CAUT
Teaching Dossier

Contents

What is a Teaching Dossier?

A teaching dossier is a summary of an academic's major teaching accomplishments and strengths. It is to an academic's teaching what lists of publications, grants, and academic honours are to research.

The teaching dossier is intended to provide short statements which describe the scope and quality of the academic's teaching. A summary of information compiled for the dossier should routinely become part of one's curriculum vitae (CV).[1] Just as statements about research in a CV should be supportable by more complete evidence (such as published papers or actual research data), statements made in a teaching dossier should be substantiated by more complete evidence related to teaching activity. A teaching dossier would not normally be more than about three pages long, a reasonable amount to ask someone to read.

Part 1 of the *Guide* contains a general explanation of what a teaching dossier is and how it can be a useful and even necessary part of a curriculum vitae.

Part 2 is addressed to users of teaching dossiers.

Part 3 describes how to create a teaching dossier and includes a list of "Possible items for a teaching dossier." This part is the most important from the point of view of a academic.

Part 4 is a sample Teaching Dossier.

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[1] Although requirements for CVs vary considerably from institution to institution, this *Guide* uses the term to refer to the document, whatever it is called locally, which the academic updates periodically to list cumulative accomplishments.

Part 5 provides a selected bibliography.

1. Evaluating Teaching

Academic staff in Canada face numerous rigorous evaluations of their work. In theory equal emphasis is given to teaching, research, and service. The CV provides the single most common source of information on performance, but the listing of accomplishments recorded in the CV needs to be supported with some sampling of work which lends itself to peer review and evaluation. Despite claims to the contrary, supporting documentation tends to bias research at the expense of teaching. This bias needs to be corrected. A CV normally provides a list, among other things, of books and articles published, papers presented at conferences, or professional performances and artistic exhibits as evidence of accomplishments. The academy has long acknowledged the right of individual academics to organize their own CV and, with time, to become more selective about what is recorded. To cite a common example, the Ontario Council on Graduate Studies in its periodic evaluation of graduate programs require CVs to list career summaries of publication but actual citations for only the last seven years. For both major and minor items backup material, such as copies of reports, papers and speeches is retained and offered as evidence of good work. Frequently, as in the case of external evaluation for promotion, hard copies of publications are sent to external peers for evaluation.

Although teaching remains a necessary part of any career evaluation, it has not been accorded the same attention as research. Academics conduct their research in a broad forum that generates evidence of work done, evidence that can be assessed and evaluated. Research results are sent to external journals which provide peer review. Subsequent publications can be submitted to external peer review at the time of tenure or promotion decisions. This is rarely possible with teaching results. Moreover, academics have not learned to take the initiative in keeping a record of accomplishments in teaching.

This in part stems from our graduate training where we were taught to recognize and advertise success in research but rarely in teaching. Many academics held teaching assistantships or taught courses during their graduate years, but seldom was this teaching observed or evaluated.

Teaching is at a disadvantage in the evaluation process. The recording of competence and effectiveness in teaching is more difficult than research. The CV often restricts itself to a simple list of courses taught or numbers of theses supervised. Such lists do not speak to the issue of teaching quality. Moreover, evidence which lends itself to evaluation is frequently unavailable. Many academics who pride themselves on being first rate instructors do not recognize the need to collect information for the evaluation of teaching. Among the many reasons for the failure of the academic to take the initiative in recording evidence of good teaching is lack of knowledge about how or what to record. A teaching dossier is an effective means to fill this lacuna.

Despite a professional culture that focuses attention on research achievement, there has been a discernible shift in how teaching is viewed. Almost all universities and colleges now have centres for teaching effectiveness that play an active role in promoting teaching as a core mandate of the academy. Such centres have gone some way in changing the status of teaching, yet the fact remains that teaching will be undervalued so long as it can not be properly assessed.

Scepticism surrounding the evaluation process can become particularly acute when student evaluation questionnaires become the primary mode of adjudicating teaching effectiveness. Such questionnaires, although too often simply a poll of students' likes and dislikes, can include impressions of course workload and the characteristics of the instructors. The questionnaire results are frequently published, sometimes with comments. Although they may help inform course selection,

they only rarely provide useful feedback to the academic to improve pedagogy or solid information on teaching and learning that can be used by a peer committee.

