University of South Australia

Strategies for Success

Developing Applications for the University of South Australia Teaching Awards

Learning and Teaching Unit
(Reviewed April 2012)

.

Note: This paper deals with the three categories of competitive awards that are offered by UniSA. These awards articulate with those offered through the national Office for Learning and Teaching (http://www.olt.gov.au/awards).

Contents

1. Introduction

It is widely understood that staff will not become involved in reward and recognition schemes if they do not value the reward and recognition offered, or if they have no confidence that they can be successful in achieving the reward or recognition offered.

Hence the advice contained herein is intended to reinforce the value of teaching awards; in particular, the awards offered by UniSA. It also aims to raise the confidence of applicants by clearly indicating what needs to be done and how to do it in order to develop a competitive application. The objects are to identify and explain the conceptual and practical aspects of designing and writing an application for a teaching award.

While the focus is on the competitive UniSA teaching awards, the advice respecting the development of written applications applies equally to the national Office for Learning and Teaching awards.

2. Teaching Awards

2.1 The Strategic Role of Teaching Awards

Some years ago, teaching awards in Higher Education were generally poorly perceived by academics. Schemes were often arbitrary and the number of awards limited. In the last few years, however, partly through the positive influence of Australian Awards for University Teaching—now expanded and administered by the Office for Learning and Teaching—well-considered and accessible awards in learning and teaching have developed across the sector in Australia and are receiving broad support from staff. University teaching award schemes are now firmly embedded within the scholarship of learning and teaching, in the category of reward and recognition. Some of the more important benefits of such schemes can be summarised as follow:

- Recognition – from peers, management, discipline, and across the sector.
- Reflective practice – development of a personal philosophy and critical approach by practitioners.
- The benchmarking of good and excellent practice.
- The dissemination of 'best' and better practice, thereby building the learning and teaching capacity of Higher Education institutions (at UniSA the awards scheme operates with particular reference to the Teaching and Learning framework).
- Promotion of excellence in teaching and quality student learning outcomes at both the national and international levels.

2.2 The UniSA Teaching Awards

The University currently has four award categories. The first is:

- **Supported Teacher Award**: This award rewards high levels of performance in teaching in a way that mirrors the Supported Researcher Scheme for individual performance in research.

We will not deal with this award here as the process for identifying staff for the award is largely automated. The remaining three categories comprise the 'competitive awards'; namely awards made subject to the competitive adjudication of written applications:

- **UniSA Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning**
  This award recognises the many and diverse contributions that individuals and teams make to the creation of effective learning environments and to the quality of student learning. Citations are awarded to staff (academic and professional) who have made a significant contribution to student learning in a specific area of responsibility, over a sustained period of time. Either teams or individuals may be nominated.

- **UniSA Awards for Teaching Excellence**
  This award recognises teachers (whether as individuals or in teams) who are renowned for the excellence of their teaching, who have outstanding presentation skills and who have made a broad and deep contribution to enhancing the quality of learning and teaching at UniSA.

- **UniSA Enhancing Learning Awards**
  This award recognises teaching and learning support activities, services and programs that make an outstanding contribution to the quality of student learning and the quality of student experience at the University.

2.3 Nomination

Nominations for the competitive awards are made in the Divisions by the Deans: Teaching & Learning, with the support of the respective Heads of School. The Deans use different strategies in identifying nominees, and some nominees may have been have been identified through recommendation by their Head of School or by colleagues. Others may have been identified through the Quality teaching awards and various Divisional awards. Whatever the precise reason for a given nomination, the UniSA teaching awards are not a popularity contest. The staff nominated have been identified as members of the University (whether academic or professional, contract, continuing or sessional) who contribute to excellent student learning outcomes.

The University encourages nominees to take a strategic (as opposed to a 'one-off') approach to obtaining competitive teaching awards, and is committed to the ongoing development of applicants. *Nominations remain in effect for three years*. Once in the nomination 'pool', we will work with candidates to develop their applications progressively through the internal and national awards rounds. For candidates this means that the initial effort in preparing an application becomes an investment in a process of professional development aimed at achieving appropriate recognition.

Nomination is a personal invitation to embark on a two to three year process of professional development by reflecting on and describing your teaching practice and the learning outcomes of your students.

2.4 Procedures (UniSA Teaching Awards)

Submission details are included in the UniSA Teaching Awards [Guide to University Teaching Awards](#) on the application cover-sheets. Dates are posted on the website.

All applications for teaching awards, whether the UniSA teaching awards or the Office for Learning and Teaching awards, are adjudicated by the Grants and Awards Selection Panel.

This panel is appointed by the PVC: Academic for the purpose of reviewing and making recommendations with respect both to University and national Office for Learning and Teaching awards and grants. In the case of the UniSA and national awards, the Panel makes recommendations to the Deputy Vice Chancellor: Academic for endorsement. The Panel undertakes to provide feedback and constructive suggestions to applicants.

Enquiries about nomination, submission, and assistance in developing applications should be directed to Dr Susanne Owen (susanne.owen@unisa.edu.au) or to Associate Professor Gavin Sanderson (gavin.sanderson@unisa.edu.au).

