

TEACHING

Dossier: A Guide

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INTRODUCTION

Faculty members at the University of Alberta are responsible as scholars “active in teaching, in research, and in service” and are evaluated in terms of their performance in these three categories (Faculty Agreement, Article 7.01 – 7.09). In view of the University’s mandated multifaceted teaching evaluation policy (GFC Policy Manual, section 111.2) a Teaching Dossier may provide the basis for the category “input from self.” This Guide, in conjunction with *A Guide to Evaluate Teaching*¹, is designed to help document achievements in teaching and to present evidence of these in the form of a Teaching Dossier².

WHAT IS A TEACHING DOSSIER?

A Teaching Dossier is a document intended to facilitate the presentation of a faculty member’s teaching achievements and major strengths for self-assessment and interpretation by others. The process of developing the Dossier contributes to good teaching by stimulating self-reflection, self-analysis, and self-development. The Teaching Dossier is a **yearly record** and a **cumulative record** of teaching activities and results. The **yearly record** is a key document designed to help faculty members review their teaching philosophy, goals, and strategies and organize material for inclusion in the Annual Report under the “teaching” section. Ultimately, **yearly records** become a **cumulative record** helpful for the preparation of documents requiring historical information (nominations for teaching awards, applications for research leaves, teaching development grants, positions, tenure, promotion, etc.).

The Dossier, a three to eight page document with appendices, reflects a number of related areas of inquiry. These may vary according to the specific needs of individual teaching units, though research on dossier preparation agrees that because the accent of the Dossier is placed on a compilation of materials that make the case for the instructor’s effectiveness, the following categories play a significant role: (a) a statement regarding the faculty member’s teaching philosophy, goals, and strategies; (b) a description of teaching (planning, preparing, and teaching courses; assessing student learning; and giving feedback); (c) an evaluation of teaching accomplishments; and (d) suggestions regarding possible changes for future teaching.

A typical Dossier will consist of four sections:

- Approach to Teaching
- Teaching Contributions
- Reflections on and Assessment of Teaching
- Supporting Documentation

HOW TO PROCEED

The following offer a wide range of options for documenting your teaching and may be included in your Dossier³. In making a selection appropriate to your own case, consider the unique elements of your teaching style, the subject matter you teach, and other concerns (such as the type, level, and number of students in your courses). If a particular activity has not been listed but is relevant to your teaching responsibilities, include it.

1. Ideally, you should begin gathering and retaining information which pertains to your teaching from the first day of your first teaching assignment. When making decisions about what to retain and what to discard, remember that it is better to err on the side of saving too much than destroying material that may later prove useful.

Keep copies of all items referred to in your teaching documentation such as examination outlines, original copies of course evaluations (unless they are kept by your unit), letters from chairpersons and students, samples of students’ work, etc. These materials will not necessarily be included in your Teaching Dossier but should be retained in case original evidence is required. There should be a reference in your Teaching Dossier informing the reader that such

¹ *A Guide to Evaluate Teaching* (1994) is available through the Campus Wide Information System (CWIS) and in the Resource Room, University Teaching Services.

² In Britain and the United States a Teaching Dossier is often called a Teaching Portfolio.

³ University Teaching Services has a collection of materials detailing the development of teaching documentation as well as model Teaching Dossiers. These may serve as useful supplements to the Guide.

materials are available.

You may wish to include as an appendix a few representative samples of materials that illustrate accomplishments referred to in your Teaching Dossier (e.g., an exemplary course outline, unsolicited letters from students, or an outline of a particularly innovative assignment). A one-page reflection on the included samples enhances their value.

2. It might be helpful to consult your department's mission statement, the University's mission statement, the University's Academic Plan, the sections on teaching in the Faculty Agreement, the GFC Policy Manual, and other relevant documents, to identify the goals, priorities, and expectations of the University concerning excellence in teaching.
3. Examine the Teaching Contributions in section 2 and select those areas and items which are most applicable to your teaching; list accomplishments in each area.
4. Summarize your teaching contributions. Include graduate and undergraduate teaching and your contributions to curriculum and course developments. Highlight your teaching strengths.
5. If you have an item that cuts across teaching and another category (e.g., service), select the one where it fits the best and cross reference it in the other category.

.. PRESENTATION
OF A FACULTY
MEMBER'S
TEACHING
ACHIEVEMENTS
AND MAJOR
STRENGTHS ...

APPROACH TO TEACHING

1. 1 *Philosophy*
It is useful to begin with a discipline-related statement outlining your teaching philosophy, your views about students, learning, and teaching. Examples of statements of objectives from specific course descriptions may be included. You may choose to note the changes you expect or are trying to accomplish in your teaching, and how your courses contribute to the students' achievements in their university programs.
1. 2 *Teaching Goals, Strategies, and Evaluation Methods*
Self-reflection on the consistency among your teaching philosophy, goals, learning objectives, teaching strategies, and ways to evaluate students is helpful. Examples of materials to include are found in Appendix A.

