



Towards effective teaching and learning at Swiss universities

This paper has been compiled by a group of faculty developers from 5 Universities¹ in Switzerland who reached a consensus about the underpinning principles and values of faculty development programmes as well as the objectives and outcomes of such programmes².

Aims of this paper

The framework presented in the paper aims to contribute towards improving university teaching and learning in general.

More specifically, this paper aims to provide a basis for

- planning faculty development activities
- designing faculty development programmes
- the accreditation (and assessment) of training programmes and teachers in higher education and thus to potentially increase the chances of Swiss academics on the international labour market
- internal quality management of faculty development programmes (definition of minimal standards)
- university decision-making processes (internal) in connection with teaching (e.g. Habilitation regulations, recognition of national and international teacher training certificates, employment policy)

Underpinning principles and values

An effective university teacher is able to show how the following principles and values underpin his/her work:

1. An understanding of how students learn

All activities in the teaching and learning environment should be based on an understanding of how students learn.

2. A concern for students' development

Helping students learn must begin with a recognition that all students have their own individual learning needs and strategies, and bring their own knowledge and resources to the learning process, including their own native tongue. Work with students should show a concern for their development and enable them to develop capability, responsibility and competence in their personal and professional lives.

¹ Universities of Basel, Berne, Geneva, Zurich and the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology, Zurich.

² The SEDA (Staff and Educational Development Association, UK) Standards for the accreditation of programmes to train teachers in higher education were used as a basis for this framework.

3. A commitment to scholarship

At the base of professional teaching is an awareness and acknowledgement of the ideas and theories of others. All teaching should be underpinned by a searching out of new knowledge – about the subject/discipline, on an interdisciplinary level (including ethical issues) and about good teaching and learning practice. All teaching should also lead to students developing a questioning, analytical approach together with a capability for thinking systemically and creatively.

4. A commitment to work with and learn from colleagues

Much of an academic's work is carried out as part of a team made up of teaching staff and academic support staff. The collegiality and support of peers is as important as individual excellence.

5. The practising of equal opportunities

Teachers must be concerned that students have equal opportunities irrespective of gender, disabilities, race, religion or sexual orientation. They aim to create a learning environment free from fear or sarcasm.

6. Continuing reflection on professional practice

Teachers should reflect on their intentions and actions and on the effects of their actions.

Objectives and Outcomes

An effective university teacher is able to:

1. Design a teaching programme within the context of the curriculum (e.g. series of lectures, case study, laboratory course) from a course outline, document or syllabus

Evidence may be based on:

- writing learning objectives and teaching goals
- structuring the teaching programme to meet the needs of the learners in attaining the specified learning objectives
- structuring the teaching programme to meet the needs of the curriculum
- choosing teaching methods appropriate to the group of learners, their knowledge and skills, the mode of study, the subject material and the resources available
- choosing appropriate assessment methods (including examinations) to test the attainment of the learning objectives
- showing a general understanding of curriculum development.

2. Use a wide and appropriate range of teaching and learning methods effectively and efficiently in order to work with large groups, small groups and one-to-one.

Evidence may be based on:

- making presentations (e.g. lectures, demonstrations)
- enabling group learning (e.g. through seminars, group discussion work, projects, laboratory classes, problem-based learning) and encouraging student participation in the learning process in the role of coach
- supervising and giving feedback to individual students (e.g. diploma and doctoral students, feedback for term papers, diploma and doctoral theses, laboratory reports, exercises)
- using visual aids effectively (e.g. overhead projector, beamer, blackboard)
- using appropriate information technology effectively for the teaching and learning environment e.g. web-based training (WBT), computer-based training (CBT), CD-ROMs, synchronous and asynchronous communication tools

- producing appropriate materials for the teaching and learning environment (e.g. handouts, guidelines for experiments, in conventional and/or electronic forms).

3. Provide support to students on academic issues in a way that is acceptable to a wide range of students

Evidence may be based on:

- reviewing with students their progress
- offering educational guidance and, where necessary, referring to specialist services (e.g. student advisers, psychological advisory service, careers advice centre)
- working in a way which takes account of individual student needs and perspectives.

4. Use a fair, valid and reliable range of assessment techniques

For examinations, evidence may be based on:

- generating and implementing assessment criteria in examinations that reflect learning objectives
- grading examinations in a fair, valid and reliable manner (justifying grades)
- using various assessment techniques: written, oral and practical examinations, individual and group exams
- choosing an appropriate form of the assessment according to e.g. the size of the group.

For written work, evidence may be based on:

- assessing and grading student work with criteria that reflect learning objectives
- justifying grades
- giving feedback to students.

5. Initiate evaluation of their own work with a range of self, peer and student monitoring and evaluation techniques

Evidence may be based on:

- evaluating their own teaching: results of formative and summative evaluations
- discussing evaluation results with students
- encouraging/inviting peers to observe their teaching
- implementing findings from these evaluations and peer observations.

6. Perform effectively their management duties in connection with teaching

Evidence may be based on

- being an effective member of a teaching committee
- acquiring the necessary number of teaching assistants appropriate to the teaching and learning environment
- leading a teaching assistant team e.g. by introducing them to the work, discussing the tasks and exercises, observing their teaching, providing support, writing references
- acquiring grants for teaching and learning projects
- project management of new teaching and learning projects (IT and non-IT)
- organising training of the teaching assistant team.

7. Develop personal and professional strategies appropriate to the constraints and opportunities of their institutional setting

Evidence may be based on:

- making appropriate use of available resources (resource management): time, money, personnel
- working with change

8. Reflect on their own professional practice and pursued continuing professional development.

Definition

An effective university teacher is one whose teaching has met each of the eight objectives in a way that reflects the six underpinning values.