

Creating a Teaching Dossier

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What is a Dossier?

A teaching dossier presents an integrated summary of your teaching philosophy, approaches, accomplishments, and effectiveness. It contains documents and materials that provide evidence of the scope and quality of your teaching practice (Seldin et al., 2010). A teaching dossier is grounded in a strong teaching philosophy statement that describes *what* your fundamental beliefs are about teaching and learning, *why* you hold these values and beliefs, and *how* you translate these claims into practice. The teaching philosophy statement should become the thesis around which the dossier is built, providing a framework for the presentation of evidence and exemplary materials (Schonwetter et al., 2002). A dossier highlights the teaching practices you implement that support the key claims made in your teaching philosophy (see Table 1), and provides strong evidence of the effectiveness of these teaching strategies and approaches (see Tables 2). A teaching dossier should be presented as an organized, integrated and cohesive document that provides a critically reflective narrative of your teaching experience.

Why Prepare a Teaching Dossier?

Teaching dossiers capture the inherent complexities associated with teaching and learning. They provide an opportunity for instructors to assemble robust and accurate evidence of their teaching approaches, accomplishments and effectiveness, based on multiple sources of information (Knapper and Wright, 2001). Teaching dossiers are often used in tenure and promotion processes, annual performance reviews, teaching awards programs, and as requirements for academic hiring processes (Seldin et al., 2010). Perhaps most importantly, preparing a dossier provides a valuable opportunity for continued reflection, professional development, growth and improvement related to your teaching and learning practices.

How to Prepare a Teaching Dossier (adapted from Seldin et al., 2010)

1. Determine what purpose your dossier will serve (i.e. tenure and promotion, employment application, teaching awards package), as well as the intended audience (e.g. self, search committee, review committee, administrators).
2. Summarize teaching responsibilities including courses currently and recently taught, and other teaching-related activities.
3. Create a teaching philosophy statement that describes why you do what you do in your teaching practice. This is typically presented in a 1-2 page reflective summary based on some of the following questions (see also Table 3):
 - What are my beliefs about teaching and learning? Why do I hold these beliefs (drawing upon scholarship and/or past experience)? What are the key claims I make about my teaching? What are my strengths and accomplishments?
 - What do I believe about the role of the teacher, and of the learner?

- What does good teaching mean to me? What does good teaching look like in my discipline, and/or institution?
 - How do my actions and strategies as a teacher reflect my beliefs and support the claims I make about my teaching?
 - What has been the impact of my teaching (e.g. on myself, the learners, the teaching and learning community at the University of Calgary, and the wider academic community)? What difference has been made, and how do I know? What methods do I use to evaluate the impact of my teaching?
 - How and why have my teaching approaches evolved overtime? How have I demonstrated a commitment to continuous growth and improvement?
 - What are my future goals and aspirations related to teaching and learning?
4. Prepare statements and compile support documentation to inform readers of the nature and extent of your teaching activities and accomplishments, as well as to provide evidence of the claims made in your teaching philosophy statement. Evidence, which will come from yourself and others, may include student evaluations of teaching, example student work, sample course outlines, assignments and assessment strategies, conference presentations on teaching, letters of support from peers, administrators, and students (see Table 2).
 5. Order items and create a table of contents. The contents, order and presentation of the dossier should reflect its intended purpose and audience.
 6. Present the dossier as an organized, integrated, narrative about your teaching philosophy, approaches, accomplishments, and effectiveness. Dossiers are typically 8 to 12 pages in length, excluding the appendices. The body of the teaching dossier should consist of summaries, rather than raw data (Knapper and Wright, 2001). Evidence is most often presented in its entirety in the appendix. Throughout the body of the dossier, references are made to artefacts in the appendix that best illustrate your key claims and beliefs about teaching and learning.

Table 1: Framework for Aligning a Dossier

Claims and Beliefs	Strategies and Approaches	Evidence
What are the key beliefs that you hold related to teaching and learning? What are the key claims that you make about your teaching?	What teaching and learning methodologies, strategies and approaches do you use that support these key claims?	What sources of documentation and materials provide evidence of your teaching and learning methodologies, strategies and approaches? What data and documentation provide evidence of the impact and effectiveness of your approaches? How does this evidence align to the key claims you make about your teaching?
<i>I encourage learners to be critically reflective and believe that students best synthesize new knowledge by being provided opportunities to uncover and examine their assumptions and beliefs.</i>	<i>Weekly on-line reflective learning journals One-page reflective summaries for course projects and papers</i>	<i>Assignment description for online-reflective learning journals Student course evaluation comments related to the development of their ability for critical reflection Exemplary student submissions</i>