TEACHING CONTRIBUTIONS

Consider the following items for your Teaching Dossier. To assist the reader of the Dossier, elaborate on selected items.

2. 1 *Teaching Responsibilities*
See Appendix B for examples.

2. 2 *Supervising and Advising Students*
To allow for an assessment of the extent of your contribution in this area, you might wish to provide data describing the average supervision load in your department. See Appendix C for documentation.
2. 3 *Activities Undertaken to Improve Teaching and Learning*
Professional development comprises all steps taken to improve an instructor's effectiveness. See Appendix D for examples.
2. 4 *Committee Service regarding Teaching and Teaching Issues*
A variety of activities do not take place in classrooms but do provide important support for teaching. Some of these departmental, faculty and University-wide activities which contribute to strengthening teaching are described in Appendix E.
2. 5 *Publications and Professional Contributions*
This section includes your achievements in developing for a wider audience the theory and practice of teaching. Publications on teaching, papers, seminars, and workshop presentations may be included. See Appendix F for examples.

REFLECTIONS ON AND ASSESSMENT OF TEACHING

3. 1 *Documentation of Results of Teaching*
See Appendix G for examples of the different types of documentation.
3. 2 *Reflections on Teaching and Student Learning*
You may provide summary statements that reflect your assessment of the effectiveness of your teaching and the resulting student learning. Here you may include background information that provides the context for the previous section (e.g., 8a.m. class, inappropriate classroom, too cold). Teaching strategies that worked well and those that perhaps did not work out as well may be included. Describe what changes, if any, you plan to make in your teaching.
3. 3 *Future Plans*
Consider including both short-term (within one year) and long-term (two to five years) goals related to further development of your teaching skills (e.g., Short-term: Over the next year I plan to convert my lectures in Course XYZ into case studies and to experiment with small group learning. Long-term: Over the next three years I plan to develop an interactive video program for first year students in Course ABC and develop a

research project comparing two teaching strategies: traditional lecture approach and problem-based learning).

SUPPORTING DOCUMENTATION

Provide a table of contents of the documentation which you have selected to support your accomplishments.

Appendix A

1. 2 *Teaching Goals, Strategies, and Evaluation Methods*

- Course materials, special notes, handouts, problem sets, laboratory books, computer manuals, portfolio of student work, etc. relevant to your teaching methods.
- Teaching methods (e.g., lecture, small group discussion, problem-solving, collaborative inquiry, critical thinking pedagogy, problem-based learning, case studies, project-based, student presentations).
- Procedures used to assess or evaluate student learning. Arrangements made to accommodate needs of special students.
- Teaching developments undertaken (course design, curricular changes to include gender issues, student diversity, subject matter, methods of presentation, evaluation procedures, specially designed assignments, teaching methods geared to developing critical skills, as well as developments involving teaching resources such as films, computer materials, and other audio-visual material), and, where possible, evidence of the effectiveness and impact of the teaching developments you have undertaken.
- Research activities related to teaching and student learning.

Appendix B

2. 1 *Teaching Responsibilities*

- Titles and numbers of courses taught, including graduate, undergraduate, and reading courses. Indicate with an asterisk courses you have developed or substantially revised.
- Number of students in each course. Describe your workload including, where appropriate, the number of teaching assistants assigned to assist you in the course and the nature of their involvement.
- Details of other teaching activities such as seminars, advising students, supervision of a teaching or research practicum, athletic coaching, field placement supervision, and coaching in the performing arts.
- Teaching which has contributed to the achievement of awards, honours, and employment for students.

Appendix C

2. 2 *Supervising and Advising Students*

Documentation of supervision activity includes names of those supervised and the nature and the extent of the supervisory activity. It is also useful to indicate the outcome of the supervision (e.g., the thesis title and acceptance date, the citation information of a student publication, or the date and venue of a public performance).

- PhD thesis supervision (indicate whether supervisor or committee member).
- Master's thesis supervision (indicate whether supervisor or committee member).
- Honour's thesis supervision (indicate whether supervisor or committee member).
- Supervision of graduate and undergraduate independent study or directed readings.
- Advisement on program of study, courses, or career and professional advice.
- Supervision which has contributed to publications, exhibitions, performances, and conference presentations by students.

