Key features of successful teaching award applications

When selection panel members read and assess teaching award applications, they are generally looking for an evidence-based case or argument in which the set criteria are addressed persuasively. The following features seem to be common to successful teaching award applications:

1. The clear articulation of the applicant's aims with regard to teaching (or research supervision, learning support, or systems to support learning) and the significance of these aims.

   Implications for applicants: In mapping out what exactly you are trying to accomplish and why this matters, it is helpful to provide some broader context for your work, which might involve such things as the challenges and constraints of working with a particular disciplinary area(s), subject matter, student demographic, and so on; the aims or mission of a particular program, faculty, institution, discipline, or profession; or broader societal needs, such as sustainability, social inclusion, and so on. This kind of information would typically go in the 'summary' or 'overview' section.

2. A description of the teaching approaches or strategies that are in use and a brief explanation of their conceptual underpinnings.

   Implications for applicants: Try to provide a clear picture of what goes on in your class, program or system. To this end, a few illustrative examples can be useful. Also, consider which key ideas – about learning, teaching, knowledge, and so on - have influenced or shaped your practice. Most successful applications incorporate a few references from scholarship or research, whether from literature in higher education generally or in one's own discipline(s), or from a key thinker whose work has informed the teaching practice/philosophy.

3. An account of the applicant's key achievements and evidence of success.

   Implications for applicants: You will need to provide evidence to support your claims. Most successful applications present a mix of evidence types (e.g. qualitative and quantitative, the perspectives of colleagues and students). It is also important to integrate the evidence effectively into the case you are making (don't just include it at the end), and to make it clear what point you are trying to make (don't assume that numbers or quotes will 'speak for themselves'). Also, in the case of individual applications about collective projects, be sure to clarify your individual contribution to

the work of the team. Also, keep in mind that demonstrating 'success' can mean demonstrating significant improvement.

4. Where relevant, evidence of embedding 'good practice' over time, or of the applicant disseminating their successes beyond their own course, student cohort, or program.

   Implications for applicants: You generally need to have been collecting data over some time in order to persuasively address the selection criteria and provide sufficient evidence of the quality of your work. (However, if a project is at the early stages, the application might focus on the processes involved in developing and beginning to implement [and evaluate] a given course, program or system.) Also, assessors of teaching awards are often impressed by those applicants who can demonstrate that their work has attracted the interest of colleagues in your area or in other departments, faculties, disciplines, institutions or countries.

5. A clear focus and an effective structure.

   Implications for applicants: In order to develop a clear focus that can be sustained throughout the application, it is important to be selective (not comprehensive). Successful applications generally provide a clear, overarching focus that thematically links the various parts of the application into an integrated whole, so that there is strong alignment between the aims, strategies and evidence of outcomes. In a nutshell, try to make it clear how what you're trying to accomplish fits with how you're going about it and the results you're getting. Consider how to best structure the case you're making – especially with regard to how you integrate evidence. Most successful applications clearly introduce the main focus early on, and then elaborate on that focus through the discussion of each criterion (rather than introducing brand new ideas under each subheader).

6. A writing style that engages colleagues with a broad interest in university teaching but little or no knowledge of the applicant's disciplinary area.

   Implications for applicants: The selection panels tend to be made up of people from across widely divergent disciplinary backgrounds but who share a common interest in university teaching and learning. Consider whether those from other disciplinary areas are likely to understand your application and to find your evidence convincing. If possible, seek feedback on your draft application from colleagues who are not in your disciplinary area as well as those who are.

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