and maximize learning
- Ability to keep school-related records
- Ability to collaborate and actively participate in educational activities as a member of a school community

**Assessing**

Provide evidence of

- Ability to administer, score, and interpret results in an array of assessment instruments
- Ability to use a variety of informal assessment tools
- Ability to use appropriate procedures for reporting pupil progress

**Professional**

Provide evidence of

- Professional goal setting and self-evaluation for professional education classes
- Knowledge of the basic ideas of noted educational thinkers concerning effective schools
- Book Lists Nos. 1 and 2
- Annotated bibliography of books and journals related to your content field
- Preparation of résumé
- Student teaching assignment
- Ability to evaluate personal teaching effectiveness
- Participation in professional growth activities
- Ability to reflect about and learn from professional experiences during class sessions and field experiences

**Caption Sheet** (*This was attached to rough and final lesson plans from a secondary English methods class*)

**Please explain how this work demonstrates that the requirement has been met.**

These are the rough and final drafts on my lesson plans. The rough draft includes feedback from my instructor. I chose to include this document to show that I made progressive steps to create an effective lesson plan after reflecting on my instructor's feedback. It also shows that I am capable of choosing appropriate literature that will develop predictive thinking skills. The final copy shows that I know how to use draft, edit, and final draft process writing cycles when preparing formal documents for others to read and understand.

be given to their wholistic development. At the same time, the program stresses the pedagogical skills necessary for harmonious development in the pupils they teach.

Examples of requirements and documentation in this area are on page 40.

#### 4. Caption Sheets (See Figure 4)

Education majors monitor their own growth (and eventually that of their students) in a reflective commentary. They do this by writing short captions for individual pieces of evidence. These explain why the document is included and what the education major thinks it shows about his/her knowledge, learning and/or teaching skill(s). An example of a student caption sheet appears on page 40.

#### 5. Table of Contents

Education majors display their portfolios in large three-ring notebooks or file boxes. The documentation and caption sheets are organized by a table of contents, which lists the developmental and pedagogical strand requirements, as well as the documentation that has been included.

During the second semester of each year, each preservice student presents the contents of his or her portfolio to a

*Olga Datriil participates in a Native American children's meeting to fulfil part of the spiritual requirements for her sophomore portfolio at Union College.*

committee of two to four students, chaired by the student's education advisor. Using a team conference allows students to hear and learn from one another. The advisor asks questions and

makes comments about portfolio contents. Each portfolio conference lasts approximately one hour, after which students are asked for feedback regarding strengths and weaknesses of the ed-

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**Figure 4  
Caption Sheet #1**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Please attach this sheet to the front of the document.

1. Identify the requirement that this section supports.
2. Please describe the origin (a course or outside activity).
3. If for a course, please describe the assignment for this item.
4. Please explain how this work demonstrates that the requirement has been met.

**Figure 5  
Portfolio Conference Rating**

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

This rating sheet will be used by the committee who will review your portfolio with you.

#### Review Conference

Outstanding	Impressive	Average	Weak
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#### Portfolio

Outstanding	Impressive	Average	Weak
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#### Justification

What documents/evidence justify the portfolio ratings?

What are the special strengths of the educator's performance?

What are the problems or concerns?

ucation program at Union College. These comments and concerns are then presented to the Teacher Preparation Committee\* and used in the formal program evaluation.

After the conference, portfolios are kept by the education faculty for more careful examination. A rating of *Outstanding*, *Impressive*, *Average*, or *Weak* is assigned to each portfolio and conference (Figure 5). A written summary of these ratings and comments is returned to the education major along with the portfolio. Copies of the summaries are kept in the student's credential file.

The benefits of portfolio use are three-fold. As education majors take a more active role in observing, documenting, and reviewing their own progress, they come to see connections in their program. They are able to apply information learned in one course to others and to the world of practice. By learning to assess their strengths and weaknesses and raise hard questions, students become more willing to seek

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routes for improvement. By observing documentation quality, education faculty are forced to reflect upon the effec-

tiveness of their teaching and total program effectiveness.

This year, we are once again listening to our education majors as they describe their growth. In doing so, we will follow the advice of Albert Schweitzer, "Modeling isn't one way of teaching, it's the only way to teach." ☞

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*\*The governing council for the Union College Teacher Education Program. The council is comprised of all education faculty, representatives from each content field, three student representatives, and a practicing teacher in the field.*

***Union College education students Rochelle Dames, Danna Calvert, and Shirleetra Roundtree display their portfolios.***

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