Appendix D

2. 3 *Activities Undertaken to Improve Teaching and Learning*

- Steps taken to assess and respond to general problems arising in a course, which may necessitate redesign or refocus of course content.
- Results of student ratings or questionnaires designed by you to solicit assessments of your teaching effectiveness.
- Description of efforts made to improve the classroom climate or your teaching methods. You may wish to consider items such as steps taken to ensure free and open participation and the comfort of all learners regardless of gender, ethnic origin, class, age, sexual orientation, or ability.
- Seminars, lectures, workshops, and conferences on teaching and learning approaches and techniques (internal and external) attended.

Appendix E

2. 4 *Committee Service regarding Teaching and Teaching Issues*

It may be useful to include details such as names of committees, dates, and the nature of your contribution.

- All activities concerned with teaching that you have undertaken as a member of a faculty, department, or cross disciplinary committee, sub-committee, *ad hoc* committee, or task force. Consider membership on General Faculties Council and its sub-committees; Senate; Board of Governors; AAS:UA; Library committees; University service units; Teaching and Scholarship committees;

SUMMARIZE

YOUR

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HIGHLIGHT

YOUR

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- Presidential committees; Advisory boards (examples: Academic Planning Committee, Council on Student Life, Committee for the Improvement of Teaching and Learning, Special Sessions Committee, Undergraduate Awards and Scholarship Committee, Undergraduate Teaching Awards Committee, University of Alberta Preview Days, and other committees working on academic policy, curriculum, review, planning, and implementation topics).
- Professional training, orientation, or development for teaching assistants.
 - Professional training, orientation, or development sessions for faculty, such as orientation sessions for new faculty, and sessions that introduce or raise consciousness about teaching techniques or technological developments.
 - Mentor Program
 - Peer Consultation Program
 - Teaching awards committees for full- and part-time instructors and teaching assistants.
 - Involvement in establishing, adjudicating, or administering awards or honours recognizing and celebrating student achievement.
 - Observing others teach as part of formal or informal evaluation and feedback regarding teaching effectiveness.
 - Accreditation committees.
 - Curriculum planning / review committees or task forces.
 - Program revision committees.
 - Organization of retreats and strategic planning sessions.
 - Development of department teaching resources such as a computer instruc-

tion project, a teaching materials resource centre, a reference map collection, and a visiting scholar program.

- Coordination of multi-section, sequenced, or inter-related courses.
- Other cross-University committees, standing or ad hoc, which examine teaching and learning matters.
- Use of your teaching materials by instructors in other departments, faculties, colleges, or universities.
- Involvement in program review of other teaching units.
- Workshops, seminars, or invited presentations within and outside of the University.
- Involvement in providing consultation or review to instructors in other units in improving teaching effectiveness.
- Development of widely-used student ratings of instruction or other assessment instruments.

Teaching involvement outside your unit.

Appendix F

2. 5 Publications and Professional Contributions

It is helpful to include information about the nature of your audience and your contribution.

- **Curriculum materials**
Details of published and unpublished curriculum materials, textbooks, workbooks, case studies, class notes, lab manuals, and other classroom materials which you have developed.
- **Research and professional contributions related to teaching**
Books (including chapters in books, edited books, and special issues of journals); articles (indicate whether refereed, solicited, or non-refereed); papers in conference proceedings (indicate whether refereed or non-

refereed); bibliographies; newsletters; unpublished conference papers; workshop presentations; and unpublished professional reports.

- **Funding related to teaching**
Internal and external teaching development grants, fellowships, and research grants received.

Appendix G

3. 1 Documentation of Results of Teaching

- Results of the multifaceted teaching evaluations (GFC Policy Manual, section 111.2).
- Results (statistics) and student comments from the GFC Universal Student Ratings of Instruction as well as the results of questions selected by your department, faculty, and you.
- Unsolicited letters from students; and solicited letters from students and teaching assistants.
- Feedback which has been initiated by groups of students.
- Objective indicators of student progress, where available (e.g., proficiency tests; examples of students' work "before" and "after"; students' standings on nation-wide tests).
- Peer evaluations or reviews based on visits to your classroom or on scrutiny of your course materials.
- Teaching awards received by you including departmental, faculty, and University of Alberta awards, and external awards (professional association, civic groups, nation-wide, and international teaching awards).

Nominations for awards also indicate your reputation as a teacher.

In preparation of this Guide we have consulted the following Canadian publications and wish to acknowledge their works:

Recording Teaching Accomplishments: A Dalhousie Guide to the Teaching Dossier
Carol O'Neil and Alan Wright, Office of Instructional Development and Technology, Halifax, 1992

Teaching Documentation Guide
Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning, York University, Toronto, December 1993.

The CAUT Guide to The Teaching Dossier. Its Preparation and Use
Bruce M. Shore et al., Canadian Association of University Teachers, revised 1986, reprinted 1991.

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If you have comments on the Guide or suggestions for future revisions, please contact
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