

Teaching Matters: Developing Teaching Dossiers to Showcase Teaching Success and Competency

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Teaching Matters: Developing Teaching Dossiers to Showcase Teaching Success and Competency

Summary

Throughout academia, the value of developing a strong CV is pervasive, while teaching dossiers can be overlooked. Furthermore, though partaking in a teaching assistantship is often required, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are not always mentored in developing teaching-related skills, or in understanding their importance in future career success. Considering that the skills GTAs gain through teaching contribute significantly to their development of discipline-based expertise and presentation skills (Seldin et al., 2010), and that faculty appointments typically include a 40% teaching load, it is apparent that this problem poses a major challenge. GTAs and junior faculty are often unsure how to articulate and qualify their teaching experience, and appointment committees seeking demonstrated skill and excellence can not find adequate evidence. Finally, in an era of increased focus on research skills and productivity over teaching, it is increasingly important to find ways to promote a campus culture that is supportive of teaching. Fortunately, well-defined teaching philosophies support students, faculty and administrators in viewing teaching as a valuable scholarly activity, and promote a deep commitment to teaching as well as professional and personal growth (Goodyear & Allchin, 1998).

Teaching dossiers offer an opportunity to convey a teaching philosophy by cataloguing concrete evidence and accomplishments supporting the scope and quality of teaching experience (Sidhu, 2015). The development process itself is useful for promoting self-reflection and growth (Foote & Vermette, 2001; Sidhu, 2015), as well as enhancing the quality of teaching (Sidhu, 2015), while the final product is a necessary portion of academic hiring/promotion decisions (Seldin et al., 2010). This workshop seeks to support participants in (1) understanding the importance of teaching and creating early career dossiers (Foote and Vermette, 2001); and (2) outlining teaching dossier content and structure (Foote and Vermette, 2001; Seldin, Miller, and Seldin, 2010; Sidhu, 2015) while focusing on critical reflective activities (Sidhu, 2015) to promote dossier content generation.

Keywords

teaching dossiers; teaching philosophy statements

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Teaching Matters: Developing Teaching Dossiers to Showcase Teaching Success and Competency

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SUMMARY

Throughout academia, the value of developing a strong CV is pervasive, while teaching dossiers can be overlooked. Furthermore, though partaking in a teaching assistantship is often required, graduate teaching assistants (GTAs) are not always mentored in developing teaching-related skills, or in understanding their importance in future career success. Considering that the skills GTAs gain through teaching contribute significantly to their development of discipline-based expertise and presentation skills (Seldin et al., 2010), and that faculty appointments typically include a 40% teaching load, it is apparent that this problem poses a major challenge. GTAs and junior faculty are often unsure how to articulate and qualify their teaching experience, and appointment committees seeking demonstrated skill and excellence can not find adequate evidence. Finally, in an era of increased focus on research skills and productivity over teaching, it is increasingly important to find ways to promote a campus culture that is supportive of teaching. Fortunately, well-defined teaching philosophies support students, faculty and administrators in viewing teaching as a valuable scholarly activity, and promote a deep commitment to teaching as well as professional and personal growth (Goodyear & Allchin, 1998).

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KEYWORDS: teaching dossiers; teaching philosophy statements

LEARNING OUTCOMES

By the end of this workshop, participants will be able to:

- Describe the main components of teaching dossiers and philosophy statements.
- Create an organized outline of teaching accomplishments that will guide the layout of the final document.
- Reflect upon key aspects of teaching experience that influence academic hiring.

REFERENCE SUMMARIES

Foote, C. J., & Vermette, P. J. (2001). Teaching portfolio 101: Implementing the teaching portfolio in introductory courses. *Journal of Instructional Psychology*, 28, 31–37.

While written from the perspective of training teachers, this paper emphasizes the rationale for implementing teaching portfolio development in early career stages. The authors emphasize the importance of dossiers for students in becoming reflective practitioners and gaining contextualized field experience. This sentiment is expressed throughout the workshop as it is aimed at graduate students and junior faculty who are presumably at the outset of their teaching careers.

