

# Documenting excellence in teaching

When you talk about yourself, you run the risk  
of betraying false modesty or genuine conceit.

—Erwin Panofsky  
Art Historian

## Suggestions

1. Teaching matters. Even if you do not present yourself for tenure based on excellence in teaching, you still must demonstrate that you are satisfactory in teaching.
2. Make the tenure process work for you. Although your department, school and Indiana University will use it to make a summative evaluation of you, you should use the process to make a formative evaluation of yourself to advance your development as a teacher.
  - Formative:** Use the occasion as an opportunity to reflect on your beliefs about teaching and learning, and on your teaching practice.
  - Summative:** Use it to present yourself in the best light.
3. The most important part of your dossier is your personal statement.
  - a. Create a meta narrative about your teaching.
  - b. If applicable, relate your teaching to your research and/or service.
  - c. Interpret your course evaluations, whether good, bad or average. Explain semesters or courses with bad ratings.
  - d. If early evaluations were negative, explain what you did to improve.
4. The tenure process is no time for false modesty or genuine conceit. Don't be reluctant to emphasize the positive, but don't make unsustainable claims.
5. Rewrite your statement several times. Write with clarity for people outside your discipline. If you must use disciplinary jargon, explain it. Get editing help from colleagues, friends, spouse, etc. Do not try to be your own copy editor.
6. Be sure to check early with your chair, dean and/or personnel committee if it is possible in your unit to go up for tenure based on excellence in teaching. Some units permit it; others do not.
7. All the materials that can help you document excellence in teaching are itemized in the tenure handbook. Talk with your chair and dean about which are considered most important in your unit. Generally, the same principles apply for teaching excellence as for excellence in research:
  - a. You must make your teaching tangible in ways that it can be peer reviewed. Start with Earnest L. Boyer's *Scholarship Reconsidered* for ideas.
  - b. Similarly, the Scholarship of Teaching and Learning under Lee Schulman.
  - c. Publications in pedagogy journals, presentations and panels at conferences. National carries more weight than regional, than local.
  - d. You must go beyond student evaluations to document excellence. For suggestions, see Idea Paper # 36 "Appraising Teaching Effectiveness: Beyond Student Ratings" by Donald P. Hoyt and William H. Pallett, ISS, Franklin 004.

Some obvious items include visits by senior colleagues and their letters, work with teaching consultants, publications, course portfolios, teaching awards, student projects, new course you have launched or existing ones you have significantly upgraded, service in teaching, e.g. curriculum committee, etc.

8. In keeping with the “new paradigm in teaching and learning,” focus on your students’ learning and on tangible outcomes. Include some of their work as demonstration of the effectiveness of your teaching.
9. After the decision at your unit level, review your personnel committee’s report for accuracy. Bring any errors of fact to the attention of your chair or dean for correction before it leaves your unit to go to the college or campus level.
10. Presentation
  - a. Consider putting your materials in ring binders instead of a box.
  - b. Make Volume 1 an executive summary, followed by other volumes with supporting materials.
  - c. Make it easy for all who see your dossier to find what they’re looking for: table of contents, indexes, clear divisions, labels, cross references, etc.

## **Bibliography**

- Angelo, Thomas A. and K. Patricia Cross. *Classroom Assessment Techniques: A Handbook for College Teachers*, 2nd ed. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1993.
- Applying the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education*. Arthur Chickering and Zelda Gamson, ed. San Francisco, CA.: Jossey-Bass, 1991.
- Barr, Robert B. and John Tagg. “A New Paradigm for Undergraduate Education.” *Change*, November/December 1995.
- Belenky, Mary, et. al. *Women’s Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice, and Mind*. New York: Basic Books, 1986.
- Boyer, Earnest L. *Scholarship Reconsidered: Priorities of the Professoriate*. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, The Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1990.
- Egan, Kieran. *The Educated Mind: How Cognitive Tools Shape our Understanding*. Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1997.
- Perry, William G. Jr. *Forms of Intellectual and Ethical Development in the College Years: A Scheme*. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1968.
- Taxonomy of Educational Objectives. The Classification of Educational Goals. Handbook 1: Cognitive Goals*. Benjamin S. Bloom, ed. New York: Longman, 1954.

Claude Cookman, Ph.D.  
School of Journalism  
Indiana University Bloomington  
ccookman@indiana.edu  
812 855-1717