Gathering and using evidence to support a Teaching Excellence application

So, you think that you can teach?  So, prove it!

There is no doubt that the success of your Teaching Excellence application rests very heavily on the amount and quality of the supporting evidence that you can gather. Don’t just describe all the ‘great’ things that you do, you must also prove that you are a good teacher and gathering ‘great’ supporting evidence is the way to do it.

Put very simply, your application will not succeed unless there is copious evidence that you are a good teacher and that you are constantly striving to do better.

Getting started – be bold, be strategic and be patient!

1. Take on a conscious and dedicated intent to gather evidence. It won’t happen by accident!
2. Quickly overcome any reticence about hunting for good evidence. Don’t be shy!
3. Start gathering evidence soon. Start today!
4. Plan on gathering evidence over a period of 3-5 years. Think long term!
5. Consider applying for a VC Citation award as a first step towards applying for a Vice-Chancellor’s Award for Excellence in Teaching (VCAET) or Australian Learning and Teaching Council (ALTC) Teaching Excellence Award.
6. Consider applying for your Faculty based teaching excellence award as a first step towards applying for a VCAET or ALTC award.
7. Throughout the evidence gathering period, strive for any other discipline based recognition, including promotion, that reflects on either your teaching outcomes or the quality of the units in which you teach.
8. Create a website that meets your ongoing university needs and doubles as the potential website of ‘supporting materials that you use to supplement your teaching excellence application.
9. Use a teaching portfolio, or at least some systematic way, to store and organise the evidence that you gather.
10. Talk to your mentor about the examples on which you should concentrate.

Two fundamental sources of evidence and how to display

Evidence will essentially come in two broad sources: ‘what people say about you and your teaching’ (endorsements) and ‘information from documentary sources’. Depending upon the specific original source and your purpose, evidence can then be displayed in such ways as: verbal quotes (endorsements), textual quotes, examples (eg case studies or sample documents), figures, tables, models, maps, diagrams, illustrations and photos. You may also have other useful ways to display your discipline specific evidence.

Endorsements

Well chosen quotes are a powerful medium for supporting what you say about yourself. Here are some suggestions for getting maximum scope and value from endorsements:
• Save any positive but unsolicited emails or letters that students may send you;
• Maintain a relevant contact list so that when the time comes you can reasonably ask for an endorsement of your teaching abilities.
• Occasionally seek written feedback from supervisors on your teaching and/or the design of your units and assessment items – this could come from your annual management performance system (MPS) interview;
• Make a real effort to communicate with people in relevant industry - a dialogue with such people will often give you rich pickings for your evidence repository;
• Communicate regularly with ECU, state, national and international colleagues to maintain a network of potential people from whom you could gather endorsements when required;
• If you ever present at a conference, seminar series, colloquium or similar forum, ask for brief written feedback from the audience and store the comments.
• When using endorsement quotes use the author’s name and position if they give permission.
• References are a special form of endorsement and you need to supply two of these for the both the VCAET and AAUT schemes. Choose your referee wisely, coach them on the context of your application, keep them informed of your progress and make sure that they do not exceed the single A4 page limit when writing the application. Check the relevant guidelines for more details.

Domains of documentary evidence

This paper suggests that you gather documentary evidence in each of six domains.

1. Your teaching philosophy and application of current learning theory
   You need to show that you know about and can apply learning theory to your teaching.
2. Practical teaching methods
   You need to show that you have good practical teaching skills.
3. Quality course and/or unit documentation and resources
   Provide examples of the course and/or unit documents that you provide to students.
4. Data from surveys and student evaluations
   Use objective and subjective data that reflects on the success of you and your unit.
5. Past recognition of your teaching.
   Evidence of any teaching related award or reward that you have received.
6. Your PDRI quality review cycle
   Show that you use a quality improvement process.

Each of these will now be dealt with in more detail....

1. Your teaching philosophy and application of relevant learning theory
   • A well reasoned few paragraphs about your philosophy of teaching will be useful.
• A well reasoned few paragraphs on your understanding or interpretation of relevant learning theory and practices as they relate to your discipline will be useful. You might need to consider and show your understanding and application of any of the following: authentic learning, authentic assessment, work integrated learning, flexible learning, student centred learning, problem solving, constructivism and enquiry based learning. There may also be other learning methods particularly relevant to your discipline.

• Evidence that you are a consumer of the current literature on learning theory and that you attend relevant seminars, talks, workshops and conferences.

• Evidence that you participate in teaching and learning related PD.

• Extracts from any article that you have previously written about teaching in your discipline area will probably provide good strong supporting evidence for your application.

• Endorsements from others about your teaching philosophy and your understanding of learning theory will also add weight to your application.