This paper notes the use of portfolios in hiring instructors, key components that demonstrate teaching proficiency, and questions that promote instructor reflection. A final topic addressed in this paper is the importance of field experiences to developing a strong dossier. This content is emphasized in the dossier component and wrap-up sections of the workshop where participants are encouraged to seek out opportunities specific to developing dossier weaknesses.

Goodyear, G. E., & Allchin, D. (1998). Statements of teaching philosophy. *To Improve the Academy*, 17, 103–122.

This paper targets the rationale behind developing clearly articulated teaching philosophy statements. They specify that teaching philosophy statements are essential to creating and maintaining a campus culture supportive of teaching and are beneficial for students, faculty, and administrators in both public (administrative decision making) and personal fashions (self reflection and clarification). They explore the process of how to develop a teaching philosophy statement and questions to ask (underscored in worksheets) to get started thinking about and clarifying one's perspective. They also provide support for readers in evaluating teaching philosophy statements. Instructors may use this article as pre-reading for participants to support the discussion following the philosophy example activity.

Seldin, P., Miller, J. E., Seldin, C. A. (2010). *The teaching portfolio* (4th ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

This book is a clear and comprehensive review of teaching dossiers and their use in the promotion/tenure process as well as guiding self-reflection to improve teaching. The content on dossier sections was particularly useful in developing content for this workshop. The book targets an extensive range of topics which are far beyond the necessary understanding for junior faculty and GTAs though is no doubt an excellent reference for further learning.

Sidhu, N. S. (2015). The teaching portfolio as a professional development tool for anaesthetists. *Anaesthesia Intensive Care* 43, 328–334.

Sidhu explores the teaching portfolio in the context of practicing anaesthesia physicians. She emphasizes its importance in professional development through self reflection, and provides insight on its use outside of academia, which may be important for those participants looking to move into clinical work. A proposed content outline for a teaching portfolio for clinicians is also included, which was adapted using other resources for this workshop. While not specific to the academic case, this paper underscores the importance of setting a discipline-specific focus for a teaching dossier.

CONTENT AND ORGANIZATION

DURATION (MIN)	SUBJECT	ACTIVITY	PURPOSE
10	Introduction and Workshop Objectives	<p><i>Think Pair Share</i></p> <p>Provide a session outline or list of objectives to the group.</p> <p>Ask participants to reflect on the following questions, then have them share their thoughts with a partner.</p> <p>Questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why does teaching matter? • When would your evidence of teaching success be used? • What transferable skills do you develop/demonstrate through teaching? 	Discuss the purpose and relevance of teaching, and identify the skills acquired through teaching.
30	Dossier Components	<p><i>Interactive and Didactic Lecture</i></p> <p>Pose the question, “What are the similarities and differences between teaching dossiers and CVs?”</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The key difference is that dossiers focus on teaching accomplishments with expanded explanations, while the CV provides a briefer overview of all academic accomplishments. • Highlight how dossiers are used in academia. <p>Emphasize the value in starting a dossier early in one’s career. The document continues to develop as one acquires more teaching experiences.</p> <p>Use Seldin et al. (2010) for the content of this section of the workshop.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the six major components of a dossier (teaching philosophy statement, professional record, scholarship, professional development, formal evaluations/assessments, and appendices) • Facilitators could choose to illustrate examples of each component using PowerPoint slides. 	<p>Identify the key differences between a teaching dossier and a CV.</p> <p>Provide a common starting place among participants for the design of dossiers.</p> <p>Establish common terms used to discuss dossiers.</p>

