

The Teaching Dossier



**A Guide for the
Schulich School of Medicine
& Dentistry**

***The University of Western
Ontario***



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THE GOAL OF A TEACHING DOSSIER

The goal of a teaching dossier is to describe, through documented evidence over an extended period of time, the full range of your contributions as a teacher. "The dossier should chronicle your development as a teacher, highlight the very best of your teaching skills, and record the learning responses achieved by your students. Keep it organized. Keep it concise. Keep it honest."¹⁹

The dossier is especially important if you wish to follow the Promotion and Tenure Process on the basis of teaching excellence with less emphasis on research. "The teaching dossier is to education what the list of publications, grants, and university awards is to research."³ By displaying your accomplishments and activities in a structured format, the teaching dossier can be used for multiple purposes:

- To provide documentation and evidence of your activities in education for promotion;
- To serve as a self-evaluation tool for career planning and personal development of your teaching abilities;
- To raise the value of education within individual medical & dental school departments and the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry at large.

Because faculty members have different roles and responsibilities, each teaching dossier will be unique, but will usually include information in four categories.

THE REASONS FOR THE GUIDE

“Teach or Perish!”

We are all familiar with the outcry “Publish or perish” and may criticize the apparent overemphasis on research and publication, compared to teaching, inherent in this expression. In recent years more and more faculty members are focusing their careers on teaching and education. For these faculty members to be successful in their application for promotion, they must provide thorough documentation of their teaching activities. ***The commonest reason for failure to achieve promotion for teaching contributions is incomplete documentation.*** We hope that this guide will help to prevent this.

The idea of the teaching dossier began in Canada with the publication of, “*A Mini-guide to Preparing a Teaching Dossier*”, published in the spring of 1978 in Ontario (Shore et. al, 1978).

"Since then, the concept of a teaching dossier, alternately called a *teaching portfolio*, has grown in popularity along with a growing interest in finding ways to measure teaching so that it can be rewarded professionally. The dossier is essential to enhance the information held in the Curriculum Vitae. Although Curriculum Vitae means *life story* in Latin, it is more like a table of contents than a story. The CV is typically limited to a list of vital statistics in raw form – a few lines for your educational and personal history, a list of publications and so on. These lists say a lot about research since publications and grants have already been evaluated and by a well-known process such as peer review. In contrast, no standard evaluation methods are in place for teaching activities and a list of courses taught tells the promotion committee very little."⁷

As the process of teaching and learning at university becomes the focus of increasing attention, more and more faculty members are using the teaching dossier to document their activities and accomplishments in this area of academic life. In addition to its value at the time of promotion and tenure decisions, the teaching

CATEGORY 1: DESCRIPTION OF TEACHING RESPONSIBILITIES

CATEGORY 2: SCHOLARSHIP AND RESEARCH ON TEACHING

CATEGORY 3: EVIDENCE OF EXCELLENCE

CATEGORY 4: EDUCATIONAL ADMINISTRATION AND LEADERSHIP

dossier can also be used as a systematic way for teachers to reflect on teaching activities and progress.

In practical terms, keeping a record of your accomplishments in one place makes them easier to find the next time you want to use them or when you decide to apply for a new position.

THE SCOPE OF THE GUIDE

The guide is intended to be as comprehensive as possible, so as to provide you with a wide range of categories for your consideration. One way to use this guide is to treat it as a checklist. Consider the unique elements of your teaching style, the subject matter you teach, and other concerns (such as the type of course, the level and number of students) and then select the items from the guide that are most pertinent in illustrating your competence as a teacher. If a particular activity has not been listed but you think it is relevant to your teaching responsibilities, you should add it. Furthermore, you should not feel obliged to include in your documentation every item described in this guide.

"A major challenge in the construction of a teaching dossier is to decide how much information to include. The essence of good teaching dossier construction is to convey as much depth and richness as possible by providing selective evidence of professional accomplishments."⁸

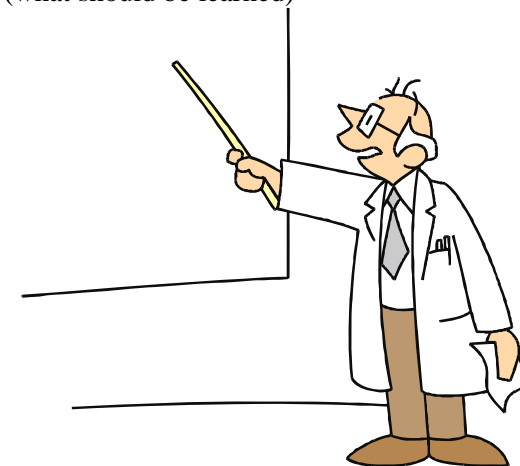
SUGGESTIONS FOR PROCEEDING

WRITE YOUR PHILOSOPHY OF EDUCATION

This is often referred to as a *Statement of Personal Teaching Philosophy* which is a succinct, clearly reasoned, statement of personal beliefs about teaching and learning and how these influence your selection of teaching methods, etc. This is

normally 3-5 paragraphs in length, and should be revised periodically (approximately every five years). This philosophy may include, but not be limited to, discussion on each of the following:

- Your personal theory of learning (e.g. what happens inside students when they learn)
- The goals for instruction (what should be learned)
- The role(s) and responsibility(ies) of the student in this process
- The role(s) of the instructor in this process
- A description of the variables which promote learning



See Appendix A for some examples of Personal Philosophies of Education taken from The Educator's Portfolio document.

RETAIN YOUR "BACK-UP" EVIDENCE

Ideally, you should begin gathering and retaining information that pertains to your career from the first day of your first teaching assignment. But it is never too late to start! The Teaching Dossier itself should be relatively concise but needs to be "richer" in the description of your teaching contributions than most CV's. Peer-reviewed publications have already proven their merits and all that is needed in the CV is a list. A list of courses taught does not convey any information about how much work was involved in developing or supervising the courses or how effective they were. You need to provide enough information so that reviewers can assess the quality of your teaching activities.

Example 1: After revising this moribund course, student evaluations of the course went from 3.5 to 5.7 out of 7.

Example 2: Since taking over this elective course, student involvement has doubled from an average of 12 students selecting the course (in the previous 8 years) to an average of 24 (in the past 3 years).

"Back-up" evidence to support your Dossier may consist of several thick files, housing all the documents supporting your teaching and related activities. This material may span several years and will be used on an "as needed" basis at times when your name is put forward for promotion or for teaching awards. In addition, the process of collecting and analyzing the evidence is a valuable method for continuing self-improvement. You should always include a statement in your teaching dossier that detailed "back up evidence" is available upon request.



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 or students, samples of students' work, etc. These materials will not necessarily be included in your CV or in your Promotion and Tenure file, but should be retained by you in case "original" evidence is required.

THE "MINIMALIST" DOSSIER:

Not everyone needs an extensive teaching dossier. For a "balanced" portfolio (in the Senate stream), or for faculty members being promoted largely on their research contributions, a less ambitious dossier is adequate. This

"minimalist" dossier should include:

1. A list of courses taught in the last 7 years with a description of your role;
2. Outlines for the courses you have taught in the last 2 years;
3. A list of all students you have supervised (at least, provide the numbers of students supervised each year);
4. A summary of your student evaluations of your teaching in the last 7 years. (If possible, these should be on a 7-point scale and include the mean scores for other teachers who teach the same courses. This information may be available from your department office or the Dean's office.)

CATEGORIES FOR EVALUATION OF TEACHING

The following information should be helpful for evaluating teaching and identifying the types of evidence that can be used to demonstrate performance in each of the categories for evaluation of teaching. This long list is quite extensive and is

most relevant for dossiers presented for teaching awards or for faculty members being considered for promotion largely on the basis of their teaching contributions.

CATEGORY 1: Description of Teaching Responsibilities:

"Teaching skills focus on your ability to deliver instruction to the learner using techniques which will maximize learning. These techniques include strategies to present and reinforce information, stimulate thinking, trigger discussion and synthesis, and the ability to improvise to take advantage of those 'teachable moments' -- the ability to respond rapidly to a variety of unplanned events. Evidence of teaching competency should be provided using as many of the data sources listed below as possible."¹⁶

- ☐ List of courses taught - academic years, including graduate, undergraduate or professional school courses. Note level of responsibility (course coordinator, lecturer etc.), title of course and number of hours of instruction, and include a brief course description. Include continuing education and public lectures.
- ☐ Give a brief description of any clinical or "bedside" teaching activities. Note the number of students to whom you would teach these skills and an approximate number of hours. Retain a list of student names where possible. These may come in handy when you are creating a list of students who might be asked to write a letter supporting your promotion (or teaching award).
- ☐ Indicate the number of students in each course and describe your workload, including, where appropriate, the number of TAs or residents assigned to assist you in the teaching.
- ☐ For each course taught, give a brief description of the teaching methods you have used, e.g. lecture method, small group, discussion method, collaborative inquiry, critical thinking, project-based approach, problem-based learning, student presentations, other.

