

# A Guide to Writing Academic Portfolios for Radiologists

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The academic educator's portfolio is a collection of materials that document academic performance and achievements, supplementing the curriculum vitae, in order to showcase a faculty member's most significant accomplishments. A decade ago, a survey of medical schools revealed frustration in the nonuniform methods of measuring faculty's medical education productivity. A proposed solution was the use of an academic educator's portfolio. In the academic medical community, compiling an academic portfolio is always a challenge because teaching has never been confined to the traditional classroom setting and often involves active participation of the medical student, resident, or fellow in the ongoing care of the patient. Diagnostic radiology in addition requires a knowledge base that encompasses basic sciences, imaging physics, technology, and traditional and molecular medicine. Teaching and performing research that involves this complex mix, while providing patient care that is often behind the scenes, provides unique challenges in the documentation of teaching, research, and clinical service for diagnostic radiology faculty. An academic portfolio is seen as a way to explain why relevant academic activities are significant to promotions committee members who may have backgrounds in unrelated academic areas and may not be familiar with a faculty member's work. The academic portfolio consists of teaching, research, and service portfolios. The teaching portfolio is a collection of materials that document teaching performance and documents the educator's transition to a more effective educator. A research portfolio showcases the most significant research accomplishments. The service portfolio documents service responsibilities and highlight any service excellence. All portfolios should briefly discuss the educator's philosophy, activities, methods used to implement activities, leadership, mentoring, or committee roles in these respective areas. Recognizing that academic programs have differing needs, this article will attempt to provide some basic guidelines that may help junior faculty in diagnostic radiology develop their teaching, research, and service portfolios.

**Key Words:** Academic portfolio; diagnostic radiology.

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## INTRODUCTION

Traditionally, faculty hired to teach at universities have been primarily rewarded for research and publications, even though they are expected to support the three missions of university academic life: research, teaching, and service. However, leadership of many universities now utilizes a broader definition of scholarship that recognizes the importance of teaching as an expression of scholarship and includes a more serious consideration of teaching and educational accomplishments in the promotions process. Two factors have caused academic healthcare centers to search for newer ways to measure and reward academic productivity: changes in the finances of healthcare and the consideration of whether the medical community was well served by de-emphasizing the value of medical teaching, which is the core of academic medicine (1). This has resulted in some challenges for faculty members and the promotions committee alike as they decide what constitutes excellence as an educator.

One valuable tool faculty can use to help demonstrate excellence during the promotions and tenure process is an academic portfolio. The portfolio is a collection of materials that document academic performance and achievements, supplementing the curriculum vitae (CV), in order to showcase a faculty member's most significant accomplishments (2). A survey of medical schools revealed frustration in the nonuniform methods of measuring medical education productivity, particularly concerns of sporadic faculty evaluation, lack of standardized methods for gathering peer evaluation of teaching, lack of understanding on the part of the faculty for the requirements for promotion and tenure, and lack of provision of documentation of educational excellence. A proposed solution to the problem of documentation of the scholarly activity was the use of an academic educator's portfolio (3–5). In each case, the portfolio is seen as a way to explain why activities are significant to promotions committee members who may have backgrounds in other unrelated areas and may not be familiar with a faculty member's work. Increase in the use of academic portfolios has since been documented (6).

So are academic portfolios effective? Beecher et al. studied the effect of academic portfolios and came to the conclusion that they helped bring to the surface dilemmas in educational practice, resulting in faculty seeking support when educational activities did not work and hence helped reformulate educational practices (7,8). In our own experience over the last decade, the use of academic portfolios has aided the mission of our departmental

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promotions and tenure committee's readiness of our faculty for institutional promotion with a 100% success rate.