		<p>Ask participants to brainstorm the types of teaching roles/activities that could be documented in each of the relevant sections.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Identify the skills acquired through teaching that are beneficial to future academic and other career roles. • Encourage participants to think about how they might acquire additional teaching experiences in these areas after the workshop. 	
30	Teaching Philosophy Statement Examples	<p><i>Philosophy Example Activity</i></p> <p>In small groups, ask participants to read and discuss example teaching philosophy statements.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Find discipline-specific statements online or request colleagues/peers to “donate” their own statement for the purposes of the workshop. <p>Ask the participants the following questions adapted from Goodyear & Allchin (1998):</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What is this instructor’s teaching style? • Do they gain your confidence or respect? • Is the statement discipline-specific? • What do you remember most about the statement? <p>Summarize the answers on the whiteboard, or chart paper for all participants to view.</p> <p>Great statements are specific and genuine, provide concrete examples of teaching and are contextualized to the discipline. Refer to Goodyear & Allchin (1998) for additional characteristics that participants miss.</p> <p><i>Note:</i> “How To” Guides for writing teaching philosophy statement are typically available on Teaching and Learning Centre websites. Facilitators could research the guidelines offered by the Centre at their home institution or beyond.</p>	Identify the key characteristics of teaching philosophy statements that make them effective descriptions of teaching abilities.

15	Establishing Disciplinary Context in a Teaching Philosophy	<p><i>Paired discussion</i></p> <p>Emphasize that good teaching philosophy statements are grounded in disciplinary context. To help participants focus on their disciplines, ask them to verbally expand upon one of the following listed prompts with a partner. Ideally participants should expand with specific examples that they could later include in their draft philosophy statement.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “I believe the role of a university instructor is...” • “My goal as an instructor of first year students is to...” • “Three challenges for undergraduates in my field include...” 	Provide a starting point to participants for drafting teaching philosophy statements.
30	Dossiers in Promotion and Hiring	<p><i>Insight from Guest Speaker(s)</i></p> <p>If possible, invite 1-3 guest speakers (e.g., departmental chair, recent hire, selection committee member) to share their perspectives on the relevance of teaching to promotion and hiring, and the value of teaching dossiers.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Request that speakers prepare a short statement/outline of their thoughts and be prepared to answer questions from participants. 	<p>Provide a context for the use and value of teaching dossiers in a particular discipline or department.</p> <p>Offer an opportunity for participants to ask someone with expertise questions about academic positions.</p>
5	Tips for Success & Wrap-up	<p>Summarize major points from workshop underscoring importance of teaching dossiers and their maintenance.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Synthesize the key strategies for creating/polishing a dossier. • Encourage participants to search for new teaching opportunities. <p>Provide the worksheets in Appendices A and B to participants as a takeaway resource. The worksheets allow GTAs and faculty to continue reflecting on their teaching experiences and to synthesize those experiences in a dossier.</p>	Motivate participants to continue working on their statements and dossiers after the workshop ends.
Total Time: 120 minutes			

PRESENTATION STRATEGIES

This session will focus on collaboratively developing information through large group discussions on the relevant nature of teaching dossiers and competencies, and paired discussions on philosophy statement content to create actionable strategies for creating and improving a dossier. These activities are interspersed with didactic lecture to convey factual/necessary content so that all participants, regardless of level/teaching exposure, can engage with the topic. Individual reflective activities are also included to help participants apply new knowledge to create a dossier for the first time, or spark the development of a fresh perspective on teaching dossiers and philosophies for the seasoned veteran. It also includes the opportunity for a guest speaker or speakers to participate in the discussion surrounding the importance of teaching, and the relevance of dossiers to hiring and promotion from the perspective of faculty or administrators experienced in the area.

Pre-Workshop Preparation

- Invite and organize guest speakers who are involved in hiring/promotion/tenure.
- Identify and reserve a workshop space to suit ~30-45 participants. Ensure that the space includes a whiteboard, whiteboard markers, projector, and computer.
- Prepare PowerPoint slides based on order of content and activities.
- Identify 4 or 5 examples of teaching philosophy statements for the discipline focus of the workshop. Search online or ask colleagues/peers to “donate” statements. Ensure that there are enough copies for small groups to share during the workshop.
- Make copies of the takeaway worksheets for participants.