- ☐ Supervision: supervision differs from classroom teaching in a number of respects. It is typically done on a one-to-one basis, there is no set curriculum, and it can be extremely time consuming. 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. A log of a sample week or two of clinical teaching would provide a rich description of the nature of your contribution in this area. Some faculty members have created their own programs for PDA's in order to keep track of the amount of time spent with each student and the nature of the supervision.
 - Describe the nature and content of your responsibility for supervision
 - Retain student lab books, papers, essays, workbooks, and creative works, with written feedback.
 - List student names, degree sought, your role (e.g. clinical or research supervisor) and approximate time commitment.
- ☐ Provide details of other teaching activities such as supervision of a teaching or research practicum, field placement supervision, other teaching activities outside the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry.
- ☐ Teaching materials prepared: e.g. computer-based learning, videotapes, self-instructional packages, study guides, lab materials, etc.
- ☐ Other materials e.g. course handbooks, cases developed for problem-based learning or for the case method, reading lists, assignments. Retain for evidence copies of all teaching materials:
 - Retain course syllabi including objectives and evaluation methods. This will make it possible to assess how well your course plan reflects your teaching philosophy and also the

degree of congruence between your course objectives, teaching strategies and evaluation methods.

- Retain old course syllabi. This is important to document improvements in courses especially those that you were responsible for modifying.
- ☐ Describe how your teaching materials were used in teaching by you and by others especially if used in other courses or at other universities.
- ☐ Academic counseling, career planning, advising and mentoring students/residents/faculty. It is important to remember to collect this type of information. Often this informal instruction is overlooked. However this one-on-one involvement with learners as counselor, advisor, mentor, may have a major impact on their development as professionals. Describe activities and estimate the number of hours for each.
- ☐ Describe arrangements made to accommodate special student needs.
- ☐ Describe any special projects or activities relating to students (e.g. Science Fairs, Career Fairs, Orientation activities, Discovery Days, etc.)
- ☐ Workshops and courses on teaching attended to improve your own teaching (faculty development).
- ☐ Information on your availability to students outside of class.
- ☐ Development of innovative teaching methods or course(s) e.g. distance education, case method, etc.
- ☐ Self-improvement by intensive review and analysis of your own teaching activities. This process should be related to the statement of personal philosophy of teaching and learning.

CATEGORY 2: Scholarship and Research on Teaching

"Scholarship refers to those activities which advance knowledge in the discipline of education."¹⁶

- ☐ Publications and papers in journals, chapters in books, etc. (note whether peer-reviewed or not). One way to start is to publish in a newsletter of your discipline or in the CAME (Canadian Association for Medical Education) Newsletter. See their website at <http://www.came-acem.ca/Pages/NewsLetters.html>. The four major journals of medical education are: Academic Medicine, Medical Education, Medical Teacher, and Teaching and Learning in Medicine. For a list of journals and links, check out the GAMES website at <http://www.schulich.uwo.ca/education/GAMES/>. The UWO library service offers one-stop easy access at <http://www.lib.uwo.ca/taylor/outreach/>.
- ☐ Not all research will lead to publication. Keep a record of what you have done. Consider publication in non peer-reviewed journals and in educational newsletters.
- ☐ Measure the impact of your course on student learning. Consider measuring the impact of different strategies of teaching.
- ☐ Research including grants obtained.
- ☐ Papers presented at educational meetings.
- ☐ Invited presentations.
- ☐ Reviewing a course or program.

CATEGORY 3: Evidence of Excellence

- ☐ Student evaluations. Retain all evaluations for several years. Provide comparisons with evaluations of all faculty teaching the same course, whenever possible, so that your evaluations can be compared with those of your peers. Explain any omissions or anomalies in rating of your teaching by students.
- ☐ Evaluations of your course by a curriculum/course review committee or accreditation review of your program.
- ☐ Peer Review. This is a report on your teaching activities prepared by a colleague. The report should be based on first hand observation of some or all of:
 - course materials - objectives, evaluations, handouts, syllabi, etc.
 - teaching encounters e.g. lectures, small-group discussions or one-on-one teaching (this could be based on direct observation of live teaching or reviews of video tapes of your teaching).

The credentials and experience of the peer reviewer should be considered - the reviewer's report should provide a rich description of your teaching with an analysis of your strengths and weaknesses. This can be done by faculty in your own department, other departments in your university or even by faculty from other universities.

