

Assessing teaching excellence based on scholarly teaching portfolios

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Abstract

In this workshop, we will explore the nature of teaching portfolios as qualitative documents including teachers' reflections and analyses of teaching and student learning. Participants will work with questions of how to document and verify the quality of teaching practices using actual teaching portfolios as case studies, and analyse procedures in a scholarly assessment of teaching. We will also focus on the importance of teachers' ability to incorporate their discipline in a pedagogical context.

As workshop leaders, we build our experience on empirical data including hundreds of teaching portfolios written by teachers from different subjects, faculties and universities as part of applications for appointment, promotion or teaching awards (Olsson and Roxå 2013). Our target audience includes academic teachers and researchers, leaders, policy makers, and advanced students.

After the workshop, participants should have

- reached an improved understanding of how teaching portfolios can be used to demonstrate teaching practices,
- shared a practical assessment experience of how teaching portfolios can be used in a scholarly assessment of teaching,
- used theoretical models and through them increased their awareness of the complexity of excellence in university teaching,
- increased their understanding of the critical importance of "pedagogical content knowledge" – teachers' ability to incorporate their discipline in a pedagogical context,
- recognised that a teaching portfolio is about the actual teaching practice and students' learning in the actual discipline, and that it is not a text about pedagogy in general,
- acquired new ideas and broadened their views on what constitutes excellence in university teaching and how it can be assessed.,

The activities during the workshop will, after a short theoretical and practical introduction about teaching portfolios, focus on authentic portfolios from Swedish universities. Participants will assess reflective parts using actual criteria, and the discussions will include traditions from different countries and findings from the higher education literature.

The workshop's relation to sub-themes

The workshop will mainly address Sub Theme 2 (academics) and Sub Theme 3 (tertiary institutions). It is obvious that teaching portfolios address academic development and environments but also identity issues and career development. Relevant criteria form the basis for the assessment and the criteria expose an institution's definition of teaching excellence and explicit institutional priorities. The focus can be toward institutional development or individual academic career development. Of course, both aspects are appropriate and important and the workshop therefore includes discussions of portfolios related to individual academics as well as tertiary institutions (especially leadership, new developments, and governance and management). We will argue that the institutional development should be overarching and include the individual career development. We base our arguments on our ongoing research on how the structure of criteria used for assessment of teaching qualities effect individual and institutional development. At Lund University, we have adopted an assessment system that focus on institutional development. An illustrating result is that (after 15 years) excellent teachers are significantly overrepresented at important positions within the university. The fact that excellent teachers are seriously involved in policy and decision-making is of profound importance for the institutional development of university teaching.