Web Resources for Facilitators

“Writing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement,” University Center for the Advancement of Teaching, Ohio State University, <http://ucat.osu.edu/professional-development/teaching-portfolio/philosophy/>

“The Teaching Philosophy/Statement,” Center for Research on Learning and Teaching, University of Michigan, <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpts>

“A Guide to Constructing Your Western Teaching Dossier,” Teaching Support Centre, Western University, http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/resources/selected_teaching_topics/teaching_dossiers/guide_to_constructing/index.html

APPENDIX A

Teaching Philosophy Statements and Dossiers: Getting Started (Worksheet for GTAs)

Use this sheet to reflect on your experiences as a teaching assistant. The generated content will translate to your dossier and philosophy statement.

PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS: CONTEXTUALIZE YOUR TEACHING

These questions help to establish your personal teaching context:

- What topics/subject areas have you taught? (include discipline/level)
- What was the format? (e.g., lecture, laboratory, tutorial, developing assignments/assessments, grading, office hours, etc.)
- What are the characteristics of students you typically teach? (e.g., undergraduate, graduate, professional, international, etc.)
- What size are your classes/labs/tutorials? (e.g., <10, <25, <50, <100, 100+)

Now consider the following reflection questions:

- When you have taught in the past, what has worked and why?
- How do subjects and teaching formats align? Why do you choose one method over another to teach effectively?
- What specific teaching choices do you make to meet to the needs of different student groups and class sizes?

PHILOSOPHY STATEMENTS: CONSIDER YOUR ROLE AND EFFECTIVENESS AS AN INSTRUCTOR

- What does “good teaching” mean to you? Think about a professor/teacher that you admire. What teaching choices did they make and how were those methods effective for you as a learner?
- What is the role of the instructor? Can you think of a metaphor that fits your teaching approach?
- What is unique about your teaching style?
- What is your classroom like? What types of behaviors and learning do you encourage? (e.g., hands on, discussion, independent problem solving, etc.)
- How do students learn?
- How can you tell when you are being effective as a teacher?
- How do you know your students have learned something?

TIPS FOR BUILDING ELEMENTS OF A DOSSIER

- **Build a Professional Instructor Record**
 - Offer to guest lecture in courses when possible. Use labs, tutorials, and other interactions with students as opportunities to mentor them.

- **Formal Evaluations/Assessments**
 - Ask for feedback on your teaching from professors (e.g., a written letter of observation), and from your students at the end of the course. If your department does not facilitate formal GTA evaluations, consider creating a formal one to share with your students.
- **Document Professional Development**
 - Attend teaching workshops, become a peer mentor, look for educational leadership opportunities. (Note: pay attention to departmental and campus wide emails that invite these experiences). Keep track of these opportunities and document them as they happen.
- **Scholarship on Teaching**
 - Become familiar with scholarship on teaching and learning (SoTL) in your discipline. Consider attending teaching-focused conferences. Determine ways to get involved if research on teaching/learning is happening in your department/Faculty.
- **Appendices**
 - Amass evidence of your teaching successes. Include, for example, novel assignments or activities that you developed, certificates achieved, letters of observation, and the course outlines for courses you taught or contributed to in some way.

SKILL DEVELOPMENT

You should be able to articulate the kinds of skills you gain through teaching. These skills are important for academic jobs but are also transferable beyond the institution. Select skills from the following list and write one piece of evidence supporting its development from your teaching practice: “*evaluation, organization, supervision, presentation, communication, collaboration, time management, problem solving, creativity, design, leadership.*”

Skill	Evidence
<i>e.g. Communication</i>	<i>Work with students in large classroom (~100), small groups in lab (~10) and one-on-one help to address their individualized needs/concerns</i>

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/resources/selected_teaching_topics/teaching_dossiers/guide_to_constructing/index.html
- <http://ucat.osu.edu/professional-development/teaching-portfolio/philosophy/>
- <http://www.crlt.umich.edu/tstrategies/tstpts>

APPENDIX B

Teaching Dossiers and Philosophy Statements – Making Progress (Worksheet for Junior Faculty)

Developing a strong teaching dossier is important for academic hiring and promotion decisions, and enhancing your quality of teaching. By developing and maintaining your dossier, you will effectively communicate your teaching accomplishments skills and aptitudes.