In the medical community, documenting educational effectiveness is a challenge because teaching has never been confined to the traditional classroom setting and often involves active participation of the medical student, resident, or fellow in the ongoing care of the patient. As well as showing how the faculty member is an active teacher in a variety of settings, the teaching portfolio can also contain materials that help prove they are effective educators. Current trends require that educators develop programs to systematically help them modify their teaching based on a variety of feedback mechanisms. The portfolio is a place where faculty can show not only what curricula they develop but also how they reflect on these programs and why they change them over time (9).

In addition to their teaching accomplishments, faculty must also showcase ongoing research, whether it is basic, translational, or clinical research. Whereas the CV summarizes research activities, the portfolio can serve as a place to explain the significance of that research, outline the pathway as the junior researcher moves from working under a mentor toward independence, and can help expand on how certain collaborations can benefit the researcher and university alike. As well as highlighting grant-funded research, the portfolio can showcase the contributions of faculty members as research mentors, explaining topics from the time spent working with medical students, residents, and fellows in research endeavors to how faculty members encouraged their mentees to present at regional, national, or international meetings.

Along with teaching and research, medical university faculty shoulder the responsibility of patient care, which is often a significant part of their daily work. Indeed, clinical care is critical for the financial viability of academic medical centers, as approximately 40%–50% of revenue is derived from this work (10), if not more. Documentation of this effort is often difficult, making it all the more important to showcase faculty clinical productiveness. In academic radiology, the service portfolio can be used to highlight time spent developing unique or novel clinical imaging services, contributions to clinical care through multidisciplinary conferences often led by radiologists, and quality assurance projects that faculty undertake. Besides clinical care, service involves committee work and leadership. Thus, it is important to explain why leadership positions and committee activities at the local, regional, and national levels are critical to the university or to the faculty member's specialty. Teaching and performing research that involves this complex mix while providing service and patient care that often occurs behind the scenes provides unique challenges in the documentation of teaching, research, and clinical service in diagnostic radiology.

While attempting to find material that could provide guidance for our junior faculty, we discovered generic material online, but few resources that were meant for physicians and none for academic radiologists. Recognizing that academic programs have differing needs, this article will attempt to provide some basic guidelines that may help junior faculty in diagnostic radiology develop their teaching, research, and service portfolios.

## Getting Started

Getting started is often the hardest part. While planning to write the academic portfolio, consider the following: Who is the audience for this portfolio that you are putting together? What evidence will most convince the reader? It is important to remember that some of the members of the institutional promotions and tenure committee may not be radiologists or even physicians. Different institutions have varying guidelines for their teaching portfolio. Make sure you obtain a copy of guidelines at your institution and follow the guidelines while compiling your academic portfolio components. An academic portfolio of a colleague who has been successful in his or her promotion will help serve as a guideline. It is good practice early on in the process to have a senior faculty mentor who can help you finesse the portfolio by pointing out deficiencies or redundancies. In our institution, the chair or a member of our departmental promotions and tenure committee leads faculty development workshops for creating teaching portfolios, and mentors in this capacity.

## Writing the Portfolio

Once you have gathered the material, the next step is to simply get it down on paper. Working off an outline helps. For this purpose, we have also included a master outline at the end of this article. Whether dictating or typing, following a structured outline will help make your case for promotion to your audience.

## Housing the Portfolio

All of the portfolios can be housed in a single, three-ring binder. The material should also be stored electronically (and backed up) on a separate hard drive or other suitable storage device. For purposes of security, sensitive personal information such as Social Security numbers (if requested) should not be included in your backup copy.

## Improving the Portfolio

Not all articles related to your academic endeavors should be "dumped" in your portfolio. To avoid this, consider designing the portfolio around a theme extracted from your philosophy of education (11). There is always room for improvement. The goal is to present a concise portfolio that will showcase your academic achievements and efforts and make a case for your promotion. Adding redundant material should be avoided, as it often distracts from highlighting your key achievements.

## Keeping the Portfolio Updated

Keeping track of one's academic achievements is something people often forget to do. Yes, most departments do keep a log of the talks that you have given. However, it ultimately

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