

Evaluating and supporting teaching quality using teaching portfolios

This paper presents an overall framework for evaluating and supporting teaching quality at CUHK using teaching portfolios. Teaching portfolios enable teachers to represent their teaching experiences in a balanced manner using a range of evidence, collected over time from multiple sources. Examples of evidence are: feedback from students, feedback from colleagues, teachers' own documented work in teaching and learning, and other forms of self-reflection.

SECTION 1: INTRODUCTION

Evaluating teaching quality is an integral part of the quality-assurance (QA) mechanism of the University. Evidence of teaching quality should not be limited to comments from students. This paper explains how teaching portfolios can be effectively used by teachers as a comprehensive method to represent their teaching experiences and achievements. A teaching portfolio is a collection of material that documents multiple aspects of teaching performance. It is the teaching equivalent of lists of grants and publication that illustrate research achievement.

This paper outlines the principles for evaluating teaching quality (Section 2); the suggested composition of teaching portfolios (Section 3); and suggested approval and future revisions (Section 4).

SECTION 2: PRINCIPLES FOR EVALUATING TEACHING QUALITY

2.1 Purposes for evaluating teaching quality

Teaching is a major component of the academic life for instructors, professors and other teaching staff at CUHK. Evaluating teaching quality is an integral part of QA processes and so needs to be central also to the teaching and learning (T&L) strategy of the University. For teachers, an evidence-based record of their ability to teach is relevant to academic life in the following situations:

- awarding excellence in teaching at department, faculty and institutional levels;
- renewal of contract or promotion;
- departmental planning for teaching duties and programme arrangements;
- personal interests of teachers, in that evaluation records enable teachers to reflect upon their own practice and set goals for themselves; and
- personal records for showcasing achievement and capabilities in a teacher's curriculum vitae.

2.2 Attributes of good teaching

To see teaching as having a single focus – ‘learning’ by the student in the classroom – is too narrow a view. For example, there is a need to consider the overall teaching environment and the system of ideas that the environment represents. The following attributes are often regarded as a core for teaching excellence. There is overlap between these attributes.

- *Clear and valid goals, and aligned teaching philosophy:* Curriculum planning at CUHK is guided by an outcomes-based approach (OBA). OBA operates at programme level and then cascades down into the design of individual courses, so that each course has an internally coherent set of learning outcomes, learning activities and assessment tasks. Good teachers should have a clear understanding of T&L goals with an OBA perspective, which can be articulated in a personal teaching philosophy that they follow in planning their teaching and subsequent classroom and out-of-classroom activities.
- *Capacity of teachers to design and work in a T&L environment that fosters achievement of student-centred desired learning outcomes.* This requires a broad set of skills, including good educational design and planning, teaching-delivery skills in terms of having clear explanations and good class management, timeliness in providing feedback to students on their learning, flexibility in adjusting and updating course design, etc.
- *Developing teacher–student relationships* that motivate students to engage in meaningful learning.
- *Peer recognition from colleagues and practitioners.* Affirmation by informed colleagues can be obtained on overall curriculum design in the programme, course administration, learning-activity design, classroom teaching performance, etc.
- *Commitment and enthusiasm.* Good teachers devote time and effort to T&L. Time needs to be spent on designing what and how to teach, preparing materials, and thinking and revising teaching strategies based on feedback. Good teachers are also willing to engage in teaching-related societies; and professional development activities, both inside and outside the University.
- *A scholarly approach to teaching excellence.* Good teachers are open to suggestions and are sensitive to new needs and opportunities. Such teachers systematically collect feedback and evidence concerning their teaching, and then make evidence-based adjustments and improvements to their teaching.

2.3 Teaching portfolios as balanced strategy for representing teaching quality

Teaching quality is a complex entity. It is unfair to teachers to simply equate teaching quality with student satisfaction as revealed in course and teaching evaluation (CTE) surveys, typically administered at the end of each course. The use of teaching portfolios helps prevent an undue emphasis on single-event CTE scores, by providing a wider perspective of teaching performance. Teaching portfolios contain a range of evidence, collected over time from multiple sources, such as feedback from students, feedback from colleagues, teachers’ own documented work in teaching and learning, and other forms of self-reflection.

Teaching portfolios can be paper-based, but the creation of portfolios in electronic format has significant advantages, including convenience of dissemination, and the ability to store and display multimedia files as examples of teaching in action.

