

From Teacher to Leader: The *Why* and *How* of Teaching Award Nominations

Every discourse, even a poetic or oracular sentence, carries with it a system of rules for producing analogous things and thus an outline of methodology.

- Jacques Derrida

With Respect to The Prelude

1. Compiling a teaching award nomination is a lot easier if you start...before *actually* starting:
 - Start a file – use a box, a drawer, a binder, a suitcase – just keep copies of *everything*, i.e., course syllabi, student ratings and comments, cards and copies of emails from students and colleagues, newspaper clippings, copies of publications, photos, etc.
 - Jot down a few notes after each class, each week of classes, or if that's still too much, after each semester of classes. Ask yourself, what worked? What didn't? Where do I go from here?
2. Develop a teaching dossier. A teaching award nomination is really just a teaching dossier in formal wear.
 - Participate in a teaching dossier development workshop and/or flip through the many wonderful teaching dossier development guides available online (we've included links below).
 - If you've already completed a teaching dossier, gather feedback from members of your university's teaching and learning centre, faculty colleagues, and friends. Tell them that the dossier should read like a scholarly document, one that reflects your scholarship as well as your scholarly approach to teaching, always maintaining a complementary balance between narrative and evidence.

Start Where You Are and Know Where You're Going

1. Start where you are, with what you know. Identify key characteristics and teaching and learning strengths. Is it disciplinary expertise, or mentorship, or educational leadership, use of innovative teaching methods, learning technologies – what *exactly* makes you an excellent teacher?
2. Having now identified key characteristics, choose the appropriate award level:
 - Department and faculty-wide awards, e.g., Faculty of Science Teaching Excellence Award
 - University-wide awards, e.g., University of Windsor Distinguished Contributions to University Teaching
 - External discipline-specific awards, e.g., Canadian Association of Schools of Nursing (CASN) Award for Excellence in Nursing Education
 - Provincial and regional awards, e.g., Ontario Confederation of University Faculty Associations (OCUFA) Teaching Award; Association of Atlantic Universities Distinguished Teaching Award
 - National awards, e.g., STLHE's 3M Teaching Fellowship
 - International awards, e.g., Sloan Consortium (Sloan-C) Excellence in Online Teaching Award

Note: It's recommended (though not mandated) that candidates receive an internal or regional teaching award before submitting for a national or international award. We have, however, submitted successful applications at the international level for candidates who had not previously received a regional teaching award.

3. Just as you would with a research manuscript or grant, gauge your audience. Know the purpose of the award. Why was it initiated? What does it hope to achieve? What does it celebrate? What does it value?
 - If you decry lecturing as a teaching method and solely teach graduate courses with low, capped enrolment, do not apply for the Large Class, Best Lecturer Award.
 - If you are innovative in your use of learning technologies to facilitate more effective, engaging online courses, the Sloan-C Excellence in Online Teaching Award recognizes instructors who have creatively used Internet-based technologies to teach online and/or blended courses in higher education.

Dissecting the Evidence Act

1. Read the award criteria very carefully.
 - Do you still believe your candidate is deserving of the award? If so, gather the evidence.
2. Match the award criteria to the teaching philosophy.
 - The candidate must write his/her own teaching philosophy. The award dossier is the *candidate's teaching profile*, and not the nominator's, and not the university's, and not even the discipline's. This is not to say that one cannot or should not consult with educational developers and others for feedback on writing a statement of teaching.
 - Be clear and explicit in what you claim in your teaching philosophy. For example, it is not enough to say that you're a learner-focused instructor who uses student-centred approaches. The committee is prepped. They're sharp. They suspect fire at even the hint of smoke. You're learner-centred? Great. But take it further. Ask yourself:
 - What does the term mean to you?
 - What does this approach 'look like' in your practice?
 - How has this approach improved aspects of the students' experience or learning?
 - How has this approach contributed to your profession, the discipline?
 - Can you prove it?
3. Match the award criteria to the teaching philosophy to the evidence.
 - You've already collected evidence in a box, or a drawer, or a binder. Sift through it and select the best evidence, the most convincing evidence, the evidence most aligned with the teaching philosophy. Again, the dossier is a scholarly document. It's not enough to climb atop the tallest mountain and recite your manifesto. The committee will want to see how that manifesto exists in real life, with and through the people and programs you claim to impact.
 - Present evidence from a variety of perspectives. Evidence may include:
 - student evaluation data (do not append pages and pages of raw data – contextualize and chart your scores, and include the student ratings instrument)
 - formal recognition of your teaching, i.e., campus-wide or regional-level awards
 - student feedback, i.e., a complete list of comments collected at the end of a course
 - letters of support and/or testimonials from superiors, colleagues, students, graduates, and community agencies and members (nominators should send letter writers award criteria ahead of time – in the end, collect more letters than you need to allow for flexibility and choice)
 - peer observation feedback
 - examples of faculty and student mentorship efforts
 - course syllabi

- community outreach
 - educational policy planning
 - teaching and learning publications, presentations, workshops, symposiums, and grants (long lists are not useful – briefly outline the effort and contextualize, contextualize)
 - course and curriculum design materials
 - teaching assessment activities
 - documentation of teaching development efforts
 - documentation concerning innovative teaching methods and course materials
4. Match the award criteria to the teaching philosophy to the evidence, and highlight this in the nominator's letter.
- The nominator's letter is the glue. The letter should speak to award criteria as they relate to the evidence included in the package. For example, in an award submission that values student engagement, speak to the candidate's innovative teaching practices, but then refer the reader to the appended evidence (with page numbers), which may include documentation of innovative course assignments and student comments about their learning experience.