YOUR DOSSIER

Teaching Philosophy Statement

- What courses do you typically teach? And to whom? (e.g., third year undergraduate physiology)
- What methods do you employ when teaching and why? How do you know that they work? Does this change with class size?
- What is your goal for your students?
- Can you describe what “good teaching” means to you? How do you personally model good teaching?

Professional Record as an Educator

- Describe your teaching experiences beyond the classroom (e.g., developed teaching resources/technology, mentored undergraduate/graduate students, led or contributed to curriculum changes, facilitated teaching workshops for graduate students/colleagues, presented on teaching practices through invitation or at a conference etc.).

Formal Evaluations/Assessments

- Include summaries of all student evaluations of your courses. Select high-quality comments from students to highlight aspects of your teaching.
- Consider asking a colleague to observe your teaching and provide a formal letter of feedback to include in the dossier.
- Once marks are submitted, consider asking one or two of your students to provide a formal letter of feedback on your teaching.
- Be sure to list any teaching awards or nominations in this section of your dossier.

Documenting Professional Development

- Have you attended teaching-focused conferences? Be sure to list them.
- What workshops and courses on teaching have you completed? Remember to keep track of keep track of workshop titles and dates.
 - Does your institution offer formal training on teaching? Some Teaching and Learning Centres offer Certificates for completing this training.
 - Think about completing the internationally recognized teacher training program known as the Instructional Skills Workshop (www.iswnetwork.org)
 - What professional development opportunities are offered in your home department or faculty?

Scholarship on Teaching and Learning (SoTL)

- Describe the research you do or would like to do on teaching and learning in your discipline.
- If you are thinking about changing or implementing something new in one of your courses, consider how you might evaluate the outcome in a scholarly way.

Appendices – the “evidence” section

- Consider including examples that reflect your approaches to teaching (e.g., sample novel assessments or active learning activities).
- Remember to include recent course syllabi.

SUPPORTING THE DEVELOPMENT OF GRADUATE STUDENTS AS INSTRUCTORS

In-Course Opportunities for GTAs

- Do your GTAs know what the departmental expectations are regarding their role as instructors? What teaching-related responsibilities do you expect from the GTAs you work with?
- Ask GTAs about the skills they are particularly interested in developing (e.g., evaluation, management, organization, presentation, collaboration, design). What teaching opportunities can you personally offer to students that might help them with developing these skills?
- Consider asking a GTA to present a guest lecture in one of your courses. If possible, provide them with a written letter of observation that describes their strengths as an instructor. Identify the skills they develop/gain through guest lecturing.
- Ask your GTAs for ideas when developing new projects or assignments for your courses.

Campus-Wide Opportunities for GTAs

- What opportunities/resources are available on your campus? Consider encouraging your GTAs to seek out mentors, Teaching and Learning Centres, departmental training, and membership on committees/councils.

Mentorship Opportunities for Faculty

- What areas of expertise do you have with regards to teaching that could be used to support GTAs? How do you define your roles as a supervisor/instructor/mentor?
- What do you think is the most under addressed area GTA teaching/training? What could you do to help address the issue?
- What does mentorship look like between you and your graduate students? What role do senior graduate students play in mentoring junior colleagues?
- What does “good” mentoring look like? Can you come up with concrete examples?

REMEMBER: *Helping your graduate students develop their teaching skills further develops your own skills as an instructor! Be sure to include mentoring efforts in your teaching dossier.*

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

- http://www.uwo.ca/tsc/resources/selected_teaching_topics/teaching_dossiers/guide_to_constructing/index.html
- <http://ucats.osu.edu/professional-development/teaching-portfolio/philosophy/>
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