However well intentioned they may be, student questionnaires are rarely subjected to methodological scrutiny necessary to establish the reliability or validity of results. Numerical values of "1", "2" or "3" are often arbitrarily assigned to descriptors such as "excellent," "good" or "unsatisfactory,".   Indeed, only a handful of student questionnaires provide ordinal data. Yet despite the nominal nature of this data, academic administrators routinely calculate "averages" and "means" as if the data were interval. Nor is this the most significant problem with student questionnaires. There is little doubt that the increased competition for grades and places in professional programs further compromises the value of student evaluations. The advent of anonymous online evaluations has further complicated these issues.

There is no question that student response and student opinion provides significant information about teaching and learning, and as a consequence must be considered in any legitimate evaluation of teaching. The fact remains, however, that students cannot provide much of the essential information needed to undertake a thorough evaluation of teaching. Students are rarely in a position to comment, for example, on the role a particular course plays within the larger curriculum of a program. Nor are they able to judge the degree to which course content reflects the state of knowledge within a discipline. Information on these questions is better sought from colleagues, departmental curriculum committees, program coordinators, and, most importantly, individual academics. Such information is best not left to chance; academic staff must take the initiative and ensure that relevant information is accessible and included in their files.

An academic can control some, but by no means all, of the many variables that affect student learning and student satisfaction. Teaching in a university or college relies on the quality and cooperation of libraries, computing centres, laboratories, bookstores, administrative support and student motivation and ability. Teaching must receive direct and indirect support – public honours, sabbatical leaves, promotions, and the like – if it is to enjoy the prestige accorded to other activities, particularly research, which compete for the academic's finite time and energy.

Academics must take the initiative; they must make the critical decision to gather the information that they wish to form the basis of performance evaluation. This *Guide's* main purpose is to suggest how an academic can gather and present evidence about their teaching. Peers charged with evaluating the academic's performance require this information if teaching is to be valued in the context of career development and progress.

This *Guide* tackles only one part of the evaluation matrix. Specifically it describes ways for the academic to replace hearsay and general impressions about teaching with more appropriate information systematically collected. To do this, the academic preparing their dossier should clearly understand the distinctions among the various purposes of evaluations outlined in the following section.

1.1 Reasons for Evaluation

There are two reasons to review performance in the academy:
1. formative review to improve the quality of teaching by assessing individual strengths and weaknesses, and
2. evaluative review to assess accomplishments and guide peers when making recommendations related to career decisions.

It is important to recognize that the objectives of professional development are not necessarily best served by the same instruments used in professional advancement.

The primary reason for evaluating teaching ought always to be the improvement of instruction. Often referred to as formative evaluation, feedback should be sought early and often, not just at the end of a course. Some of the information collected from students is best provided confidentially to the instructor. Assistance, meanwhile, must be available to permit the instructor to modify their instructional techniques on the basis of the feedback received.

Professional development is a continuous process and requires a steady supply of reliable information about the individual's pedagogical efforts. Not all such information, however, lends itself to evaluative procedures designed to inform career decisions. Yet, precisely because career decisions have the greatest need for valid, direct input from individual academics, the teaching dossier can bridge the information gap. Academic staff members can recast information gathered for the formative purpose of professional development and place it within the context of the broader teaching mandate of both the individual instructor and the institution – be it the department, the program, the faculty, the college or the university – to provide a record of teaching accomplishments suitable for evaluative procedures. By providing both data and context a teaching dossier helps prevent vital discretionary decisions from becoming arbitrary and capricious. No academic should be subjected to an evaluation based on inappropriate or incomplete criteria or data. Well-designed and appropriately used institutional evaluation procedures should be augmented by a carefully prepared teaching dossier in which the academic staff member puts "their best foot forward."

