Writing an award-winning account of your teaching practice

Strategy, space and time to write an application for an OLT teaching award

An OLT workshop facilitated by Tilly Hinton, Sydney, Melbourne, Brisbane, February 2015

- What is it that you do?
  - *Six word memoir*
- Context and highlights
  - *Conversation*
- Evidence
  - *An evidence plan*
- Supporting materials and references
- Style
- Ways of writing
  - *Some moments for writing*

Identifying your contribution

A six word teaching memoir

What claim are you making in your award application? Tell your story in six words:

Statistics fun? Always gets a giggle.

Building technologies for better student learning.

BuDI. Best friend for first years.

Reform through education in Indonesian Papua.

Sustained excellence in supporting doctoral students.

Biomechanics excellence through authentic student engagement.

And from http://www.sixwordstories.net/:

Small Fish. Big Pond. Same Expectations. — Charlotte, 3/19/2011

Sorry. Bad hair day. Love, Rapunzel - kashika, 3/17/2011

Sign on research lab: "Gone. Fission." - BvS, 2/16/2011

Teaching context and highlights

- the landscape and the attractions
- balance between description and evidence/argument
- enough description to make sense of your unique/significant contribution
- not so much that you weaken your claims through brevity

Listen to the person next to you and identify in their comments what constitutes the landscape/context, and what are their particular contributions to student learning.

You may also find yourself discussing evidence, notice that as well.

Evidence

What is evidence?

- Information from a range of sources that attests to the claims made in your teaching award application
- Identified by source, context, date etc
  - eg. (Teaching Evaluation qualitative comment, BUS108, 2014)
- Authenticity is validated by you and the application process

Sources of Evidence

Peers

- peer review of teaching, course materials, course content, assessment practices
- scholarship of teaching, publications
- teaching and learning strategies
- leadership and management roles
- various levels of peers – senior, supervisor, reviewers, colleagues etc
- recognition
- uptake of ideas

Self

- teaching journal
- teaching philosophy
- self reflections, analysis & evaluation
- responsiveness to student feedback
- publications
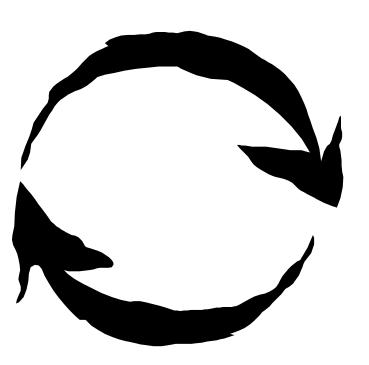- leadership roles
- innovations

Student Reactions

- student evaluations of teaching
- student interviews, focus groups
- informal class student feedback
- formal surveys and questionnaires
- unsolicited student feedback
- student logs and journals
- on-line feedback

Student Learning

- students' self-reported knowledge/skills gained
- rates of attrition, failure, progression to honours/postgraduate
- grade distribution
- evaluation of generic skills/outcomes/attributes
- student work - assessment, thesis, projects
- employer/workplace feedback
- approaches to study questionnaire etc

Adapted from a framework from Nicoll and Smith, no longer accessible online.

Using evidence responsibly

- Inherently biased and selective
- Solicited vs unsolicited
  - Both are appropriate and meaningful
- Awareness of power relationships
- Quoting accurately
- Maintaining records and/or a teaching portfolio

Showing Iterative Improvement

- What needed improvement?
- How did you intervene?
- What evidence is there of your intervention working?
- What do you plan to do next?

Effective selection of evidence

- As broad a time period as possible
- As many and varied sources as possible
- Give voice to those who matter to you
  - Eg. a WIL application should include industry evidence
- As many types as possible (numbers, words, scores, tables, etc)
  - Eg. pass rates, login counts, evaluation scores (with commentary), emails
- A mix of *gathered* and *arm's length*
  - Eg. Feedback collected from students in class and student feedback results

Using the A3 planning sheet, map out the evidence you could use in your application.