- ☐ Unsolicited letters of thanks or commendation. Even solicited letters are helpful if they demonstrate heartfelt appreciation. Retain all letters and cards of thanks from students and other teachers. (This can form the basis of a "feel good" file for reference when the job isn't going as well as hoped!)
- ☐ Descriptions of courses on teaching which you attended as well as planned reading and other methods of continuing learning

about education. Describe how these experiences were used to improve your teaching. Provide documentation whenever possible.

- ☐ Teaching awards, certificates, and honors are evidence that you are held in high esteem. It is important to document this recognition in your teaching dossier as they represent the collective judgements of peers and students regarding your expertise. All awards should be listed along with a brief description, if not evident from the title, of the criteria used to select award recipients. Even nominations for awards not won may be significant, especially for very prestigious awards where competition is great.
- ☐ Invitations to be a visiting professor. Provide details about the length of the professorship and a description of the responsibilities and activities.
- ☐ Significant accomplishments by students that can be directly related to your teaching.

CATEGORY 4: Educational Administration and Leadership

"Educational administrators participate in and provide leadership for small and large group tasks and manage self, others, money, and time on various educational projects and programs."¹⁶ Evidence of competence in educational administration and leadership can be presented by collecting verbal and written documentation in some of the areas listed below.

- ☐ Program planning and curriculum development. Individuals who present evidence of activities in curriculum development are typically responsible for the development of new or substantially revised courses, clerkships, rotations, seminars, etc. This process of systematically transforming curriculum

goals into educational objectives, teaching methods, and instructional materials is referred to as instructional design.

- ☐ Committee responsibilities (as member or chair) - involved with the planning and/or evaluation of education.
- ☐ Chairing a course committee deserves special mention. Include student evaluations of the course and of the teachers in the course. Save the minutes of meetings of your course committee.
- ☐ Responsibility for an educational program (e.g. director of a residency program, or a faculty development program etc.).
- ☐ Note courses for which you were course coordinator. Include student evaluations of courses as well as student evaluations of each teacher.
- ☐ Serving as a peer consultant.
- ☐ Establishing or setting up a new opportunity for bedside teaching for students
- ☐ Making efforts to improve bedside teaching (e.g. sitting on committees, etc.)
- ☐ Developing a new evaluation system for a course or program. An essential faculty competency is the ability to construct and implement reliable and valid assessments of performance.
- ☐ Obtaining external funds to develop teaching materials, etc.
- ☐ External service concerned with the improvement of teaching (e.g. serving on an accreditation survey team or as a member, or chair, of a provincial or national association or society).
- ☐ Annual reports from Chair or Dean about your performance. This could be documented as part of the bi-directional annual review and development (BARD) process. Presenting a

teaching dossier at this time, will make it easier for your department Chair to support your activities within the department and acknowledge your work. You will be able to justify making time for special education projects.

"Furthermore, the information it provides will help your department Chair, on a political level, to promote the important contribution that the department is making to the Schulich School of Medicine & Dentistry and the university in general in terms of teaching. Reviewing your teaching dossier with your Chair is an opportunity to plan your own professional development as a teacher, as well as that of your colleagues".¹⁴

TIPS ON HOW TO KEEP TRACK OF ACTIVITIES FOR INCLUSION IN THE TEACHING DOSSIER

- ☐ It is the teacher's own responsibility ultimately to prepare a teaching dossier and retain appropriate evidence - no one else has as much at stake.
- ☐ Prepare annual updates of your teaching dossier by reviewing activities listed in your appointment book (paper or computerized).
- ☐ Either include the necessary details in your appointment book or keep a file folder or 3-ring binder for retaining information on the activities noted in your teaching dossier. You may wish to make a short memo on your involvement for this file. Also file letters of congratulation and thanks, peer reviewer reports, etc. Do it at least once a year or you will forget important details.
- ☐ Keep blank student evaluation forms on hand and give one to every student and encourage him or her to complete it. Asking the students yourself increases your return rate on obtaining feedback.
- ☐ Ask a colleague to review your dossier and to provide advice on how to improve it.

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Appendix

Philosophy of Education

Example #1 - written by an Associate Professor in Medicine:

"In the development or creation of 'learning', I believe the teacher plays an active but largely supportive role to the learner. To effectively instruct, the teacher must, in some way, determine the learning needs and obtain some sense of the abilities and level of the learner. Once determined, the teacher can then select the methods through which the teacher can best meet those needs based on demonstrated or anticipated abilities. The teacher also must actively develop the environment within which the learner will be exposed to the methods and materials to be learned. If time is a factor, as when a predetermined amount of material is to be covered, the teacher must factor that into both the methods and environmental aspects.