The increasing number of institutional evaluations such as National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) are,

meanwhile, poor indicators of an individual's ability to teach. NSSE collects survey data not on teaching and learning but on "activities that research studies show are linked to desired outcomes of college," variables like faculty/student contact and t i m e l i n e s s   o f   f e e d b a c k [//nsse.iub.edu/2002_annual_report/html/download.htm]. Much of this information is, in fact, unrelated to individual teaching and learning. Although institutional level data such as these clearly have some value, we have witnessed an unfortunate tendency for some administrators and government agencies to measure productivity or output with some marginally relevant indices such as teacher-student contact hours that are then interpreted to be measures of "perceived student engagement." Many institutions, typically under pressure from their provincial government, now use NSSE as a primary measure of educational quality.[2] In the absence of a more rigorous academic alternative, such measures will become the norm in measuring the quality of university teaching. They cannot become the measure of individual teaching.

Teaching is a highly creative activity whose success can only be shown by a variety of data from a variety of different sources. The teaching dossier provides a comprehensive approach to evaluation much more likely to result in genuine "quality control" than any so-called productivity measure. The post-secondary educator with the aid of this *Guide* can add evidence of successful teaching to a portfolio of accomplishments in other areas. The portfolio will grow indefinitely. Like a publication

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[2]For example, under the recent Accountability Agreements signed with the province of Ontario, universities in that province administer the NSSE and provide detailed results to the Ministry of Training, Colleges and Universities. Universities not complying with the agreement will not be eligible for their share of over $150 million available through the Quality Improvement Fund (QIF).

list, it will be selective, although the hard evidence to support the summary, like a copy of a publication, will remain available.

It is also important to point out that a well-constructed and maintained teaching dossier may be useful if academic staff members find it necessary to appeal against negative decisions on renewal, tenure or promotion. The procedures now commonly used by arbitrators and members of appeal panels require the formal submission of persuasive evidence. The maintenance of effective records of teaching effectiveness will enhance the persuasiveness of an academic's appeal should teaching effectiveness ever be in question.

2. Administrative Use of the Teaching Dossier

Institutions that have adopted the teaching dossier – or portfolio as it is sometimes called – use it primarily in tenure and promotion procedures. In these cases, an academic staff member presents the best case description of their research accomplishments; it is reasonable they do the same for their teaching accomplishments. This *Guide* suggests ways to document the teaching activities carried out by all instructors on a routine basis. A well-prepared portfolio can then can be used in the preparation of a more formal dossier to be presented to peer committees at important points in the person's career.

A common objection raised by deans, chairs and some academics is that teaching dossiers require time and effort to maintain. Although most worthwhile endeavours take time, teaching remains the *raison d'être* of universities and colleges. Consequently it is imperative that we evaluate and reward effective teaching. This cannot be done on the basis of limited, incomplete or perfunctory evidence such as the summary scores from one or two items on a student questionnaire. If teaching is worth examining at all, then a reasonable commitment of time and resources must be made by both instructors and administrators.

Academic staff members, meanwhile, can generally benefit from the periodic review of their teaching. The review process can reveal shortcomings in teaching as well as suggest alternative pedagogic approaches. Sadly if the teaching dossier were only used for these purposes, it might not gain widespread acceptance precisely because using feedback about teaching to make improvements in course content is, to a considerable extent, a private matter. The main attraction of teaching dossiers to most academics will typically be the chance it

provides to describe and justify their teaching accomplishments when it comes time for tenure, merit and promotion decisions.

There is no way to predict exactly how the teaching dossier will be used; however, there appears to be widespread dissatisfaction with the most common current procedures for evaluating teaching – gossip or the oversimplified results of student evaluations. When academic staff incorporate their teaching dossiers into their curricula vitae, administrators will pay careful attention to this information because it fills a void in the review process. Individual academics can express in their own ways the unique aspects of their teaching, and the variety of reliable data that demonstrate them. The dossier, like the CV itself, should be regularly, perhaps annually, brought up-to-date.

The recommendations provided in this *Guide* are not set in stone. A teaching dossier will have its intended positive effects only when personnel decision-makers and teaching staff come to trust the approach. Individually generated, open and transparent dialogue about the nature and content of the dossier is critical. Any list of "Possible items for a teaching dossier," like the one suggested below, should remain open to subsequent revision in light of relevant data. The teaching dossier developed with sensitivity and good faith becomes an important and trusted instrument. By providing flexibility and a large range of options it can be widely adapted across different units of the academy.