Key Things

- Evidence attests to the claims you make – impact on students, recognition of others, sustained over time, excellence, sustained effectiveness, creativity/imagination/innovation,

- Effective evidence comes from a range of sources, and is purposefully sought

- Evidence is written into your application, not a stand-alone

Extra materials in your application

- References (teaching awards, program awards, citations)

- Teaching materials (teaching awards, program awards)
  - a three minute video (which could include footage of the nominee talking about their teaching, their teaching philosophy or interviews with students)
  - website (URL)
  - 10 pages of teaching materials in PDF format

- CV (awards)

See these as cohesive elements alongside the written statement

Things about style

- First person
- Active voice
- Accessible formatting
- Approachable language
- Your voice
- Write abundantly, edit thoroughly (the 1/3 rule)
- Read aloud
- Benchmark and compare
- Triangulate
- Keep students and student learning upfront

Ways of writing

Metaphor

"Mountains are both journey and destination. They summon us to climb their slopes, explore their canyons and attempt their summits. The summit, despite months of preparation and toil, is never guaranteed though tastes of sweet nectar when reached. If my only goal as a teacher and mountaineer is the summit, I risk cruel failure if I do not reach the highest apex. Instead, if I accept the mountain's invitation to journey and create meaning in each step, success is manifest in every moment. As a teacher, I seek to balance 'the view' and 'the footsteps'. Without the view, my students and I are lost. Without the footsteps, we don't move from where we began. I create a flow in my teaching that seeks the summit, the learning objectives for each course, and that honours the journey, the experiences and the learning along the way to it."

Ta Loeffler, p. 30 in Hay, Iain. Inspiring Academics : Learning with the World's Great University Teachers. Berkshire, GBR: McGraw-Hill Education, 2011.

Honesty

"I was miserably anxious starting out as a teacher. There was an exhilaration in sitting or standing at the front of a classroom, but also deep insecurity about my knowledge and competence. I teetered between a sense of inadequacy and (when convinced that I'd given a seamless lecture or facilitated a great discussion) the surging exhilaration of accomplishment. I embodied, in other words, a vacillation between senses of worthlessness and worth that constituted my normative world as an undergraduate and graduate student. In this world, education is a hierarchy: you begin as a fundamentally inadequate novice and set about stacking up knowledge, skill and accomplishment in order to deserve the esteem of those who survey and evaluate your performance. And we can become the harshest observers of our own performance, reading this harshness into the reactions of our students, peers and teachers."

David Kahane, p. 17 in Hay, Iain. Inspiring Academics : Learning with the World's Great University Teachers. Berkshire, GBR: McGraw-Hill Education, 2011.

Teaching philosophy and practice

"Over the past 15 years I have studied the research on learning extensively, with particular interest in the learning of science. I have also regularly tested the application of this research in my own introductory physics courses. I have become convinced that learning is not some magic spark that takes place between the student and the teacher in the classroom. Rather it is a process that can be well characterized and understood in terms of basic principles. If the educational experience is designed according to these principles, good learning will result irrespective of age, ethnicity, student background or any other factors. The proper implementation of these principles for any given student, however, will depend on their prior knowledge and background. Put differently, good teaching is simply putting into practice those principles that are known to result in effective learning. I have written elsewhere about some of the research supporting this idea (Wieman and Perkins 2005; Wieman 2007b). Here I will discuss an example where I systematically applied these ideas to transform a course that had consistently produced small amounts of learning and large amounts of dissatisfaction."

Carl Wieman, p. 61 in Hay, Iain. Inspiring Academics : Learning with the World's Great University Teachers. Berkshire, GBR: McGraw-Hill Education, 2011.

Follow changes through

[In] One of the first assignments I revised [..] I had always had students do a standard research paper [...] the product did not resemble materials they would likely be asked to produce after college. The new assignment required that each student pick a particular textile mill in Connecticut, research its history, put that history into the context of the typical pattern of economic development in Connecticut, create a website depicting their findings, and then make a short presentation explaining their findings as depicted in their website.

Student reactions

Students enjoyed this project – many did much more research than I anticipated, they produced websites much better than I expected, and during and after their presentations they made thoughtful observations connecting their findings to the history we'd discussed in

Quality of learning class.

Longitudinal Years later students still send me updates on their mills.

Rhona Free, p. 75 in Hay, Iain. Inspiring Academics : Learning with the World's Great University Teachers. Berkshire, GBR: McGraw-Hill Education, 2011.

Anchor your writing to the criteria

For Teaching Awards and Citations:

1. **Approaches to teaching and the support of learning that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn.**
   This may include fostering student development by stimulating curiosity and independence in learning; participating in effective and empathetic guidance and advice for students; assisting students from equity and other demographic subgroups to participate and achieve success in their courses; encouraging student engagement through the enthusiasm shown for learning and teaching; inspiring and motivating students through effective communication, presentation and interpersonal skills; enabling others to enhance their approaches to learning and teaching; and developing and/or integrating assessment strategies to enhance student learning.