2.5 General Strategies

- Start with a positive attitude—and cultivate it! The process isn't 'easy', but it is worthwhile, interesting and of considerable professional value. Moreover, the University has strategies in place to support you throughout that process.
- Prioritise your time. Schedule time each week. Break the writing task into short manageable stages. Allow time to collect the evidence, data or literature needed. Approach referees early (they will often give you valuable insight into various strengths and weaknesses that should be addressed).
- Stick to the rules. For example, the Citation written statement is four pages, so do not exceed the limit—material over the limit will not be considered by the panel.
- Get feedback on your application by sharing it with others. Your colleagues are also busy people, so don't leave it to the 'last minute'. Use the support that the University provides. Also show your drafts to colleagues, partners, former award or grant winners, and the Academic Developers. Submitting your application to critical review is simply part and parcel of good scholarly practice. We all learn and benefit from the process.
- Approach awards and grants strategically. They are competitive processes. Not everyone will be successful first time. Remember it is a process, and that it may take a couple of attempts before your application is competitively successful. Applicants who commit themselves to a longer-term outlook, and who are open to feedback and development, will generally be successful.

2.5 Approach

Developing a competitive application for teaching awards starts with carefully reflecting on one's practice and the learning outcomes of students. What is it that you wish to be recognised for? How will the claim be made and supported? At the outset you will need to think through the following points:

a) My philosophy of teaching. Is the focus on what I do, or on how and what my students learn? What is good in my practice (i.e. professional competence at my level), and what goes beyond 'good' to setting a higher standard (i.e. 'excellent')?
b) What will be the focus of excellence in my application?
c) Where does my particular focus of excellence 'fit' in the awards scheme? What award should I be attempting? If there are optional criteria (as in the Citations), which should I select to address?
d) What are the sources of evidence that will support my claim? What type of evidence have I got and what do I need to get?
e) Time considerations. While time itself is not a conceptual factor, nevertheless it is the time management factor that single-handedly accounts for applications either not being completed or submitted, or else not being adequately developed in terms of the awards scheme requirements. Hence you need to consider: How can

I best manage completing the application within the context of my current workload? Making an early start and scheduling regular times to work on the application are two of the better strategies to address this problem.

Figure 1, below, illustrates the conceptual considerations that applicants need to clarify for themselves. Note that a sound philosophy and approach to teaching underpins the structure, while time (management) is the capstone required to complete the structure.

Figure 1: *Conceptual considerations*

Time

Identifying a breadth of **evidence**

Matching the **criteria** with the focus

What claims need to be made?

Focus of application

Identifying a particular aspect of excellence in my practice

Foundation

My philosophy of teaching - Approaches

What is good? What is excellent?
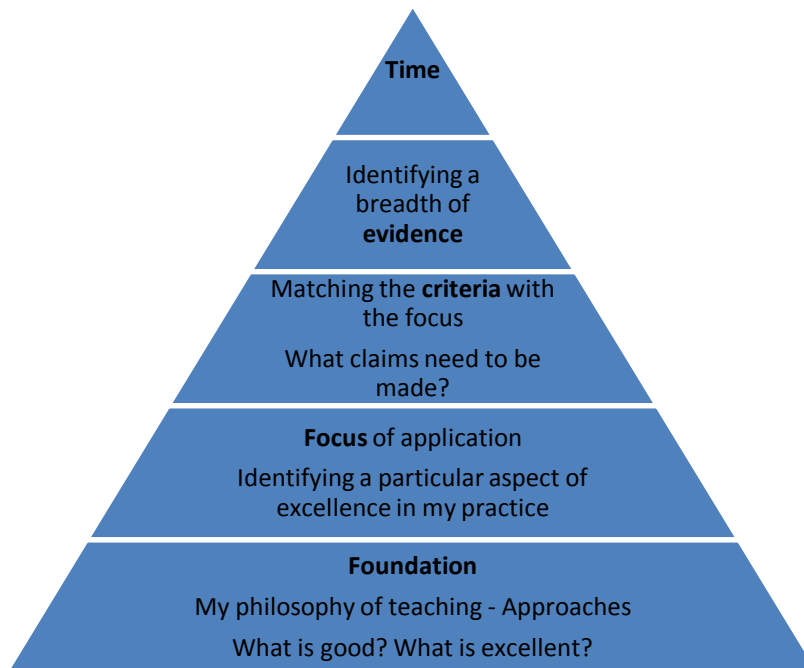
3. What is Teaching Excellence?

Teaching awards serve the purposes of helping to identify, recognise and benchmark 'best practice'. Hence awards tend to be described in qualitative terms: '*outstanding* contributions to student learning', 'teaching *excellence*' or '*enhancing* learning'. Consequently it follows that applicants need to have a clear idea of what comprises teaching excellence and the ways in which it may be quantified and demonstrated.

The difficulty commonly faced is that while we may have a sense of what teaching excellence is in ourselves or in others—'I know it when I see it'— it is much harder to express as a concept or to objectively measure.

However teaching excellence may be defined, the consensus view is that it ought to be evidenced with reference more to student learning and less in terms of predetermined 'performance' measures. Hence it is a positive aspect of both the UniSA and national Office for Learning and Teaching award schemes that they allow applicants to make a case for teaching excellence on their own terms by addressing relatively broad criteria which allow for a wide range of approaches to teaching. Moreover, both schemes require the claim for excellence to be couched in terms of student learning outcomes.

In order to arrive at an understanding of what comprises 'excellence' in university teaching, and to offer a theoretical discussion that may help award applicants to better

reflect on the question of teaching excellence, it may be helpful to deal with the problem from the meta-understanding and attributive approaches.