3. How to Create a Teaching Dossier

The purpose of Part 3 is to present to the reader six steps to creating a useful teaching dossier and to provide a list of possible items for inclusion. Not all of these items are required. Rather the list suggests possibilities; the academic staff member should select those items most relevant to his or her teaching situation.

Step 1 - Clarify teaching responsibilities

Individual teaching occurs within a context of program and disciplinary objectives. Such objectives in turn affect individual teaching responsibilities and the criteria for teaching success. The academic should include a brief statement of their own assumptions concerning context, responsibilities, obligations and expectations. As anyone who has ever taught a compulsory methodology course knows, differing program requirements alter the classroom challenges in varied and significant ways. The first step in preparing the teaching dossier is to provide a description of the relationship between individual teaching goals and program objectives. Points to cover might include the numbers and types of courses to be taught, the role these courses might play within the larger program of a department, how students are to be evaluated, and expectations for the course.

Step 2 - Select criteria for effective teaching

Paying particular attention to the statement on goals and objectives outlined in Step 1, the academic selects those items which are most applicable to their assigned teaching responsibilities and prepares a statement about accomplishments in each area. Item choice should reflect the academic's personal preferences and teaching style.

Step 3 - Order the criteria

Statements on criteria should be arranged in the order that best fits their intended use. If the academic is trying to demonstrate improvement in teaching, entries that lead in the short-run to improvements should be emphasized by placing them at the beginning. A "Statement about quizzes and examination items being keyed to instructional objectives" (item 6 in the list below), for example, is probably more immediately useful than "Becoming involved in an association or society concerned with the improvement of teaching and learning" (item 21).

The statements may be organized in paragraphs or in point form and under headings that draw attention to the importance of some items and to the supplementary nature of others. Brief elaborations or annotations should be added to items that constitute major evidence.

Step 4 - Compile supporting evidence

Copies of all printed items referenced in the dossier should be kept by the academic. These would include such things as examination papers, original replies to course evaluation questionnaires, letters from chairs and students, and samples of student work. In addition, it is prudent to archive all e-mail contact with students. These materials are not part of the dossier, but can provide back-up information in situations where "original" evidence is required.

To complete the dossier the academic adds a sentence giving assurance that such materials are available on request.

Step 5 - Incorporate dossier into curriculum vitae

The academic inserts the completed dossier into the CV under the heading of "Teaching" or "Instruction." Precisely where it is placed in the CV in relation to the sections on research and service is a matter of personal choice or institutional practise.

Step 6 (optional) - Add exemplary materials

When the academic submits the updated CV to a promotion and tenure committee, the CV may be accompanied by a few pages of illustrative material drawn from the major evidence referred to in the dossier. An exemplary course outline or reading list, an examination keyed to objectives, a numerical summary of student course evaluations, even unsolicited letters of praise from students, might be included with the CV. The advisability of this step depends very much on local customs, but is generally useful when an academic staff member is seeking tenure or promotion.

3.1 Assistance may be available

One of the biggest problems in using teaching evaluation data for career advancement decisions is knowing how to set criteria for distinguishing between successful and unsuccessful teaching performance. A teaching consultation service, if one exists on your campus, can contribute its experience here. Consultation at the start of the process can clarify issues and help structure the dossier to achieve maximum advantage. Even after completion of the dossier, a confidential opinion from a teaching consultant or a trusted colleague might help refine both the information and the presentation before submitting the dossier to peer committees.

In anticipation of major career decisions, academic staff, in cooperation with their administrators, should take every opportunity to gain personal, confidential, non-threatening experience in using the contemplated procedures for the purpose of improving their teaching. One way to gain such experience is to incorporate the dossier into the academic staff member's annual report in the years prior to the application for tenure or promotion, thereby relieving some of the anxiety associated with major career decisions.

3.2 Possible items for a teaching dossier

Academic staff members should recognize which of the following items would most effectively enhance a favourable impression of teaching competence and which might better be used for self-evaluation and improvement. The dossier should be compiled to make the best possible case for teaching effectiveness.