2. Practical teaching methods (there may be some other methods unique to your discipline) If possible, use documentary evidence, embellished with endorsements, to show that you:

• Have a good grasp of the basic skills of teaching - such things as: presenting, explaining, sequencing, linking, questioning, reinforcing, rewarding and remediation methods;

• Are involved in designing courses, units and supporting resources;

• Produce quality assessment items that truly measure performance, align course content and assessment, understand group assessment dynamics, provide timely and meaningful feedback, cater for graduate attributes, mark fairly and that you cater for diversity and struggling students;

• Understand and successfully employ Engagement (capital E) practices in your unit/s. This means that there must be strong industry links including interaction both ways between students, staff and industry people;

• Authentic learning and work integrated learning are both relevant to Engagement and deserve mention here. Engagement is currently a high priority strategy at ECU, so don’t miss this one!

• Effectively foster and promote student-student, student-staff and student-content engagement; This is engagement with ‘a small e’ as distinct from Engagement (above).

• Use good practices and techniques when teaching large lecture classes;

• Employ productive, interesting and challenging small group activities;

• Use ‘ice-breaker’ activities to help students feel that that belong to a ‘community group’;

• Have a sound knowledge of online learning and participate successfully in online courses;

• Have expertise in any of: tutoring, demonstrating, practicum supervision, laboratory teaching and other discipline specific modes of facilitating student learning;

• Manage group projects and group assignment work fairly and successfully;

• Use technology and other teaching aids to enhance your teaching;

• Have empathy for students and are prepared to listen to student issues;

• Embed graduate attributes and their context in ECU courses and units;

• Are conscious of ‘students at risk’ and have a strategy to help these students;
• Seriously cater for all forms of diversity in your teaching;
• Participate in a peer mentoring scheme;
• Participate in team teaching, course and/or unit coordination and regular reviews;
• If you can show that because of your intervention student marks have improved (better grades) then you have good evidence that your teaching helps students to learn.

3. Quality course and/or unit documentation and resources

Critically review all your teaching materials and resources and from these you should be able to select a number that show best practice. Extracts from these could be used in your teaching excellence application but more likely as part of the supplementary materials that can be submitted as a complement to your application. Here are some areas that you might like to consider when choosing examples:

• Unit outlines and unit plans;
• Lecture note formats and topic schedules;
• Hard copy handout resource materials;
• Items stored on closed reserve in the university library;
• Electronic information resources - for example: PowerPoint slides, Internet accessible resources, Podcasts, recorded lectures, CDs, DVDs, and other online resources;
• Assessment items, marking rubrics, feedback formats and exam papers.

4. Data from reviews, surveys and evaluations

• Keep a record of all relevant end-of-semester Unit and Teaching Evaluation Instrument (UTEI) scores and comments.
• While you are at it, take great pains to note what the student feedback is telling you and feed these comments and suggestions into your PDRI quality review cycle.
• More specifically, show clear evidence that you use UTEI generated data from one semester to inform and improve the design and delivery of your unit/s in the following semester.
• Gather Course Experience Questionnaire (CEQ) data relevant to you, and your course/unit.
• Gather Graduate Destination Survey data relevant to you and your course/unit.
• Gather feedback from your own mid semester unit review with students.
• Seek ad hoc feedback throughout the semester – in writing if possible.
• Keep a record of any useful outcomes from your School course and unit review meetings.

5. Past recognition of your teaching

Show proof that you have won previous teaching awards, achieved promotional success and received other professional recognition. This recognition should be based at least partly on your
ability as a teacher, or for the quality of the units and the learning resources that you have designed and produced.

6. Your PDRI quality review cycle

Describe your ‘state of the art’ PDRI cycle and in so doing make a compelling case for your positive evolution as a quality teacher. This history of intent to improve and evidence that improvement has indeed occurred is particularly appealing to teaching award selection panels.

How to make best use of the evidence that you gather

Firstly, make sure that you have gathered plenty of excellent evidence as described in this paper! This evidence may be either complementary or supplementary to your main written application. To make your evidence clearly stand out from the body text, consider using a different font and font size, different text colour, text boxes or any other systematic method that works for you. Whatever you do, be consistent with the style that you use to present evidence and make certain that it is not so crowded or ‘busy’ that it detracts from overall readability! Keep in mind that the evidence you provide should both look good and confirm what you say about the success of your teaching.

You will need to decide which evidence goes into the main application and which evidence you should include in the separate ‘supporting materials’ submission. This ‘supplementary materials’ submission is optional. For an AAUT application your supplementary materials can be in the form of hard copy, video, CD files or website. In fact, you are allowed to produce any TWO forms of supplementary materials. It is recommended that you produce the hard copy version (10 page limit) for quick and easy access by selectors and that you also add a matching website for good measure. You do need to read the specific VCAET or AAUT guidelines to get more detail about the supplementary materials submission. CLD staff can assist you with a website.

Sample applications that you can view

You can view examples of past VCAET and AAUT applications at the CLD offices to see how other people have tackled this very important issue of choosing and including evidence.