3.1 A meta-understanding of teaching excellence

Alan Skelton tabulates four meta-understanding of teaching excellence as follows:[1]

Table 1. *Four meta-understandings of teaching excellence in higher education*

	Traditional	*Performative*	*Psychologized*	*Critical*
Who for?	Social elite	Meritocracy	Individuals	Informed citizenry
Where located?	Disciplinary knowledge	Rules and regulations	Teacher-student relationship	Material conditions
Epistemology?	Pursuit of truth	Knowledge that works	Subjective interpretation	Social critique
Indicative method?	Lecture	Work-based learning	Group work	Participatory dialogue
Teacher's role?	Subject expert	Enforcer of standards	Psycho-diagnostician	Critical intellectual
Purpose	Cultural reproduction	System efficiency	Effective learning	Emancipation

The Traditional understanding of teaching excellence reflects the historic notion of the university in Western Europe: "Logical analysis fostered intellectual precision which was considered to be key in the search for universal truths. The application of rational argument to intellectual propositions and the whole training in arts was thought to be just as valuable and useful as 'vocational' subjects such as law and medicine." This general approach was thought to suffice to prepare for all the professions and therefore was viewed as having direct community benefit.[2]

Performative understandings of teaching excellence have arisen in a climate of globalisation and governmental reforms which have sought to make educational systems more productive by drawing on human capital theory. The performative university is able "to contribute directly to national economic performance through teaching which is relevant to commerce and industry." It encompasses work-based learning, 'employability' and 'entrepreneurship'. It stresses a student-centred style of education "that is individualized and flexible, and is designed to enhance the individual's opportunity for employment." It is able to attract students in the global marketplace. In this environment teaching may be "regulated by the state to maximize individual, institutional and system performance," and teachers may be encouraged to become excellent against such measures through processes of continuous improvement and self-regulation.[3]

Psychological constructions of the teacher and learner, a 'technology of behaviour', underpin psychologized understandings of teaching excellence. "From this perspective, teaching excellence is relational: it does not reside in either the teacher or the student; rather it can be found in the interpersonal relationship that develops between them." The teacher understands the individual needs of students and therefore selects "appropriate methods and learning experiences from their 'toolbox' of available processes, techniques

---

[1] Alan Skelton, *Understanding teaching excellence in higher education*. (London: Routledge, 2005), p. 35 (Table 2.1).
[2] Skelton, p. 27.
[3] Skelton, pp. 29–30.

and activities," with the intent of facilitating 'deep' learning and the achievement of predicted outcomes. This understanding recognises that what is taught is often very different to what is learned. It embraces student-centred approaches and 'constructivist' ideas and theories.[4]

Critical understandings of teaching excellence "are informed by a range of critical theories (for example, critical theory itself, neo-Marxism, feminism, anti-racism, Freireism)… [which] all share an interest in and commitment to emancipation. Teaching from this perspective is therefore regarded as an inescapably political act rather than as something that is neutral or value-free." The teacher's aim, then, is to support a process of student emancipation by acting as a critical or transformative intellectual. "Teaching excellence involves not only increasing access to courses to groups of people who have been historically under-represented, but also in enhancing participation through the creation of inclusive learning environments." It involves broader questions about the purposes of higher education and educational values: "it inevitably involves moral questions about what it means to be educated." It questions established practice and goes beyond the 'dominant ideology' into areas such as the material conditions of higher education.[5]

The purpose in providing the foregoing summary is not necessarily to support Skelton's classifications, much less to privilege any one understanding over another. Indeed, one may argue that the classifications provided are largely artificial constructs. In practice most university teachers would recognise something of themselves in each of the understandings that Skelton describes. What the summary does serve to highlight, however, is the fact that a personal notion of teaching excellence will be predicated to some extent upon the pre-understanding of the teaching task that we bring to our practice while, at the same time, it will be shaped also by contextual considerations (including, peers, discipline priorities and the institutional mission).

In this connection it may be noted that Gibbs and Habeshaw make the observation that an excellent teacher "uses techniques and approaches for learning, teaching and assessment which are 'fit for purpose' and appropriate for the context and mission of the university."[6] If the observation is sound, then it follows that we ought to reflect on the extent to which being part of UniSA shapes our 'internal' concept of teaching excellence; whether that of the individual academic or in the perspectives formed at various organisational levels within the University. To what extent do the distinctive characteristics of the University shape the practices of its teachers? What does it mean to teach in an applied university that trains students for the modern professions, and that has specific commitments to the embedding of indigenous perspectives and to issues of equity? How should we define teaching excellence against measures such as the Graduate Qualities and the new Teaching and Learning Framework?

3.2 An attributive understanding of teaching excellence

Another way of looking at teaching excellence is to consider the attributes or characteristics of teachers who have been recognised as excellent in terms of student learning outcomes. While readily admitting, as Skelton serves to remind us, that there are many diverse factors which impact upon the practice and evaluation of university teaching, nevertheless it remains that, when interrogated, the relevant literature tends to

---

[4] Skelton, pp. 31–32.
[5] Skelton, pp. 32–34.
[6] G. Gibbs & T. Habeshaw, *Recognising and rewarding good teaching*. 2nd edn. Milton Keynes: TEQF National Co-ordination Team, Centre for Higher Education Practice, The Open University, 2003), pp. 12–13.

the conclusion that practitioners, students and pedagogical scholars generally settle on a core set of attributes and approaches when attempting to define 'teaching excellence'. Table 2 following attempts to offer a synopsis of such 'generic attributes':[7]

