Frequently Asked Questions about Teaching Awards

Below are some questions that the ITL is frequently asked by intending teaching award applicants, and some general advice. They are a work in progress and questions and answers will be added as they occur.

1 How do I know if I have enough evidence to apply for an award?

Mapping out the evidence that you currently have with regard to each criterion may help you to think of additional types of evidence that you could collect (for example, some people focus on student evaluations, but neglect peer evaluations). You might also find it helpful to discuss your outline of evidence with your A/Dean Teaching & Learning (or nominee) in your faculty, and to look at previously successful applications in your award category.

2 If I apply for an award but am not successful, would it look bad if I apply again next year?

No. It is typical for applicants to re-apply for awards, sometimes several years in a row. In fact, many award recipients were not successful until they had applied several times. Some report that the feedback they receive from the selection panels is useful in reapplying. And some find that the process of preparing a teaching award application – gathering evidence, reflecting on one’s aims and accomplishments - is itself rewarding and useful. Also, the process can be helpful in preparing an application for an academic position or promotion.

3 Can I see examples of successful applications?

Yes. Copies of previously successful VC and ALTC teaching award applications are kept at the ITL, and can be viewed during business hours (but not removed or made available online). You may be able to view some Faculty award applications online (see, for example, the Faculty of Business and Economics webpage [http://www.econ.usyd.edu.au/learning/staff/funding_and_recognition/awards/excellence_awards]).

4 What would be a good way to get peer review?

You can set up a peer review partnership with any other university teacher. This person may be from within your department, or outside of it. It is important firstly to agree together what will be the particular focus of the review e.g. a new in-class activity, an assessment task, etc. Also important is to receive written feedback (as well as any verbal discussions you may have with your colleague) so that you can use it as evidence in your application. Bell (2005) provides pro formas for providing collegial feedback on teaching, as well as excellent guidance on structuring peer observation of teaching. Plan the peer review in advance of your application as you want to report not only the initial positive feedback you may have received from your colleague, but also give evidence how you have been able to respond effectively to any suggestions for improvement given by your colleague (evidence may relate to improved student learning outcomes or improved student experience as a result of change/s you made).


5 Can I solicit responses from students?
We're considering applying for a VC Award for Outstanding Teaching. We have some evidence from USE data but would like to get some more targeted evidence on the particular project. Is it appropriate to directly email the students to ask them for feedback? We would, of course, acknowledge on the application that the evidence was collected in this way. If it is acceptable, is there an appropriate survey we could use?

There is no problem surveying students about the quality of a teaching/learning initiative, particularly for the purposes of quality improvement. If you wish to then cite the results as evidence in application for a teaching award that is fine.

However if you intend to publish the results outside the university then you need to submit an ethics application and seek clearance.

With regard to the nature of the survey, you could devise your own (maybe with our help?) or use one of the ITL's other 'Feedback for teachers' surveys http://www.itl.usyd.edu.au/feedback/default.htm?CFID=643114&CFTOKEN=50095801