3.2.1 Teaching responsibilities and practices

1. List of course titles and numbers, unit values or credits, enrolments with brief elaboration.
2. List of course materials prepared for students.
3. Information on academic's availability to students and evidence of prompt and effective correspondence via e-mail.
4. Report on identification of student difficulties and encouragement of student participation in courses or programs.
5. Steps taken to emphasize the interrelatedness and relevance of different kinds of learning.
6. Statement about quizzes and examination items being keyed to instructional objectives.

3.2.2 Products of good teaching

7. Student scores on teacher-made or standardized tests, possibly before and after a course has been taken as evidence of learning.
8. Student laboratory workbooks and other kinds of workbooks or logs.
9. Student essays, creative work, projects and field-work reports.
10. A record of students who select and succeed in advanced courses of study in the field.
11. A record of students who elect another course with the same academic.
12. Evidence of effective supervision of Honour's, Master's or Ph.D. theses.

13. Setting up or running a successful internship program.
14. Evidence of help given to colleagues on teaching improvement.

3.2.3 *Evaluating and improving one's teaching*

15. Maintaining a record of the changes resulting from self-evaluation.
16. Instructional innovations attempted and evaluation of their effectiveness.
17. Reading journals on improving teaching and attempting to implement acquired ideas.
18. Reviewing new teaching materials for possible application including exchanging course materials with a colleague from another institution.
19. Conducting research on one's own teaching or course.
20. Becoming involved in an association or society concerned with the improvement of teaching and learning.
21. Participating in seminars, workshops and professional meetings intended to improve teaching.
22. Using general support services such as the Education Resources Information Centre in improving one's teaching.
23. Participating in course or curriculum development.

3.2.4 *Contributions outside of the classroom*

24. Preparing a textbook or other instructional materials such as on-line 'courseware'.
25. Editing or contributing to a professional journal on teaching one's subject.

3.2.5 *Information from students*

26. Student course and teaching evaluation data which suggests improvements or demonstrate effectiveness or satisfaction.
27. Evidence of student satisfaction including written comments received during the term or after a course has been completed.
28. Interview data collected from students.

3.2.6 Information from colleagues

29. Statements from colleagues who have observed teaching either as members of a teaching team or as independent observers of a particular course, or who teach other sections of the same course.
30. Written comments from those who teach courses for which a particular course is a prerequisite.
31. Evidence of contributions to course development and improvement.
32. Statements from colleagues from other institutions on such matters as how well students have been prepared for graduate studies.
33. Requests for advice or acknowledgment of advice received by a committee on teaching or similar body.

3.2.7 Information from others

34. Honours received such as being nominated or named "teacher of the year."
35. Statement about teaching achievements from administrators at one's own institution or another institution.
36. Alumni ratings or other graduate feedback.
37. Comments from parents of students.
38. Reports from employers of students (e.g., in a work-study or cooperative program).
39. Invitations to teach from outside agencies.
40. Invitations to contribute to the teaching literature.
41. Other kinds of invitations based on one's reputation as a teacher such as a media interview on a successful teaching innovation.

4. A Sample Teaching Dossier

The traditional academic CV rarely contains more than a few lines on teaching and often only a list of course titles. The Teaching Dossier should expand the CV by one to three pages of information on the nature and quality of teaching. Unless such data exist and are used, an evaluation of teaching effectiveness will be incomplete and ineffective. What follows is a hypothetical academic's teaching dossier. Our purpose is not to describe a real case; it is to illustrate the flexibility of the teaching dossier approach.

The most frequent problem in preparing an effective teaching dossier is difficulty being explicit. It is possible to submit a new course syllabus or a complete course outline, perhaps with an assessment by a colleague, as a demonstration of effective planning. It is more difficult to present anecdotal information on student success or to present responses to a personally-administered questionnaire in a persuasive manner. It is wise to test different evaluation procedures in a non-threatening, confidential, improvement-seeking context. In this way an understanding can develop with administration officers on reasonable criteria to be used when similar information is needed for a career advancement decision. On a campus where there is a teaching improvement or evaluation service such advice and assistance may be readily at hand.