Table 2: *Teaching excellence: a synopsis*

Field	Attributes	Approaches
Discipline / subject	• In-depth subject knowledge • Know how to simplify and clarify complex subjects • Think about their own thinking ('meta-cognition') within the discipline • Makes a recognised contribution to the learning, teaching and assessment of the subject	• Develop techniques that assist students to grasp principles and to organise concepts • Work on the assumption that learning is as meaningful when it produces a sustained and substantial influence on the way people think, act and feel • Regularly update knowledge
Student-centredness	• Believe that teaching is as intellectually demanding and important as their research and scholarship • Enthusiastic and energetic	• Thorough preparation of teaching. • Begin with questions about student learning objectives
Expectations of students as learners	• Expect 'more' of students, in terms of stimulating high achievement	• Favour the types of objectives that embody the kind of thinking and acting expected for life
Support for students as learners	• Understand that people learn by confronting intriguing, beautiful, or important problems, and authentic tasks that will challenge them to grapple with ideas, rethink their assumptions, and examine their mental models of reality	• Create a "natural critical learning environment" • Support students: to feel a sense of control over their education; work collaboratively; believe that their work will be considered fairly and honestly
Trust in students	• Treat students (and colleagues) with respect and decency • Approachable	• Display openness with students • Encourage students to be reflective and candid
Reflection and evaluation	• Systematically check their progress and evaluate their efforts • Willingness to confront own weaknesses and failings • Don't blame the students for any difficulties encountered • A strong sense of commitment to the academic community, seeing their own efforts as part of a larger educational enterprise • Authentic: find own genius by adjusting every idea to who they are and what they teach	• Avoid assessing students on arbitrary standards but against primary learning objectives • Support students to try, fail, and receive feedback from expert learners in advance of and separate from any summative assessment of their effort

---

[7] The synopsis was based initially on, but is in no way confined to, Ken Bain, *What the best college teachers do* (Cambridge Mass. & London: Harvard University Press, 2004).

4. The written statement

4.1 Finding the focus

Having given some thought what teaching excellence means and how it may be expressed, applicants then need to identify and develop a focus of teaching excellence which will comprise the 'theme' of a competitive written application.

To find the focus for your application consider the following questions:

- What am I passionate about in my approach to teaching?
- What in particular do colleagues and students commend in my approach?
- In what areas do my students' learning outcomes excel?

A reflective reading of the specific award criteria also may help you to identify an appropriate focus of excellence that can be sustained and developed throughout the award application.

Figure 2: *Teaching excellence focused at the intersection of passion, approach and outcome*

Looking at Figure 2 above, think of the focus of excellence as the point of intersection between 'Teaching passion' (what educationally you are enthusiastic about), 'Best approach' (the strongest and most effective aspect of your approach) and 'Best learning outcome' (what stands out in terms of student learning outcomes).

Regardless of which award you apply for, the focus you identify must run as a theme throughout your application. In the Citations this focus will be stated at the outset in the wording of the proposed citation. In the Awards for Teaching Excellence and Enhancing Learning Awards this focus/theme should be stated at the outset in the 'overview' section of your application. In all applications, you should be returning to and reinforcing the theme as you unfold your claim. The written application may range over a broad spectrum of an applicant's teaching practice, but the focus is the 'hook' on which all else hangs.

To put it another way, the focus is the premise that runs through and unites the argument of the application. It is this focus that is to the fore and developed as you address the selection criteria, and which will be supported by the evidence adduced. Figure 3 following illustrates this approach.
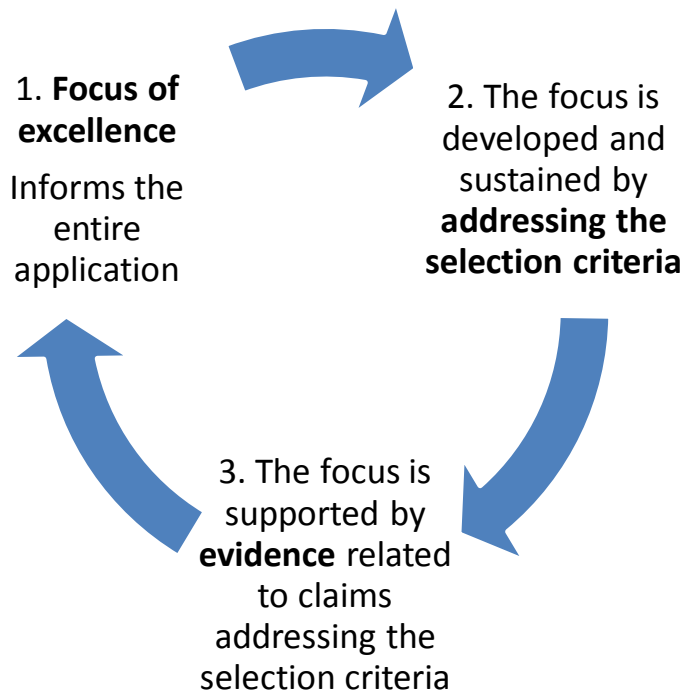
Figure 3: *The focused application*

4.2 Structure

The competitive awards each require a written statement, which should be presented in the order following:

- For Citations only, the proposed citation (maximum of twenty-five words) describing the distinctive contribution of the nominee.

