INTRODUCTION

At the University of Victoria, the processes of teaching assessment are beginning to attach greater importance to having faculty submit teaching dossiers—personalized collections of materials that document teaching effectiveness—along with their CV and annual reports at key career moments, such as tenure or promotion to teaching professor. While many faculty are already aware of the need for such a dossier and have prepared them, some are still unclear as to what exactly a teaching dossier is and what it should contain. The aim of this guide is to answer these questions and to help you to create your own personalized dossier, consistent with the UVic Framework Agreement.

Peter Seldin (1991, p. 3) says of a teaching dossier, “It describes documents and materials which collectively suggest the scope and quality of a teacher’s performance.”

What would you like your teaching dossier to do for you?

In order to begin developing your teaching dossier, consider the following questions. It often helps to answer them with reference either to (a) the course you have enjoyed teaching the most, or (b) the course you have taught most often.

1. What major claims would you make about your teaching? (What sets you apart as a teacher? What do you think your most important characteristics are as a teacher? What are your key teaching goals?) Try to limit yourself to three only.

2. What types of instructional methods, materials, and techniques do you use to support your teaching goals? (Include any that are particularly innovative.)

Seldin (1991) lists the kinds of materials that one might include in a teaching dossier. The specific items you select will depend on your particular teaching assignment and activities. It will also depend on your potential to generate opportunities for collecting materials suitable for inclusion in your dossier. Such opportunities might include discussing how you can combine your research and teaching interests.

The real secret to assembling a successful dossier is knowing whom to ask for what. Some ideas for sources of data are given below. As you read through them, check those materials that you would be able to include in your teaching dossier and star those you had not previously thought of.

---

1 In this context “dossier” and “portfolio” can be used interchangeably. Generally, in the U.S. it is called a portfolio; in Canada it is a dossier.
SOURCES OF EVIDENCE

A. Data from Oneself

Self-analysis and self-reflection are far too often overlooked in the assessment of teaching and learning; yet they are central not only to the processes of assessing teaching, but also to improving teaching. Thus they are an essential part of your teaching dossier.

As a faculty member, you can provide your own perspective on virtually every aspect of instruction. Self-reports should be primarily descriptive as opposed to evaluative—what were you trying to do, why, how, and what was the result? Consequently, these self-generated documents will more easily reflect development than those from other sources. Self-reports should also be compared with data you compile from other sources. Because feedback that provides new information is most likely to produce change, it is by virtue of such comparisons that personal growth and improvement occur. Data from oneself might include:

- a list of courses or classes taught, with brief descriptions of course content, teaching responsibilities, and student information
- a statement of your philosophy of teaching and a description of factors that have influenced that philosophy
- examples of course material you have prepared and any subsequent modifications that were made to accommodate unanticipated student needs
- a sample syllabus or lesson plan
- a record of teaching discoveries and subsequent changes made to courses regularly taught
- a description of efforts to improve teaching (e.g., participating in seminars and workshops, reading journals on teaching, reviewing new teaching materials for possible application, using instructional development services, and contributing to a professional journal of teaching in your discipline)
- evidence of your reputation as a skilled teacher, such as awards, invitations to speak, and interviews
- personal reflections on your growth and change as a teacher (including awards won and indications of future teaching promise)

B. Data from Others

Obviously, different people can provide different kinds of information about your teaching. For example, it is probably counterproductive and inappropriate to ask students about the breadth and completeness of a faculty member’s content knowledge since, from their point of view, such expertise should be a given. The more obvious and appropriate judges of this information would be department or college colleagues. Likewise, such colleagues are usually not good judges of whether a faculty member is prepared for class, arrives on time, or is available for office hours. Clearly, getting the right kinds of input from each group of individuals is what will give your
dossier its strength and depth. Accordingly, in the sections below, we summarize some of the data different sources can provide.

i. From students

As the immediate beneficiaries of teaching, students are in an ideal position to report and comment on a number of factors, such as what instructional strategies helped them learn the most and whether the instructor came prepared to class, was available during office hours, or provided useful comments on papers. Other data that only students can report involve any changes in their level of interest as a result of taking the course, the extent to which the course challenged them, and whether they felt comfortable asking questions. The most common ways of obtaining student feedback about these aspects of teaching include:

- interviews with students after they have completed the course
- informal (and perhaps unsolicited) feedback, such as letters or notes from students
- systematic summaries of student course evaluations—both open-ended and multiple-choice
- honours received from students, such as winning a teaching award

Other materials often referred to in the literature on teaching dossiers are the “products of good teaching.” In a sense, these are really a subspecies of the broader category “data from students” and might include:

- examples of the instructor’s own comments on student papers, tests, and assignments
- pre- and post-course examples of students’ work, such as writing samples, laboratory workbook or logs, creative work, and projects or fieldwork reports
- testimonials from students of the effect of the course on their future studies, career choice, employment, or subsequent enjoyment of the subject

c. From colleagues

Colleagues within one’s own department are best suited to make judgments about course content and objectives, your collegiality, and student preparedness for subsequent courses. Departmental colleagues can provide analysis and testimonials that serve as a measure of:

- mastery of course content
- ability to convey course content and objectives
- suitability of specific teaching methods and assessment procedures for achieving course objectives
- commitment to teaching as evidenced by expressed concern for student learning
- commitment to, and support of, departmental instructional efforts
- ability to work with others on instructional issues
Data from colleagues could include:

- reports from classroom observations by other faculty
- statements from those who teach other sections of the same course or courses for which your course is a prerequisite
- evidence of your contributions to course development, improvement, and innovation
- evidence of help given to other instructors on teaching, such as sharing course materials
- invitations to teach for others, including those outside the department

What types of evidence do you currently have (or could you collect in the future) in order to demonstrate your major claims?

a. 

b. 

c. 

