ADVICE ON PREPARING YOUR MA PORTFOLIO

Revised Spring 11

Portfolio Overview

An MA portfolio is intended as a representation of the diverse work and capabilities you have developed during your graduate program. It must be crafted carefully to persuade the targeted audience, namely your committee members, of what you have learned during your time in the program and that you are able to situate this work in your chosen area of specialization. You should think critically about what sample work you select for inclusion and how you organize it for readers.

Perhaps more important than the sample materials contained in your portfolio is the written reflection you do on that work. Reflection means being able to look back at your work and articulate what you learned through the process of developing that work. This reflection is a significant part of the overall argument of your portfolio. It is a demonstration of your understanding of the role individual projects played in your development as a writer, thinker, and practitioner, as well as how your programmatic experiences as a whole shaped your preparation for future work. For your introductory reflective essay and written introductions to individual sections you should apply rhetorical approaches to shape materials in purposeful, informative and persuasive ways.

Additionally, you should employ principles of visual and information design to facilitate usability and aesthetic appeal. Consider the layout of your materials, your choice of folder/binder and paper, your use of images, and the overall design of your materials. You should also include a table of contents to orient readers to the portfolio's materials, as well as a curriculum vita (CV) or resume.

Finally, you may choose to create either a print or an online version of your portfolio depending on your familiarity with needed technology and your professional or academic interests beyond the MA program. No matter which format you choose, you will need to prepare four copies of your materials (one for each committee member and one for the English department library).

Some Suggestions for Structure and Materials to Include

Keep in mind that the portfolio is a representative sample of your work, not a catalog of everything you have done. You will need to select the best six to 10 examples of your work, make a case to your readers about why these are of value to you, and demonstrate that you understand how what you learned and produced is situated in the areas you have studied.

Introductory Essay

Perhaps the most important document in your portfolio is the introductory reflective essay. This document has several crucial functions. It should:

- Give readers a sense of how you got to this point, what you got out of the program, and where you plan to go from here using what you have learned
- Provide an overview of the material in the portfolio and a rationale for what you selected and how you organized it
- Reflect on the specific work included in the portfolio and how it demonstrates your academic and/or professional development

Sub-Sections

You should develop some type of organizational structure for presenting your work. Not only does this make it easier for readers to maneuver through the material, it also demonstrates your ability to contextualize your work and to illustrate connections between different courses, projects, and subject areas. Each sub-section within your portfolio should have a short (1-3 page) introduction that ties each piece together and helps to convince readers of its value.

There are any number of ways to arrange your materials, but some examples of how previous students have structured their portfolios include:

- by disciplinary or subject areas- Rhetoric, Design, Technical Communication, Composition, Cultural Studies, Literacy, etc.
- by type of document- seminar papers, electronic documents, document design and

multimedia (on CD or DVD), technical materials, reports, proposals, short responses, etc.
- o by programmatic experiences- coursework papers, internship projects and reports, teaching materials (including teaching philosophies, syllabi you have developed, sample assignments)
- o by type of project or approach- Client-based projects, academic papers (possibly including sections for courses inside and outside of the department), multimodal projects

Miscellaneous Inclusions
Although not required, including a section with some of the following components may assist you in adapting your portfolio for application to PhD programs or professional positions:
- o Curriculum Vita or Resume
- o Teaching Philosophy
- o Non-academic, practice-based work samples (i.e. materials created for internships, client-based work, or non-duty hour assignments such as creating handbooks for the Writing Program, working as a Writing Center Coordinator, developing projects for the Design Center, or reviewing and corresponding with authors via *Puerto*)
- o An organized list of courses taken to fulfill the MA program requirements

Development Process and Timeline for Completion
To help ensure that complete your degree program in the semester you plan to finish, check the Graduate School website for all deadlines and requirements. The following is a list timelines and tasks to keep mind, but it is subject to change based on the Graduate School:

1. **Visit the Graduate School's "Graduating from NMSU with Your Advanced Degree" page (**http://prospective.nmsu.edu/graduate/current/graduating-advanced-degree.html) and submit all necessary paperwork. This includes the:
   - o *Application for Degree* form
   - o *Program of Study* form
   - o *Final Examination* form

   It is in your best interest to get a date-stamped copy of any paperwork you submit to the Graduate School.

2. **Select and finalize your committee** by gathering signatures from each member. Your committee must be composed of two members of the English Department and one member from outside the department known as the Dean's Representative. If you don't already have a complete committee, ask your advisor or your classmates for recommendations. Generally, you ask faculty with whom you have already studied and who work in areas related to your interests.

   The department's Graduate Secretary has a copy of the signature form. Check in with each committee member at the beginning of your final semester to let them know your timeline and to see what requests, procedures, or processes they like to use for reviewing your work.