We, the Storytelling Organisms, Who Lead Storied Lives

At this point, you've established that your candidate is an excellent instructor. And you've proved it with evidence. But there's more to it. The teaching award dossier is a blend of evidence *and* reflective personal narrative. Yes, the committee wants to read a well-developed, well-supported argument for teaching excellence, but more importantly, they want to follow the instructor's story. They want to learn about the instructor, about the relationship with students, the discipline, the pedagogical practice. The story is the evidence realized. The story brings the binder, the box of artefacts, the desk drawer stock full of evidence, to life.

1. Find the core narrative, the story, and ensure it comes across through the teaching philosophy, the evidence, the pictures, the writing – through every detail.
2. Use the principles of narrative inquiry and portraiture to do this:
 - a) Identify the context
 - Context is the physical space, the geographic, the historical, the cultural, the aesthetic. Context is the discipline, the institution, the city, the province, the state, the country. Context is critical to defining and dissecting the teaching methods of the large class lecturer, or the lab-based cancer researcher. The story of an instructor using online learning technologies in a rural setting with limited budget is quite different than the one about the instructor using the same technologies in an online institution with unlimited budget.
 - Context is the framework, the reference point, the setting – “it's used to place people and action in time and space, and as a resource for understanding what they say and do,” and why (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997). The teaching philosophy should not only tell readers what an instructor does, but more importantly, why they do it – context is critical to defining *and* defending this theorization.
 - b) Use a consistent, authentic voice
 - Who is telling the story? Who owns the dossier?
 - Nominators must be sure to always adhere to the principles of “illumination, implementation, and refrain” (Lawrence-Lightfoot & Davis, 1997):

- Be sure it is the nominee who first tells his or her story, and that the nominator does not impose a story – the committee will squint at the hint of inauthenticity. And even if they miss it in the nominator’s letter or teaching philosophy, the evidence will disqualify all claims.
- c) Identify emerging themes
- Be prepared to follow your nose. Scrutinize the evidence, searching for the storyline that emerges from the material.
 - Because it is difficult for many instructors to write in the award genre, at Windsor, we have found it helpful to interview nominees – many people are more at ease casually speaking about their teaching rather than articulating their ideas in writing.
 - We audio record and transcribe the interview, and use the principles of qualitative data analysis to comb through the data and uncover themes. We make it a rule not to tell instructors what we uncover, but we give them the transcriptions, and ask them to do the same. Almost always, our results are strikingly similar.
- d) Document the aesthetic whole, composing the narrative
- Use context, voice, and thematic coherence to create a dossier that is both authentic and evocative.
 - The core narrative must be obvious – it should be articulated in the teaching philosophy, supported and clarified by the evidence, and brought together and made explicit in the nominator’s letter.
 - If nominees are struggling to write their teaching philosophy, show them the evidence – the themes *they’ve identified* through their course materials, their teaching practices, their student comments. Sometimes starting at the end helps us find the best beginning.
 - The nomination letter must be concise and deliberate. Set the context. Introduce the narrative. Identify the themes. Direct the reader to the evidence. My writing coach once told me if I have to tell the reader that the main character is angry, I have not accomplished my job as a writer. Do not tell the committee the nominee is excellent; show them.

The Devil’s in the Details

1. Image is everything, and then some:
 - Find a Peter Marval, and if difficult, find someone who is familiar with basic design principles.
 - Use a consistent font and colours.
 - Use headings for organization, matching them to award criteria.
 - Use page numbers throughout.
 - White space is welcome here.
 - Check grammar, spelling, and punctuation, and use active language.
 - Think about pictures and layout in advance.
 - Avoid clichés and jargon - don’t assume the committee has detailed knowledge of your institution or discipline.
 - Adhere to page limits.
 - Pay homage to the process as much as the product.
 - “Things worth telling - take time.” (Nicholas Denmon)

A Glance at National Teaching Awards Sponsored by the STLHE

3M National Teaching Fellowship

- Recognizes teaching excellence and educational leadership
- <http://www.stlhe.ca/awards/3m-national-teaching-fellowships/>

Alan Blizzard Award

- Recognizes those whose exemplary collaboration in university teaching enhances student learning
- <http://www.stlhe.ca/awards/alan-blizzard-award/>

College Sector Educator Award

- Recognizes those who have made quality efforts to promote and support the development of their peers with regard to teaching excellence
- <http://www.stlhe.ca/awards/college-sector-educators-award/>

Desire2Learn Innovation Award in Teaching and Learning

- Recognizes innovative approaches that promote learning in new ways at post-secondary institutions
- <http://www.stlhe.ca/awards/desire2learn-innovation-award/>

Knapper Lifetime Achievement Award

- Honours individuals who have, over their career, made significant contributions to teaching, learning and educational development in Canadian higher education
- <http://www.stlhe.ca/awards/knapper-awards/>

Comprehensive Lists of Available Teaching Awards

- Ryerson University: <http://www.ryerson.ca/lt/awards/external/>
- York University: <http://teachingcommons.yorku.ca/awards-grants/>

Preparing a Teaching Dossier: Links and Resources

- University of Windsor Resources
<http://www.uwindsor.ca/ctl/links-pd>
- Queen's University Guide to Preparing a Teaching Dossier (Knapper & Wilcox, 2007)
http://www.queensu.ca/ctl/resources/publications/teachingdossier/preparing_dossier2007.pdf
- An excerpt from the University of Alberta's guide with examples of the types of evidence
http://www.ctl.ualberta.ca/sites/default/files/files/Teaching_DossierGuide-1.pdf

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