2. **Development of curricula, resources or services that reflect a command of the field.**
   This may include developing and presenting coherent and imaginative resources for student learning; implementing research-led approaches to learning and teaching; demonstrating up-to-date knowledge of the field of study in the design of the curriculum and the creation of resources for learning; communicating clear objectives and expectations for student learning; providing support to those involved in the development of curricula and resources; and contributing professional expertise to enhance curriculum or resources.

3. **Evaluation practices that bring about improvements in teaching and learning.**
   Evaluation comprises making judgements about the quality of programs and activities that are part of the academic, cultural and social experience of higher education. This may include showing advanced skills in evaluation and reflective practice; using a variety of evaluation strategies to bring about change; adapting evaluation methods to different contexts and diverse student needs and learning styles; contributing professional expertise to the field of evaluation in order to improve program design and delivery; and the dissemination and embedding of good practice identified through evaluation.

4. **Innovation, leadership or scholarship that has influenced and enhanced learning and teaching and/or the student experience.**
   This may include participating in and contributing to professional activities related to learning and teaching; innovations in service and support for students; coordination, management and leadership of courses and student learning; conducting and publishing research related to teaching; demonstrating leadership through activities that have broad influence on the profession; providing innovative learning and teaching for different contexts, including technology enhanced environments, for large and small class sizes and/or to meet the needs of a diverse student cohort; and influencing the overall academic, social and cultural experience of higher education.

Anchor your writing to the criteria

For Teaching Awards:
- extent to which the claims for excellence are supported by formal and informal evaluation
- extent of creativity, imagination or innovation, irrespective of whether the approach involves traditional learning environments or technology-based developments
- information contained in student data or institutional student surveys, references, and selected teaching materials submitted by the nominee

For Citations::
- influenced student learning, student engagement or the overall student experience
- gained recognition from fellow staff, the institution, and/or the broader community
- been sustained for a period of no less than three years (two years for early career).

Anchor your writing to the criteria

For Program Awards:

1. Distinctiveness, coherence and clarity of purpose - Extent to which the programme has clear objectives and systematic approaches to coordination, implementation and evaluation

2. Influence on student learning and the student experience - Extent to which the programme targets identified needs and directly or indirectly, enhances student learning, student engagement and/or the overall student experience of higher education

3. Breadth of impact - Extent to which the programme has led to widespread benefits for students, staff, the institution, and/or other institutions, consistent with the purpose of the programme

4. Addressing equity and diversity - Extent to which the programme promotes and supports equity and inclusiveness by improving access, participation and outcomes for diverse student groups.

In assessing nominations against the four criteria, the assessment panel will take into account:

- evidence of the effectiveness of the programme in formal and informal evaluation
- the degree of creativity, imagination or innovation
- evidence of sustained effectiveness of the programme for no less than 3 years.

Make some notes, or write part of your application, using:

- metaphor
- honesty
- teaching philosophy
- tracing a change

Letting Go

"The line of words is a hammer. You hammer against the walls of your house. You tap the walls, lightly, everywhere. After giving many years' attention to these things, you know what to listen for. Some of the walls are bearing walls; they have to stay, or everything will fall down. Other walls can go with impunity; you can hear the difference. Unfortunately, it is often a bearing wall that has to go. It cannot be helped. There is only one solution, which appalls you, but there it is. Knock it out […] You can save some of the sentences, like bricks. It will be a miracle if you can save some of the paragraphs, no matter how excellent in themselves, or hard-won."

Annie Dillard, *This Writing Life*, Harper Perennial, 1989, p. 4.

Getting started

"Thirty years ago my older brother, who was ten years old at the time, was trying to get a report on birds written that he'd had three months to write, which was due the next day. We were out at our family cabin in Bolinas, and he was at the kitchen table close to tears, surrounded by binder paper and pencils and unopened books on birds, immobilized by the hugeness of the task ahead. Then my father sat down beside him, put his arm around my brother's shoulder, and said, "Bird by bird, buddy. Just take it bird by bird.""

Anne Lamott, *Bird by bird: some instructions on writing and life*, Anchor Books, 1994, p. 18.

Playing the awards game

- Evidence, evidence, evidence
- Be focussed
- Be willing to sell your achievements
- Involve others
- Read other applications
- Be savvy with references
- Give yourself time and space to write and reflect
- Be yourself

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