Table 2: Sample Sections and Items Contained in a Teaching Dossier*

Sections	Description
Teaching responsibilities	Summary of courses currently and recently taught including course code, title, enrolment, graduate/undergraduate course, required/elective. May also include undergraduate and graduate supervisory roles.
Teaching philosophy	1-2 page reflective summary of your teaching beliefs, strategies and approaches, and brief examples of how these have been put into practice.
Teaching methodologies and materials	An overview of your teaching strategies, and a descriptive summary of sample materials created to support student learning (e.g. assignment descriptions for essays, lab workbooks and reports, field work, projects, creative work, textbooks, learning objects, course websites, learning technologies). Full examples may be placed in an appendix.
Curriculum revisions and/or pedagogical innovations	An overview of new or revised courses, materials, assignments, and assessments. Highlights of pedagogical innovations implemented and evaluated to enhance teaching and learning.
Representative syllabi	An overview of how your course design strategies and approaches reflect your teaching beliefs and approaches. Complete versions of sample syllabi may be placed in an appendix.
Documentation of teaching improvement activities	An overview of engagement in professional development activities related to teaching and learning (e.g. programs, certificates, workshops, conferences).
Engagement in the scholarship of teaching and learning (SoTL)	An overview of engagement in scholarly inquiry and dissemination related to teaching and learning in post-secondary education (e.g. conference presentations, publications, workshops).
Educational service and leadership	An overview of engagement in educational service and leadership opportunities including teaching and learning committees, advisory committees, task forces, curriculum committees, and academic administrative roles.
Teaching goals and improvement	Identify short and long-term goals related to teaching that demonstrate a commitment to continuous improvement.
Student feedback and course evaluations	An overview of formative feedback, student comments, and summative ratings that support claims made. Ratings are often presented in a table within the body of the dossier (e.g. year, course code, title, number of students, mean score, and department mean score, if available). Full course evaluation scores, student comments, and other formative evaluation strategies and feedback may be placed in the appendix.
Peer observation and review of teaching	Excerpts from observations and reviews of teaching practice and support materials. Full reports may be placed in an appendix.
Teaching awards and recognition	A summary of teaching awards and recognition received. May also include formal letters of recognition and support from Deans, Chairs or students. External invitations to speak or teach based on one's teaching reputation.
Evidence of student learning and success	Samples of student work that evidence teaching claims. May include aggregate pre/post scores and/or successive drafts of papers, evidence of students influenced by your teaching (e.g. career placement and progression, graduate school admission), student publications and conference presentations prepared under guidance and supervision, student collaborations related to the SoTL. Statements from colleagues from post-requisite courses and/or other institutions where students have been accepted for graduate work.
Appendix	Complete documentation to support statements of accomplishment included throughout dossier as indicated above (e.g. course outlines, assignment descriptions, course materials, examples of student work, course evaluation results, peer observation reports, SoTL publications).

*Adapted from Seldin et al., 2010; CAUT, 2007; Knapper and Wright, 2001

Table 3: Framework for Developing a Teaching Philosophy Statement (TPS)

A TPS is generally structured as follows: an introductory statement of your beliefs regarding teaching and learning; a discussion of discipline-specific teaching strategies which demonstrate how these beliefs are put into practice; future teaching goals which highlight a commitment to continuous improvement; and, finally a conclusion which highlights two or three main points summarizing the TPS. Based on the key components of a TPS identified by Schonwetter et al. (2002), you can begin to organize and align the *what, why* and *how* of your TPS as follows.

TPS Component	What? and Why?	How ?	Goals
	Beliefs related to teaching and learning, including philosophical and theoretical foundations of why you hold these beliefs	Teaching and learning approaches implemented that reflect beliefs, including present actions and evidence of past growth and development	Planned future growth and development
Definitions and beliefs of teaching and learning: beliefs about teaching and learning within the post-secondary context, and of your discipline			
Views of the learner and student development: personal beliefs about the role of learner, and how best to promote student development and success			
Student-Teacher Relationship: personal strengths, goals and expectations regarding the role of the teacher and the learner, as well as the interactions and relationships there within			
Teaching Methods & Strategies: personal views related to effective teaching methods, assessment strategies for your discipline, as well as personal skills and strengths			
Impact: strategies used to evaluate teaching effectiveness and impact on student learning			

References

- Canadian Association of University Teachers (CAUT). (2007). *CAUT Teaching Dossier*. Canadian Association of University Teachers, Ottawa, Ontario.
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- Schonwetter, D.J., Sokal, L., Friesen, M., & Taylor, L.K. (2002). Teaching philosophies reconsidered: A conceptual model for the development and evaluation of teaching philosophy statements. *International Journal for Academic Development*, 7(1), 83-97.
- Seldin, P., Miller, J. E., & Seldin, C. A. (2010). *The teaching portfolio: A practical guide to improved performance and promotion/tenure decisions*. John Wiley & Sons.