Teaching Dossier – Prof. X

Introduction

Over the last several years an increasing number of students from other departments have begun enrolling in Linguistics courses as electives. These students have very different backgrounds and expectations than our own honours students. As a result of discussions with the chair and dean I relinquished a

second-year course I had taught for several years and developed a new introductory course for non-specialist students. The requirements, including readings, assignments and examinations, have all been adapted to better suit the needs of elective students. I continue, meanwhile, to teach the compulsory psycholinguistics research methods course to honours students and an optional intermediate course in Canadian French dialects. Student performance in the methodology course was based on subsequent success in later courses. The dialects course is primarily an interest course and student motivation was a major factor in assessing its success. I was also responsible for supervising three students in the MA program, two of whom successfully completed their degrees this year.

The following elements in the evaluation of my teaching seem most significant to me.

Overall: list of courses, etc.[see item 1[3]]

1. **Linguistics for non-specialists:**
   ‣ Student marks on tests which I prepared following consultation with colleagues.
   ‣ a complete course syllabus. [see item 2] Particular attention paid to student difficulties. [see item 4]
   ‣ student satisfaction demonstrated by a "moderate" level or higher on a questionnaire (moderate being 3 on a 5-point scale). [see items 26 and 27]

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[3] See list of items in Section 3.2 above.

2. **Honours   Psycholinguistics Research Seminar:**
- ‣ examples of graded student laboratory records. [see item 8]
- ‣ comments from colleagues on prerequisite preparation indicating little need to "re-teach" major concepts. [see item 30]

3. **Dialects interest course:**
- ‣ examples of graded student essays showing best, average and worst work. [see item 9]
- ‣ examples of integrating my research with this course through students collecting and analyzing tapes of speech at the airport and railway station. [see item 19]
- ‣ Indication of student satisfaction as a "4" level, on average, on a 20 item questionnaire including the 10 departmental "core" questions.

4. **Canadian Dialects**
This being an optional course, the standard for student satisfaction was set high. Results of the course questionnaire confirmed considerable satisfaction, particularly with the field exercises which were closely related to my own research. The students were required to report in writing on their mini-studies. Follow-up interviews were arranged with those students who volunteered their name and address. Five of 30 later wrote to thank me for the course.

Only one poor essay was submitted, all the others being "B" or better; excerpts are appended. Following the final test, 10 of the 18 students wrote notes of thanks for a course

which, they felt, did a commendable job of making an esoteric and theoretical topic enjoyable and relevant. These comments are appended. [see item 26]

5. Other teaching related activities
In addition to my regular teaching assignments I also:
- served on the MA program revision committee [see item 23]
- attended two workshops at the Teaching Improvement Centre, one on course evaluation and the other on making multiple-choice tests [see item 21]
- wrote two chapters of a text on Canadian dialects [see item 24]
- interviewed the students doing best and worst in each of my courses as one way of discovering what makes the courses succeed and fail for different students. Several science students suggested calendar revisions because they had discovered that the course assignments were not scheduled as they had expected and this created conflicts with the timetables in other courses. I was able to advise them to raise such matters sooner because it is often possible in an optional course to adjust the assignments to better suit student needs.

All documents referred to are available upon request.

What is important about our example is the degree to which it lends itself to evaluation. The activity reported goes well beyond the simple listing of courses taught yet remains concise and specific. Our hypothetical Prof. X can be seen to be engaged

in pedagogy. The evaluator's attention is drawn to particular issues such as the care in preparing examinations suitable to the student's background and experience. Should the evaluator wish to pursue any particular point, the appendix provides documentary evidence suitable for evaluation.

Such a document underlines the individual academic's commitment to the teaching mission of the academy. At the same time it allows the academy to react and reinforce that mission. It puts teaching on a par with research in that it allows proper peer review and evaluation. In so doing it allows teaching to be recognized, encouraged and rewarded in the career development and promotion of the individual academic staff member.

5. Bibliography
A Short Reading List on Teaching Evaluation

There is considerable literature on evaluation of instruction ranging from books that describe "how to go about it" to research articles that focus on empirical studies of validity and reliability of different evaluation methods. What follows is a very brief bibliography of books and articles likely to be most useful for teachers who wish to obtain clearly written and practical information about the evaluation of instruction in a university or college setting. Nearly all the works listed contain extensive bibliographies for those who wish to pursue specific questions in more depth.

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