3. **Make an appointment with the Graduate Director** to ensure you have met all programmatic requirements and that you have filed all required paperwork. The earlier you do this in the semester, the better.

4. **Compile, write and revise your portfolio,** checking in regularly with your committee chair. A final draft of your portfolio is generally due to your chair one month before you plan to hold your exam. Your chair will provide additional revision feedback and tell you whether or not you are ready to hold your exam. After revising a last time, you should submit your final portfolio to each of your committee members *no less than two weeks before the oral exam.* This gives members time to review your work and prepare questions.

5. **Contact all members of your committee and set a date for your Oral Examination**. Once you have decided on a date, time, and place, relay this information to the department's Graduate Secretary. The secretary will help you complete your *Committee for Non-thesis Examination form* which must reach the Graduate School at least ten working days before the date of the examination or the exam is subject to cancellation by the Graduate School.

6. **The last date to hold your oral examination is generally the Monday of finals week.** However, you should generally plan to hold it at least a few days earlier in case problems occur that require rescheduling.

7. **Meet with your advisor early in the semester to get guidelines and expectations for the portfolio.** Although general guidelines are set by the department (see description at the end of this document or check the English department website for further information), individual faculty members will likely ask for inclusion of specific materials. You should **get a complete version of your final portfolio to your advisor a minimum or four weeks before you plan to hold your oral exam**, though you will likely meet with her or him prior to that to discuss development, progress, and/or drafts.

8. **The oral examination is primarily a conversation about your portfolio.** Although committee members may ask about your experiences in the program and/or specific courses, the focus is generally on the work submitted as your portfolio. The exam is not designed to trip you up, delay your graduation, or quiz you on anything and everything you read and discussed in the program. This does not mean all questions will be easy, but they are intended to facilitate a reflective discussion in which you are asked to talk thoughtfully about your work and its relation to the fields making up your program of study.

Spring 2011 Deadlines from the Graduate School

January 21	Deadline to file your Application for Degree at the Registrar's office (without a late fee).
February 28	Deadline to file your Application for Degree at the Registrar's office (with a late fee).
April 20	Deadline to turn in the Final Exam Form for non-thesis students.
May 4	Deadline to hold a non-thesis final oral or written exam.

Further Information from the RPC/English Department Website at
http://www.nmsu.edu/~english/graduate/portfolios.html

What is a portfolio?
A portfolio is a collection of your writing chosen to demonstrate your writing ability in several contexts or genres. The portfolio is meant to demonstrate that you have strong writing skills and that you can use your studies–both theoretical and applied–in the writing and design of various documents. A portfolio also provides writing samples for use in applying for jobs or for Ph.D. programs.

What should be included in a portfolio?
Generally, a portfolio should contain 6-10 separate writing samples and a total of about 35-50 pages of material. It should include several distinct genres of written communication: a proposal, a seminar paper, computer documentation, a book review, a computer program, a brochure, a newspaper or newsletter article, a book design, or other documents. It might excerpt longer works, just to demonstrate familiarity with a certain kind of writing. It might point to online publications: a web site or multimedia text, for example.

How should a portfolio be presented?
Organize your portfolio using some kind of binder with pockets. Write an introduction (see below) and provide an organizing table of contents. Label the individual documents. Make sure it is easy to see the title pages or covers of the individual documents. Make sure it is easy to pull out documents and replace them.

How should a portfolio be introduced?
People need context to understand and evaluate writing. Provide an introduction to yourself as a writer, the influences on the pieces you have chosen to present, and some indication of the theory and research that shapes your work. Discuss your purposes for writing, how you respond to specific audiences and situations when you craft a piece of writing, and how you know when pieces are successfully finished.

What about on online portfolio?
Increasingly, students are building personal home pages with resumes and writing samples. This is a good idea. To satisfy program requirements, you can submit either a physical portfolio with printed documents or on online portfolio. The online portfolio is likely to have a homepage that leads to a resume and writing samples. Just like a paper portfolio, your writing samples should provide some context so readers know purpose, audience, situation, and use of the documents presented. An online portfolio lets you demonstrate your web design and graphic skills. If you create an online portfolio you should also submit a working copy on CD to each committee member for the purposes of reviewing and archiving.

What is a teaching portfolio?
A teaching portfolio should be viewed as separate from this portfolio of your writing. A teaching portfolio is useful when applying for academic jobs or for a Ph.D. program. It typically contains a statement of your teaching philosophy, sample syllabi, exercises, course materials, and consolidated evaluations from students, peers, or supervisors. You can choose to create a teaching portfolio to complement your paper or online portfolio.

How do committee members review the portfolio?
Circulate the portfolio to your committee members at least two weeks before your orals. Provide a copy of the portfolio to each committee member. Bring your copy to your oral exam and expect questions during the exam on documents in the portfolio.