- An overview, summarising the particular contribution and describing the specific context for this contribution. Regardless of the award category, the application needs to begin with an opening paragraph that states the focus and the theme of the application and which grabs the attention of the reader.

- A statement addressing the main criteria. For the Citations applicants choose at least one of the following criteria, while for the Awards for Teaching Excellence all are required to be addressed. The criteria are as follow:

  1. Approaches to teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn

  2. Development of curricula and resources that reflect a command of the field

  3. Approaches to assessment and feedback that foster independent learning

  4. Respect and support for the development of students as individuals

  5. Scholarly activities that have influenced and enhanced learning and teaching

Applicants for the Enhancing Learning Award are required to address four criteria as follow:

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

2. Influence on student learning and student engagement
Extent to which the program 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 program has led to widespread benefits for students, staff, and UniSA and/or other institutions, consistent with the purpose of the program.

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

In addition to addressing one or more of the five main criteria, the Citations require also a statement identifying the ways in which the contribution has influenced student learning, engagement and/or the overall student experience, been sustained over time, and been recognised by fellow staff, the University, and/or the broader community.

4.3 Citation and Overview

For the Citations, the (up to) twenty-five word citation is the theme or proposition of your application. This proposition is predicated upon the focus of excellence you have determined, and will be supported and evidenced by addressing the award's criteria.

The overview is a summary of your contribution and its context for which you are seeking an award – it is not a summary of your role in total.

The overview should be designed to capture the attention of the reader from the outset. Mount a powerful case especially in your opening paragraph. Use the overview to clearly spell out why your approach to learning and teaching is memorable, distinctive, and worthy of recognition. Both the first and last paragraphs of the overview should reinforce the idea that your practice is *outstanding* (not simply 'good practice') and indicate that you have a compelling case for an award.

The overview is a convenient place to *succinctly* state your teaching philosophy and values, though as you address the criteria you will still need to explain various aspects of your practice for which you seek an award. However, whether in the overview or elsewhere in the written statement, when discussing teaching philosophy keep your language accessible and do not get 'bogged down' by the theoretical angle. If you need to elaborate on pedagogical theory, get an Academic Developer to review this aspect of your application.

The key elements of a good overview are:

- It grabs the reader's attention at the outset
- It sets the focus or principal claim of the application against a background of broad and sustained professional practise and reflection
- It places the applicant's claim in context
- It uses evidence appropriate to the purpose of the overview
- It is concluded in a way that will prepare the reader for the specific arguments made in support of the applicant's claim that follow
- It leaves the reader feeling that they something about the applicant.

4.4 Addressing the main criterion

Success in award writing requires an ability to adequately address the set criteria. The UniSA awards require applicants to address the main selection criteria as detailed above (at least one for the Citations; five for the Awards for Teaching Excellence and four for the Enhancing Learning Awards) and a number of general criteria (see below §4.5). Unless you understand what the criteria require, chances are that you will fail to address them adequately. Criteria need to be interrogated. An effective way of approaching this is to analyse each criterion and address it point by point, as in the example following in Table 3.

- Make a good case for each criterion and ensure that in each section the information directly relates to the criterion that you are addressing. A logical structure to your claim reinforces the idea that your teaching is equally well structured. If the information used applies to another criterion as well, indicate that and then describe it a bit more briefly when addressing the other criterion.
- Make the connections between each statement addressing a criterion point and the evidence provided.
- *Do not ignore the 'why' of your practice.* Explain the reasoning behind your approach to learning and teaching and how your values shape your learning and teaching strategies as you address the criteria.
- Make the criteria your own: adapt them to your circumstances and particular focus of excellence.

The approach to addressing the criteria can be summarised as follows:

- ✓ STATE the claim
- ✓ ILLUSTRATE by giving examples
- ✓ SUPPORT by providing evidence
- ✓ REINFORCE by demonstrating the depth and breadth of your practice and student learning outcomes.

Table 3. *Criterion analyses*

EXAMPLE—(Citations & Awards for Teaching Excellence) Criterion 1**:** *Approaches to teaching that influence, motivate and inspire students to learn*

a) State your approach to the aspect of your practice that you are focusing on
What is it?
Why this particular approach (educational reasons)?
How does it fit within the broader context of your practice described in your overview?
How has it been sustained?
b) How has it influenced students?
E.g. how has it fostered student learning outcomes and development by stimulating curiosity and independence in learning; how has it contributed to the development of students' critical thinking skills, analytical skills and scholarly values?
c) How has it motivated students?
E.g. how has it encouraged student engagement through the enthusiasm shown for learning and teaching?
d) How has it inspired students?
E.g. how has it inspired and motivated students through high-level communication, teaching strategies, presentation and interpersonal skills?

---

e) Conclude section with a summary statement as to how your approach has: *"influenced student learning*, student *engagemen*t or the overall student *experience".*

4.5 General criteria

Each of the award categories indicate criteria, in addition to or complementing, the main selection criteria that the Panel will apply in adjudicating applications.

The UniSA Teaching Awards documentation states that:

> The selection of winners of *Citations* will be based on the extent to which nominees show evidence that their contribution has:
> influenced student learning, student engagement or the overall student experience;
> been sustained over time; and
> gained recognition from fellow staff, the University, and/or the broader community.

For the Awards for Teaching Excellence, applicants are advised that, among other considerations, the Panel will take into account "the extent to which the claims for excellence are supported by formal and informal evaluation" and "the extent of creativity, imagination or innovation, irrespective of whether the approach involves traditional learning environments or technology-based developments".