The paper provides a suggested framework for teaching portfolios. This framework should be adapted to suit discipline needs, departmental and faculty contexts, and particular teaching duties. The paper should be viewed as a set of guidelines, and not as a prescriptive template. The intention is to support teachers in gaining due recognition for their teaching, and to

provide the University with a fair and balanced process for the evaluation of teaching quality.

Suggested sections in a teaching portfolio are:

- goals and teaching philosophy;
- teaching context;
- student evaluation;
- peer evaluation;
- professional development;
- research for scholarship; and
- reflections and continuous improvement.

SECTION 3: SUGGESTED COMPOSITION OF TEACHING PORTFOLIOS

3.1 Goals and teaching philosophy

An important component of a teaching portfolio is the description of the teacher's own beliefs and views on various issues in T&L. This should be a personal articulation of a teaching philosophy, not a literature essay. Areas of focus might be a general description of key desired student learning outcomes; how these might be achieved through programme and course design, and through experiential learning; what role teachers play in achieving educational goals, both in and out of the classroom; and the role of the teacher as a postgraduate supervisor (if applicable).

3.2 Teaching context

A brief section outlining the departmental and disciplinary context is important so that readers have a clear understanding of the context in which the teacher works. The programmes s/he contributes to should be listed (size, undergraduate/ postgraduate, etc.), as well as involvement in postgraduate supervision.

3.3 Student evaluation

Feedback from students can be conducted in several different ways.

- *Required CTE process:* The standard course-end evaluation form is administered by the faculty or department concerned and results of this evaluation are reported back to teachers under a well-established mechanism. A table showing the overall trends in course evaluation scores over a period of time is useful.
- *Other formative surveys:* Teachers can initiate other forms of evaluation of the course at different times for formative purposes. Sample evaluation forms that teachers may use and adapt to suit their own needs are on the CLEAR website.
- *Strategies other than surveys:* Evaluation strategies are not limited to surveys: 'post-it' notes in class, focus groups, informal gatherings and electronic communications are other possibilities. In portraying informal evaluations in the teaching portfolios, background information about when and how the evaluations have been conducted is essential.

Students' feedback on their learning and the T&L environment complement other components in a teaching portfolio. It is important to retain the sense of the whole student group and use individual student comments only to illustrate or highlight particular points.

3.4 Peer evaluation

In this section, teachers can provide information about whether various aspects of their teaching have been affirmed by colleagues and/or practitioners who understand teaching, the discipline, or both. Peer review, as an external source of evidence, is helpful. Peer evaluation can be relevant to many different aspects of T&L, such as:

- course design and administration;
- classroom teaching performance;
- involvement in innovation in T&L (including eLearning);
- contribution to departmental T&L processes and committees; and
- involvement in student mentoring and other community activities in the department.

Several departments at CUHK have a system of classroom peer review for new teachers or teachers who have not yet been substantiated. However, all teachers can benefit from collegial feedback at regular (perhaps every four or five years) intervals, and this practice does exist at CUHK. CLEAR also provides an individual teaching-consultation service.

3.5 Professional development

The nature and type of professional development activities should be listed. These might be in-house departmental and faculty events, CLEAR or ITSC activities, professional training courses, or academic conferences relating to T&L. The nature of the engagement should be described, such as:

- attendance;
- involvement in an organizing committee;
- doing peer reviews of papers;
- presentation of a poster;
- presentation of a paper; and
- publication of an abstract or a paper.

3.6 Research for scholarship

The scholarship of teaching is an important aspect of academic life, and evidence-based consideration of scholarly questions in T&L should be documented and rewarded. Some examples of research activities are:

- involvement in Teaching Development Grants;
- involvement in Courseware Development Grants;
- work on university T&L projects;
- presentation of the results of T&L projects; and
- publication of the results of T&L projects.

3.7 Reflections and continuous improvement

A teaching portfolio should contain a section for the teacher to reflect on the strengths and challenges portrayed by the information in the other sections. This can be a space to:

- highlight achievements;
- explain mismatches, for example between students' and peers' views;
- explain fluctuations in evidence of teaching quality; and
- suggest plans for the future.

URLs

- CLEAR's individual teaching-consultation service – <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/services/consult.htm>
- Sample evaluation forms – <http://www.cuhk.edu.hk/clear/enhance/resources.html>

CLEAR

August 2010

Noted at the Fourth Meeting (2010–11) of the Senate Committee on Teaching and Learning on Friday 15 July 2011 as being “one example of good practice” that may be useful for CUHK teachers to consult.