What is a Teaching Dossier?


"It describes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a teacher's performance" (Seldin, 1991, p.3)

A teaching portfolio is to teaching, what a "... list of publications, grants, and honours are to research and scholarship" (Seldin, 1997, p.2).

Seldin identifies three purposes for a teaching dossier: reflective, formative and administrative.

1. Reflective - provides an opportunity to reflect on one’s teaching;
2. Formative - helps make decisions about further developing one’s teaching;
3. Administrative - required as part of official process.

Seldin also identifies the successful dossier as including: materials from oneself; materials from others; products of student learning.

**LTO's Judy Britnell's definition:**

"Teaching Dossier, or Teaching Portfolio, is a personal story that tells the reader about you and your teaching practice - unique to you, influenced by your beliefs, values, your discipline and your teaching culture."

1. It is dynamic - needs to be revised periodically and changes over time as you develop your teaching practice and integrate your experiences.
2. It is selective - told with a specific audience in mind - for example, is it part of your academic position application, promotion application, annual report, a teaching award nomination?
   - At Ryerson, RFA Collective Agreement stipulates what major components of the teaching dossier should be;
   - LTO website provides description of what the contents of a teaching award nomination should be.

What Does a Good Teaching Dossier Look Like?

In a research project where search committees were surveyed to rank the most important characteristics of a good teaching dossier, the top characteristic were:

1. It offers evidence of practice - specific examples of how theory is linked with actual teaching experiences;
2. Is student centred, attuned to differences in student ability, learning style or level - specific evidence of methods of instruction and assessment that go beyond traditional lecture and testing methodology, and that addresses diversity of student body;
3. Demonstrates reflectiveness - specific examples of struggle with instructional challenges and how they were resolved, of changes made, and of the outline of future development as a teacher;
4. Conveys valuing of teaching - a tone or language that conveys enthusiasm for teaching and of considering it on par with research pursuits;
5. Is well written, clear and readable.

Conversely, the two top characteristics of an unsuccessful teaching dossier are:

1. It is generic, full of boiler-plate language, is not taken seriously
2. It provides no evidence of practice.
Five Tips for Building a Teaching Dossier:

By Gosha Zywno (LTO).

1. It’s difficult looking at a blank page - start with creating a Table of Contents, and Chapter Headings, then fill in components that don’t require much reflection, such as tabulating your teaching evaluations, listing educational conferences attended, etc.

2. Rome was not built in a day - your portfolio will grow and change over years. Don’t worry if now it seems very thin and resist temptation to pad it; if you start right away, by the time you need it, you will have a satisfying document; if you start working on it a month before your application for tenure is due, you will be in trouble.

3. Teaching Philosophy is the heart and soul of your Dossier and has to be you - resist a temptation to follow the samples, or worse yet, borrow ideas. Write in first person and without using big words, avoid making statements that sound generic and theoretical.

4. It’s difficult to remember details when you need them, or to present evidence if you didn’t retain it - create a collection of all documents that pertain to your teaching, from which you can cull a dossier as required for different audiences. Get in a habit of “dumping” information into a Word document as it happens - names and dates of educational conferences attended, workshops attended, papers presented, teaching outside your unit, etc. If you have a brilliant idea as a result of a discussion with a colleague or of a class experience, write it down as soon as possible. Three days later you won't remember a thing! Over the years, retain relevant information about each course (syllabi, student evaluations, samples of student work, etc.)

5. Get in a habit of reflecting on your teaching. It may be difficult initially, and it really helps so have someone else to talk to. Another person provides a different point of view and friendly, non-judgemental feedback. Find a likeminded colleague to be a sounding board, discuss each others' problems, ideas etc. CAVEAT: Experienced mentors are great, as long as they have no power over your career - see other departments, even universities.

Using a Rubric to Self-Evaluate Your Teaching Dossier/Statement of Teaching Philosophy:


1. Goals for student learning (your Beliefs dictate these goals)
2. Enactment of goals (specific Actions you take, teaching strategies)
3. Assessment of goals (Evidence)

Teaching Claims should be aligned with one’s Beliefs, Actions and Evidence. For example, if I make a claim that “I encourage students’ active learning in class”, then I should connect it to my Beliefs - "research shows that engaged students learn better and that active learning strategies are more effective" and state references in educational literature”. Then I should describe what it is that I specifically do in class to encourage student engagement and active learning (Actions) - for example, "I use group work in class". Finally, I should provide evidence of student learning (Evidence) - this could be examples of problems that groups deal with/discuss in class, samples of student feedback and evaluations, statistics on test results as compared with some objective benchmark, etc.

4. Creating an inclusive learning environment - how do you account for diverse learning styles? how do you integrate diverse perspectives, how do your own and your students’ identities (race, gender, class, background, privilege, etc.) affect the classroom?

5. Structure, rhetoric and language - does your Dossier sound authentic, and accurately represents you? Remove jargon, generic language. Look for clarity - the document needs to read well.