While for the Enhancing Learning Award it is stated that the Panel will be assessing "the degree of creativity, imagination or innovation", "evidence of the sustained effectiveness of the program", as well as "a strategic approach to disseminating program outcomes and deliverables".'

These general criteria are included in order allow applicants to better situate their respective claims for excellence in terms of their wider teaching practice. That is, while applicants need to maintain a focus of excellence, they need also to demonstrate a degree of breadth of experience and approaches to university teaching, as well as depth of engagement with student learning. The aspects of breadth and depth are important in all award categories, but particularly so in the case of the Awards for Teaching Excellence.

Applicants, then, should give thought as to how they will demonstrate an engagement with students, both in terms of achieving learning outcomes and in terms of the student as an individual. Beyond actual learning outcomes, evidence of awareness of the learning problems encountered by individual students, the pastoral care of students, and appropriate responses towards problems of equity, race, gender, disability and social and cultural disadvantage, should be addressed in some measure. Applicants might also expand on items touched on in the overview, and describe more fully the context in which they work, and the intersection between their practice and the Teaching and Learning Framework of the University and, indeed, the specific mission of UniSA.

Sustainability is addressed not simply in terms of length of time (i.e. "I've been teaching X number of years…") but in terms of sustained learning outcomes. Probably a minimum of data over three years is needed to make a credible case for a sustained approach.

Excellent teaching does not occur in a professional vacuum. Mention should be made of the input and impact of working with colleagues, relations with industry, the professions and professional bodies.

Under recognition from fellow staff, the institution, and/or the broader community, may be included:

- Awards to you or your students from the University and other bodies, community recognition
- Professional activities (leading workshops, memberships in education societies or education subcommittees of societies, research on teaching-related topics)
- Other research and professional accomplishments (they should be summarised). Summarise grants received, and cite the more impressive grant bodies. Teaching-related grants, however, should be listed more thoroughly
- Publications, especially teaching-related publications, should be noted if not previously mentioned.

5. Evidence

Both the UniSA and the Office for Learning and Teaching competitive awards require a robust evidence-based approach. It is crucial to back up any claims made and to provide the reader with solid evidence of performance and outcomes.

Formal, quantitative evaluations are highly regarded by selection panels, but need to be clearly related to specific claims. *Summarise* evaluation outcomes in your statement where appropriate. A range of evidence is required: different forms from different sources over a period of time.

In passing, it might be noted that the value of maintaining a Teaching Portfolio cannot be over-emphasised with respect to awards, as well as to promotion and other PD activities.[8]

Also, take stock as to how you are receiving feedback from students, past graduates and industry. It may be time to adopt some new strategies, such as online wikis and bulletin boards. Not only will your store of evidentiary materials increase, but learning and teaching benefits will accrue.

A holistic approach to evidence is required. A variety of evidences is required to build a cumulative body of support for the applicant's claim. The types of evidence which should be considered and used are summarised by the 'Evidence Grid' depicted in Figure 4 below.

Successful award applications use a variety of evidences, drawn from each of the four 'quarters' of the 'Evidence Grid'. Not every type of evidence presented in the Grid need be used, but applicants should ensure that some items of evidence from each quarter of the Grid are used.

Sifting through and selecting evidence is to use is probably the single, most time consuming activity in preparing an award application. However, you ignore doing this at your own peril.

When using statistical data, including SETs and CEIs, check that (a) they actually support the claim(s) to which they are related; (b) that the figures stated are intelligible; and (c)
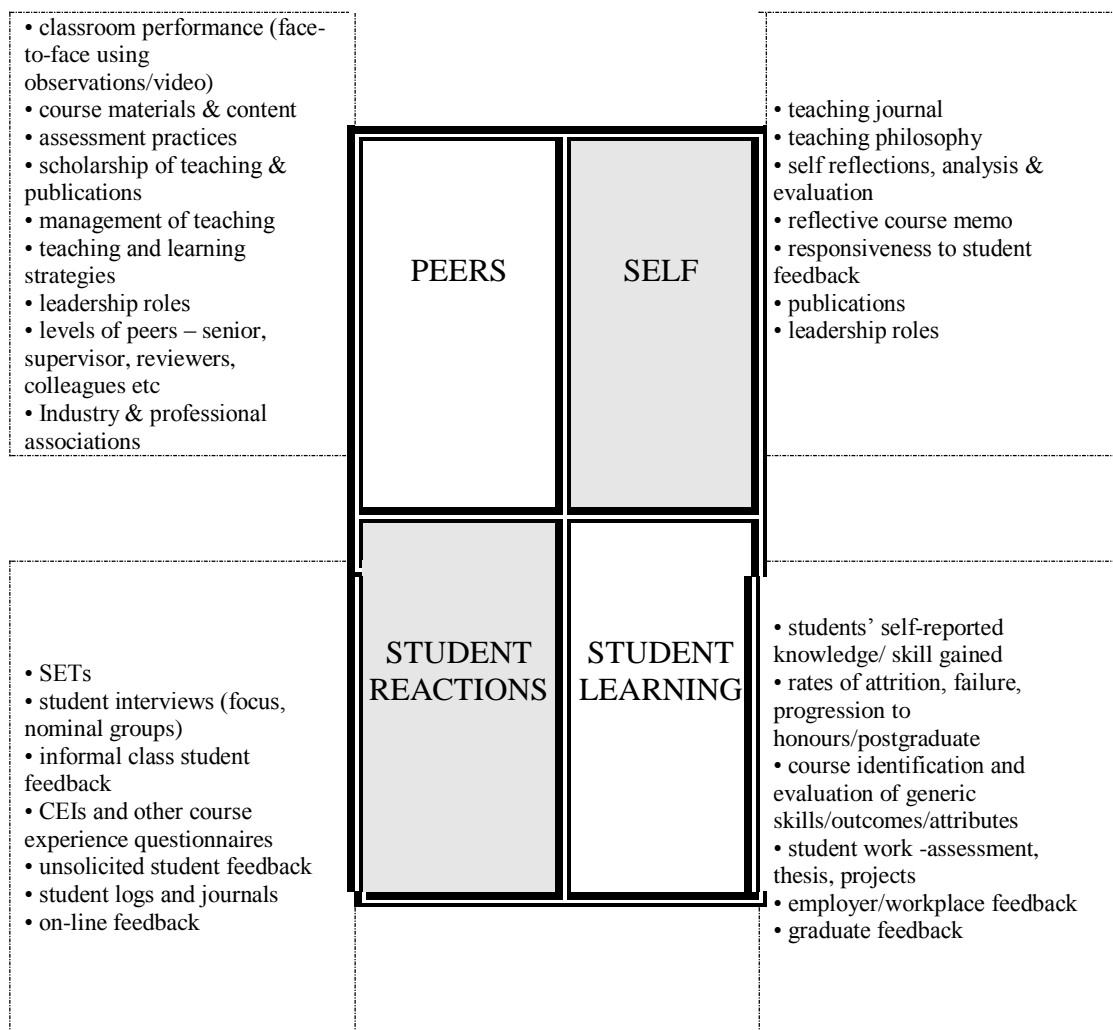
---