ASSEMBLING YOUR DOSSIER

A. Selection of Materials

Clearly you cannot put all the materials you have collected in a large box and send them “as is” to an unsuspecting department chair or teaching committee. Before you engage in the necessary process of selection, consider the following questions:

1. Why are you creating a teaching dossier?
   
   - merit assessments
   - departmental teaching assignment decisions
   - job/grant application
   - self-analysis or reflection

2. Who is your audience?

3. What is the overall argument you wish to make?

4. What are the norms as to length and depth of a teaching dossier in your department or discipline?
B. Arrangement and Presentation of Components

A teaching dossier is, and indeed should be, highly personal. There is, therefore, no specifically recognized format. In the most general sense, such a dossier is likely to contain a short reflective narrative followed by an appendix of supporting documentation. Beyond this, selection and arrangement should be done so as to best reflect the argument you wish to make. Take a few minutes now to begin planning your dossier. Try using the Organizational Matrix on the following page to help you.

i. Reflective narrative—This key piece of your dossier includes the major claims you wish to state about your teaching, and it indicates how these claims support the case you are making. You will need to use specific examples that narrate your claims and give them flavor. For this you can draw on the Data-From-Oneself section.

ii. Supporting Materials/data/documents—These elements are used to illustrate the claims and examples in your reflective narrative, and hence to support your overall argument. For this you can draw mostly, though not exclusively, on the Data-From-Oneself section. You might include, for example, a table of standardized student evaluations, as well as a sample lesson plan or syllabus. Supporting materials are most conveniently located in appendices. They need to be carefully selected so as not to be too lengthy (just pick the clearest example to support your point), and should be arranged and labeled for the convenience of the reader. Points made in the narrative should be directed to specific pages or parts of the appendices if at all possible.

C. Checking your Dossier for Balance

Once your matrix is complete, and before you write your final draft, check your dossier for balance. In particular, make sure that the “data from others” come from multiple sources (students and well as colleagues).
### Organizational Matrix:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Teaching Strengths</th>
<th>Specific Narrative Examples</th>
<th>Supporting Data for Appendices</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source: Data from Oneself</td>
<td>Source: Data from Oneself</td>
<td>Source: Data from Others/Oneself</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**EXAMPLE:**

I encourage students to appreciate alternative viewpoints.

I always include an in-class debate over a controversial topic (e.g., ...) in my classes. In these debates, students are assigned a role and asked to argue from a perspective other than their own.

*my class outline for the debate on .....  
*student testimonials from my written evaluations.
Does your dossier make the strongest case it can, and does it reflect you as a person? As is the case for teaching in general, the best dossiers are those that are constantly revised and updated. Input from colleagues and friends can be invaluable in this process.

If this guide is being used in conjunction with a workshop, this is the time to break into small groups. Individual members of your group should briefly explain in turn the overall message they are trying to convey in their dossier and the materials they intend to use to support that message. Other members should then make suggestions to strengthen the speaker’s case.

What suggestions do colleagues in the workshop have for strengthening your dossier?

a.

b.

c.

SELECTED SOURCES


Describes the current form and use of teaching portfolios in 25 varied U.S. college contexts. Includes details of standardized forms and reflections on portfolio use from the institutions concerned.


Cashin argues for more comprehensive evaluation of teaching that considers a wider range of information from a variety of sources. Although he does not specifically discuss teaching portfolios, he establishes a useful guide for assembling one by defining seven aspects of teaching and discussing the most appropriate sources of information about each.


A good place to get started with background information. Gives detailed examples of how teachers demonstrate and reflect on changes in their teaching using examples of student work.

Building on Shulman (1988), Seldin argues that writing a teaching portfolio should be a collaborative effort. Presents five key steps for creating a portfolio compiled from previous research on the topic. In many ways a seminal work and a good place to get started. Because Seldin focuses on faculty, however, teaching assistants will need to extrapolate to their own situation.


Responds to the requests from those interested in creating a portfolio who would like some concrete examples. Seldin extends his first work by showcasing examples from nine different institutions nationally.


One of the key original reference pieces for those working in the area of teaching portfolio development. This work contains a list of 49 types of items that might be included in a portfolio. A good source of ideas for additional materials, although not all apply to graduate students.


Makes a good case for the use of portfolios and suggests they reflect both the teacher’ efforts and the input of mentors or peers. Uses reference to the film Stand and Deliver (about a successful teacher) to illustrate his points.