Considering a Portfolio to Assess Student Learning in Your Program?
Questions to Ask Yourself Before You Decide

1. **What are the goals of the portfolio?**
   - Why are you assigning a portfolio? The purpose should **not** be solely to provide assessment information; students should learn something important from the process of compiling a portfolio.
   - What do you want your students to learn through the process of creating a portfolio? These should be goals you consider important; if not, portfolios are not worthwhile projects.
   - What learning goals should the portfolio demonstrate? Portfolios are best for demonstrating thinking skills (writing, critical thinking, research, organization, analysis) rather than content knowledge, which can often be better assessed through traditional tests.
   - What questions should the portfolio answer?
   - What will be your criteria for evaluating the portfolio?

2. **Who is the portfolio's audience : students, faculty, administrators, employers, etc.?**
   - Why does each audience group want information (feedback or analysis) from the portfolios?
   - What question(s) does each audience group want answered by the portfolios?

3. **How will students choose what to put in the portfolio?**
   - What kinds of student work would answer the above questions? Do all students in your program, regardless of which program options they choose, complete these kinds of assignments at appropriate points in the program?
   - What will be included in the portfolio? Students should receive written guidelines when they start your program on exactly what they are to include in their portfolios. Portfolios should focus on work completed in the last year or two of the program. Student work completed in the first year or two of the program can be used to help show growth and improvement but by itself is incomplete evidence of how well students have learned a particular goal; it cannot include the work of transfer students and cannot reflect what students have learned later in the program.
   - Who chooses each portfolio item? While students should choose at least some items, faculty may specify some items, and some may be chosen collaboratively by the student and an appropriate faculty member.

4. **What incentives will be provided to ensure that students put good effort into assembling** and reflecting on their portfolios? Will the portfolios be graded? If so, how?

5. **How and where will portfolios be stored? How and when will work be added to the** portfolios? Contact the Center for Instructional Advancement & Technology (CIAT) to explore options for storing portfolios online.

6. **How will student and faculty reflection be ensured** in the portfolio process?

7. **Who will review and evaluate the portfolios?** When?
   - What is the role of the faculty advisor?

8. **How will the portfolios be evaluated?**
   - What are your expectations for the portfolios?

- What are your criteria for deciding if a portfolio is a "success"? What would a successful portfolio look like? Your criteria should reflect the learning goals that the portfolios are to demonstrate.
- How will individual portfolio components be compared or weighted in the evaluation?
- Will you consider evidence of growth or improvement in the evaluation? If so, how?
- Will you consider student reflection in the evaluation? If so, how?
- Will students receive any feedback on the portfolio evaluation? If so, how?

9. **How will you keep the evaluation process manageable? Some suggestions:**
   - Limit the number of items in each portfolio.
   - Keep all items in the portfolio short (no more than a few pages). Consider including only excerpts from lengthier items.
   - Start small. Perhaps ask for only one or two items from senior-level courses in the first set of portfolios, and then gradually increase the contents.
   - Create a rating scale (rubric) listing the things you're looking for in the portfolio that faculty can use; it will speed the evaluation process.
   - Review portfolio contents gradually—perhaps once a semester or once a year—rather than all at once when the student graduates.
   - Consider asking the faculty member making each assignment to complete a short rubric for it that is included in the portfolio with the assignment; this will speed review of the entire portfolio when the student graduates.

10. **Who "owns" each portfolio?** What happens to each portfolio when the student graduates or leaves the program before graduating?

11. **What are the benefits** of moving toward portfolio assessment? **What are the areas of concern?**

12. **Are portfolios a feasible practice** in your program? How many majors does your program have? Portfolios are often best for relatively small programs for which other assessments may be too small in scope to yield useful information. The time requirements of portfolios can make them problematic for larger programs. If you want to use a portfolio in a program with many majors, consider reviewing only a sample of portfolios each year (provided that students have already received feedback on individual items in their portfolios).

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