[8] http://resource.unisa.edu.au/course/view.php?id=4593

that the significance of the cited data is immediately apparent to the reader. Summarise statistical data wherever possible. Use tables and diagrams wisely, remembering the limits on the space available to you. Where possible, include comparative data that shows you exceed the average for your School or Division.

Applicants are under no obligation to include anything other than the really good evaluation data. Moreover, if SETs, CEIs or other instruments, do not give you data that adequately reflect the learning outcomes of your students as related to some particular aspect of your practice, then it may be worth considering running your own survey instrument (subject to University guidelines and ethical considerations).[10]

6. Strategies for writing

Figure 4: *The evidence grid*[9]

• classroom performance (face-to-face using observations/video) • course materials & content • assessment practices • scholarship of teaching & publications • management of teaching • teaching and learning strategies • leadership roles • levels of peers – senior, supervisor, reviewers, colleagues etc • Industry & professional associations	**PEERS**	**SELF**	• teaching journal • teaching philosophy • self reflections, analysis & evaluation • reflective course memo • responsiveness to student feedback • publications • leadership roles
• SETs • student interviews (focus, nominal groups) • informal class student feedback • CEIs and other course experience questionnaires • unsolicited student feedback • student logs and journals • on-line feedback	**STUDENT REACTIONS**	**STUDENT LEARNING**	• students' self-reported knowledge/ skill gained • rates of attrition, failure, progression to honours/postgraduate • course identification and evaluation of generic skills/outcomes/attributes • student work -assessment, thesis, projects • employer/workplace feedback • graduate feedback

- **Format:** Consider using a two-column format, which often looks very good. Highlight through use of **bolds**, *italics*, FORMATTING and dot • points, to draw attention to the key points.

---

[9] Adapted from 'Sources of Evidence on Quality Teaching'© Nicoll & Smith, 2000 and used with permission.

- **Clarity of thought and expression**: Writing for awards requires that a great deal of information be compressed within a few pages. The result can be dense and difficult for the reader to follow. Clarity can be enhanced by following an ordered and logical structure, using short sentences and paragraphs, avoiding verbosity and jargon. Do not assume that the reader will know your discipline or be familiar with the technical terms or acronyms that you may commonly use.
- **Be personal:** Write in the first person ('I' for individual applicants, 'We' for teams). Writing in the third person can sound contrived or pompous and is rarely concise. Do not be flippant (assessors think you are not taking them seriously), overly humble or unnecessarily
- **Be forthcoming** about your drawbacks. You are promoting your teaching, so the only to point out weaknesses is to show how you subsequently worked at overcoming them and, as a consequence, have achieved better learning outcomes.
- **Be student centred**: Try to write about your practice as much as possible from a student learning angle. Most importantly, make it obvious to the readers how you **inspire** students. For example better than writing, "my approach is to teach …", is to say, "I offer my students learning experiences that …" It is easy when trying to write up one's teaching to slip into a rather descriptive, teaching centred approach – telling the reader what you do – rather than taking a student oriented stance which focuses on the impact of one's teaching on the students' experience.
- **Make each sentence count:** Build a compelling case. Tell the reader **what** you offer students; **why** you do so; **how** (and **how well**) you do it (think in terms of the specific strategies you employ); and importantly the **impact** of each strategy on student learning and the **evidence** thereof.
- **Inspire the reader**: Be personable. Let something of your passion and enthusiasms come through. Tell a story. Let the readers see the person behind the nomination. At the end of reading the application you want the reader to say "I want to be in that class!"