Once the 'teaching' has occurred, the teacher must assess the outcomes of the learning process (i.e., what has the learner learned) and then provide the outcomes and feedback to the learner ideally occurring periodically throughout the process. In some instances, a more or less continual assessment in the feedback loop is desirable, depending on the materials, methods, environment, and learning.

In spite of all the active support required of the teacher for the learner, the central role in 'learning' is still occupied by the learner. Whether or not the learner actively places him/herself in the teacher's environment (as in college or voluntary adult education) or is caused to be there by external influences (as in primary and secondary education), the learner must have some interest or motivation in what the teacher is presenting or he/she will not demonstrate a learning outcome.

The learners 'need to know' also influences learning outcome. If materials are presented via methods maximally compatible with the learner's style and the learners see the material as important to his/her

present or future performance or general good (relevance), there exists a higher probability of a significant learning outcome.

I believe the learner is also positively or negatively influenced by the learning environment, the significant determinant of which is the teacher.

In the final analysis, it is the learning outcome, as reflected by the learner, which is the final goal of the teacher. Active support by the teacher through the teaching process sets the stage for the learner to 'learn'."



Example # 2 - written by the Clerkship Director: Medicine

"As a long time professional and educator I have developed my own philosophy of education which can be summarized in the following quotation:

"Tell me, and I forget.
Show me, and I remember.
Involve me, and I understand."

The basic goal of instruction is to help the student to understand. A concept made personally relevant to the learner is more easily understood. This can be achieved through the use of anecdotes that are memorable, visible reinforcement, or hands on involvement. Once understood, a concept can be applied to any number of future settings. Superficial cramming or memorization, both of which omit the personal experience so necessary for long term learning, will only contribute to the myriad of useless facts that are soon forgotten. The role of the student in the learning process is to take advantage of the opportunities they are exposed to. This means attending conferences, reading outside of the classroom, learning from other students and colleagues and asking questions. Learners cannot be passive. If they are not self-motivated, the enthusiasm of the teacher will diminish as well.

The responsibility of the instructor in teaching is to communicate in a clear and concise manner with the student, offer learning resources, instruct at the level of the student's understanding, listen and be patient, and demonstrate some forethought or organization in the learning session. It is important that the teacher preserve the student's integrity, permitting them to make mistakes and to feel secure in their learning process. Once students have attained a certain proficiency, they should be allowed to function with increasing autonomy and to develop an independent style.

As I become more involved in curriculum development, I can combine the teaching principles above with my inherent desire for structure and organization. Today's medical students and residents

are bombarded with a multitude of facts leaving them with limited time or energy to learn new things. They have difficulty prioritizing, and they can benefit from a clearly structured learning format where their energies can be channeled beyond knowledge acquisition into the more advanced cognitive abilities of comprehension, application and analysis.

My special educational interest, as my portfolio demonstrates, lies in assessment and evaluation. Through effective evaluation techniques - with emphasis on feedback - students learn what their specific deficiencies are. Instructors also benefit from this interaction because they can see where weaknesses in their teaching efforts lie."



Example # 3 – written by an Epidemiologist

“I strive to encourage the students to uncover flawed thinking and hyperbole wherever these may be found.

I strive to encourage structure and logical and systematic thinking.

But at the same time, I strive to encourage inquisitiveness and promote innovative thinking.

I strive to facilitate learning rather than simply deliver information to the students.

I strive to respect the students' needs and perspectives, even when they conflict with my own.

I strive to create a warm atmosphere for the students both inside and outside the classroom, thus encouraging curiosity and exploration of ideas.

I strive to convey energy and enthusiasm in my classes.

I strive to be easily accessible to the students by keeping my office door open at most times and to keep an informal tone in my relationship with them.

I strive to avoid long monologues in my classes. Given the fact that most of the students (undergraduate medical as well as graduate) I come in contact with are voracious readers, I use the following yardstick: if the students can get more out of an hour with the book with the same content as the lecture as they can from listening to me, then I might as well not give that lecture. I therefore like to use small break-out groups, dyads and individual exercises even in large classes.

I strive not to show disappointment when students ask me ‘Is this going to be on the exam?’

I strive to provide a social and political dimension to the teaching of epidemiology.

I strive to provide an international perspective to all teaching activities.

I strive to make my classes fun (even if the students may not understand my Norse humour).

I strive to explore and develop new teaching ideas and methods.

I strive not to fill a well but to light a fire.”

This Guide was prepared By Wayne Weston, MD
Revised February 24, 2000; February 8, 2001; July 29, 2001;
January 27, 2002; August 7, 2002; August 19, 2003; June 20, 2004;
August 15 2005; February 8, 2006.