7. References and CV

Two letters of reference are required for the UniSA Citations and Awards for Teaching Excellence. One should be from the Head of School or a Dean in your Division. Your contribution and your nomination ought to be such that it also motivates your referees to write inspirational references. To do so they need to have an intimate knowledge of your work.

Encourage your referees to write references that capture and highlight the outstanding aspects of your particular contribution.

You may prefer to wait until you have a draft to show a referee. Experience has shown, however, that waiting until that point can be too late in many instances. Therefore it may be prudent to contact your referees at the outset, supplying them with: 1) the *citation wording* (or if Awards for Teaching Excellence or Enhancing Learning Awards, a brief statement of the focus/theme); and 2) the *selection criteria* that you will address. A copy of your *CV* may also be of help to them. Whatever you choose to do, do it early, so they have time, and you have time to reflect on their perception of your practice. Make sure referees know that they have only one A4 page!

Applicants for the Awards for Teaching Excellence also require a *Curriculum vitae* which usually outlines the nominee's educational qualifications, career history, teaching positions and teaching experience. The curriculum vitae is limited to three A4 pages (all margins at a minimum of 2.45cm, text in either 11pt or 12pt Times New Roman or Verdana fonts) for nominations from individuals. Teams may extend this limit, but a limit of one page per team member is recommended.

The focus of the CV should be teaching practice. In listing publications, priority should be given to publications in the scholarship of learning and teaching. If you have a large number of grants, do not list them all, just give the total value for a given period, but identifying significant grants with a learning and teaching focus.

Enhancing Learning Awards require neither references nor a CV (but a longer written application).

8. Summary[11]

UniSA Citations for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning
• Do not attempt to address all criteria. Select one or two areas of strength. No advantage to select more
• The criteria are indicative, not limited. If the criteria do not exactly suit you – then adapt.
• For each criteria -state claim; -provide examples; -supply evidence from a variety of sources; -demonstrate breadth and depth; -write in your own voice
• Less is more – if it cannot be said in the allocated pages then EDIT
• You cannot start writing too soon, and seek feedback.

UniSA Awards for Teaching Excellence
• Address each of the criteria in turn
• For each criteria -state claim; -provide examples; -supply evidence from a variety of sources; -demonstrate breadth and depth; -write in your own voice
• Less is more – if it cannot be said in allocated pages, then EDIT
• Choose referees carefully
• Start writing now, seek feedback on each draft, seek advice from recent Award winners.

UniSA Enhancing Learning Awards
• It must be a program of activity i.e. broader than one or two subjects.
• Provide a succinct overview (400 words) to orientate the assessors
• Provide a context for the program in the overview, do not only describe it. E.g. where does it come from, who is it directed at, why? How effective is it? How do you know?
• Demonstrate how it fits the category throughout the submission
• Address each criteria
   -state claim
   -provide examples
-provide evidence from a variety of sources
• Less is more – if it cannot be said in 12 pages (in 11 point and spacing) then EDIT

• Start writing now, seek feedback on each draft, seek advice from recent Award winners
• Establish institutional practices to identify and develop programs

Further Reading

Allan, C. D'Andrea, V.& Brown, S. (eds) (2003), *Exchange* Issue 5: focus on 'Recognising and rewarding excellence', available at: http://www.exchange.ac.uk/issue5.asp

Bain, Ken (2004), *What the best college teachers do*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.

Chalmers, Denise (2007), Overview of the Carrick Institute's Programs. Presentation – 2007 Carrick Institute Awards Forum (Melbourne), available at: www.usq.edu.au/learnteach/.../~/.../OverviewOfCarrick07pdf.ashx

Collins, R & Palmer, A, 'Perceptions of rewarding excellence in teaching: Carrots or sticks?' Higher Education Academy (UK), available at:

http://www.heacademy.ac.uk/assets/documents/resources/resourcedatabase/id 394_perceptions_of_rewarding_excellence.pdf

Frame, P, Johnson, M & Rosie, A (2006), 'Reward or award? Reflections on the initial experiences of winners of a National Teaching Fellowship', *Innovations in Education and Teaching International* 43.4: 409–419.

Gibbs, G & Habeshaw, T (2003), *Recognising and rewarding excellent teaching*. 2nd edn. Milton Keynes: Centre for Higher Education Practice, the Open University.

Kember, David, with Carmel McNaught (2007), *Enhancing university teaching: Lessons from research into award-winning teachers.* London & New York: Routledge.

McLean, Michelle (2001), 'Rewarding teaching excellence. Can we measure teaching "excellence"? Who should be the judge?', *Medical Teacher* 23.1: 6–11.

Moore, S & Kuol, N (2007), 'Retrospective insights on teaching: Exploring teaching excellence through the eyes of the alumni', *Journal of Further and Higher Education* 31:133–143.

Ramsden, P, Margetson, D, Martin, E & Clarke, S (1995), *Recognising and rewarding good teaching in Australian higher education: A project commissioned by the Committee for the Advancement of University Teaching*. Canberra: Australian Government Publishing Service.

Ramsden, P & Martin, E (1996), 'Recognition of good university teaching: Policies from an Australian study', *Studies in Higher Education* 21: 299–315.

Simpson, R D (2001), 'Editor's address—From adequacy to excellence: Honoring the scholarship of learning and teaching', *Innovative Higher Education* 26.2: 83–85.

Skelton, Alan (2005), *Understanding teaching excellence in higher education: Towards a critical approach*. Key issues in higher education. London: Routledge.