How do students define 'excellent teaching? Using student-led Teaching Awards to enhance learning

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Shaping the Student Experience Together: 20 Years of Enhancement

Introduction

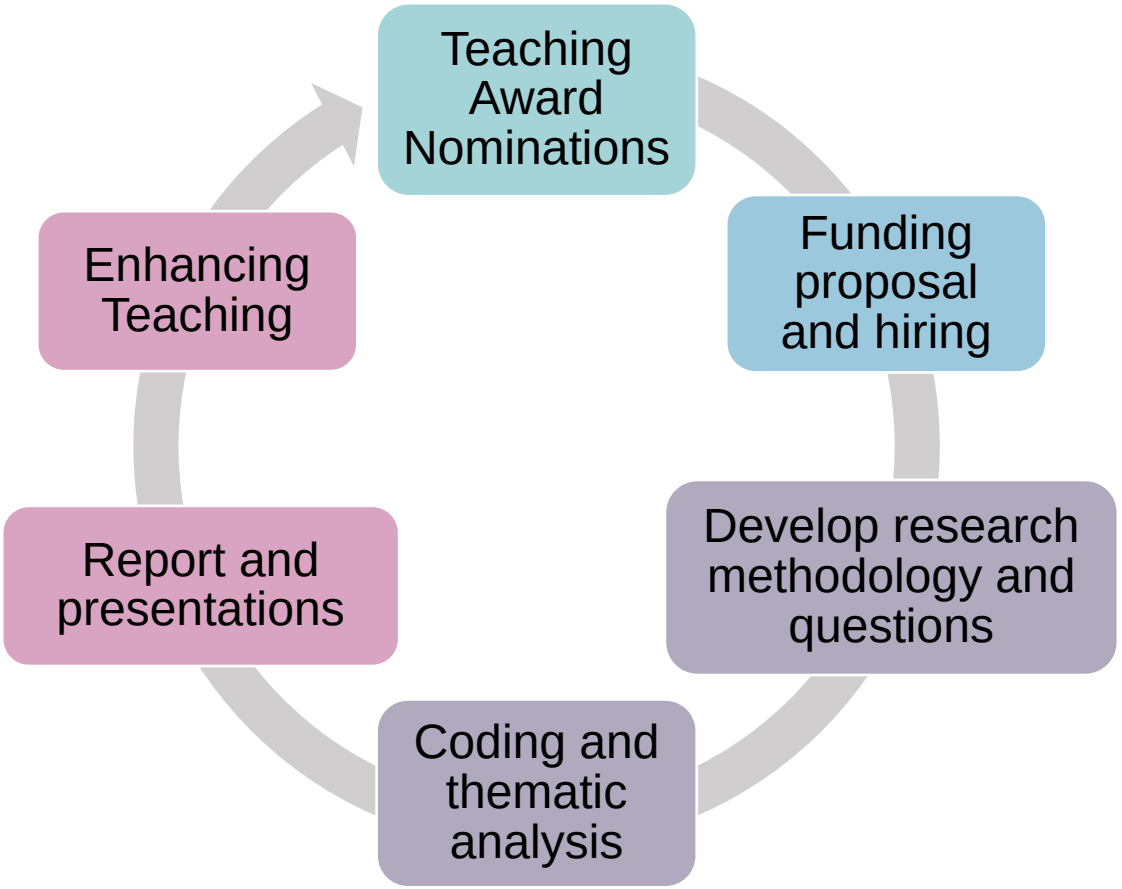
Overview of the presentation

- Introduction
- Main themes of “excellent teaching”
  - Care (Individual care & Caring attitude)
  - Students as contributors and collaborators
  - Adaptation of learning materials and learning-enhancing activities
- Enhancing Teaching
  - Examples
  - What have we learned?
- Further Guidance
- Q&A

Learning Objectives

- An understanding of the students' view of "excellent teaching"
- Knowledge of how student-led Teaching Awards can be used to enhance learning.

Overview of our process



Main themes of “excellent teaching”

Main themes

1. Care
2. Students as contributors and collaborators
3. Adaptation of materials and learning-enhancing activities

Care

Defining care

"*She has been incredibly supportive, and I always feel I can ask for her help and advice, whether in class, through email or office hours. <…> Throughout the semester I have been incredibly stressed about an assignment, yet she has been absolutely fantastic at helping me navigate my way through the task and has really helped calm my nerves.*"

- Nomination 18

Some features associated with care have been mentioned in 82% of the nominations:

Caring attitude

+

Acts of individual care

- Responsiveness to emails
- Useful feedback
- Individual discussion of ideas and suggestions for future research
- Checking up on students in difficult circumstances

- Creating caring atmosphere in a class

"She always encouraged students to reach out to chat about any issues and offered comforting and wise advice every time."

- Nomination 98

"Although I personally never requested any extra sessions, she made it abundantly clear there was no shame in asking and that she would be more than happy to oblige."

- Nomination 12

- Timely responses

"Whenever I contacted her, her replies were quick and so friendly. It is obvious that she genuinely cares about the wellbeing of her students, and this is very refreshing to see within a university setting."

- Nomination 232

Students as contributors and collaborators

Mentioned by

69% of the nominations

- Treating students' contributions as valuable
- Keen interest in students' views and perspectives
- Approachability
- Participatory, democratic, respectful atmosphere

- Accounting for different backgrounds

"As he cheers us on, he also reminds us to not be so hard on ourselves as beginner students, and as someone who struggled with self-doubt at the beginning, I cannot thank him enough. I believe that he deserves to be nominated because he gave me something that I was severely lacking in my subject: self-confidence."

- Nomination 145

- Early and mid-semester feedback

"She has provided strong assembler feedback as well as collective feedback and had engaged with us asking what assessment style we would like before making the executive decision. This made us feel included and prioritised."

- Nomination 161

Students as contributors and collaborators - Conclusion

- Affirmed Representatives' behaviour (e.g. mid-semester feedback)

- Shared investment in the learning environment

- Practical approach for shaping "how" students learn

Adaptation of materials and learning-enhancing activities

Mentioned by 48% of the nominations:

Practical elements of teaching

- Style of delivery of lectures
- Supplementary materials
- Activities which diversify a module or expand beyond it

Individual approaches and adjustments implemented by a teacher within a module or a school

Not just about being 'creative' or 'unique'!

"Her curricula are designed with great purpose <…> and she is able to explain how each reading and lecture contributes to overall learning goals."

- Nomination 29

"The module itself is also delivered and structured in a way that makes learning from it so easy and enjoyable <…>"

- Nomination 302

Coherence

Evident module methodology

- EDI

"His dual delivery of lecture content, and the use of presentations designed to aid students with dyslexia have made the material more accessible"

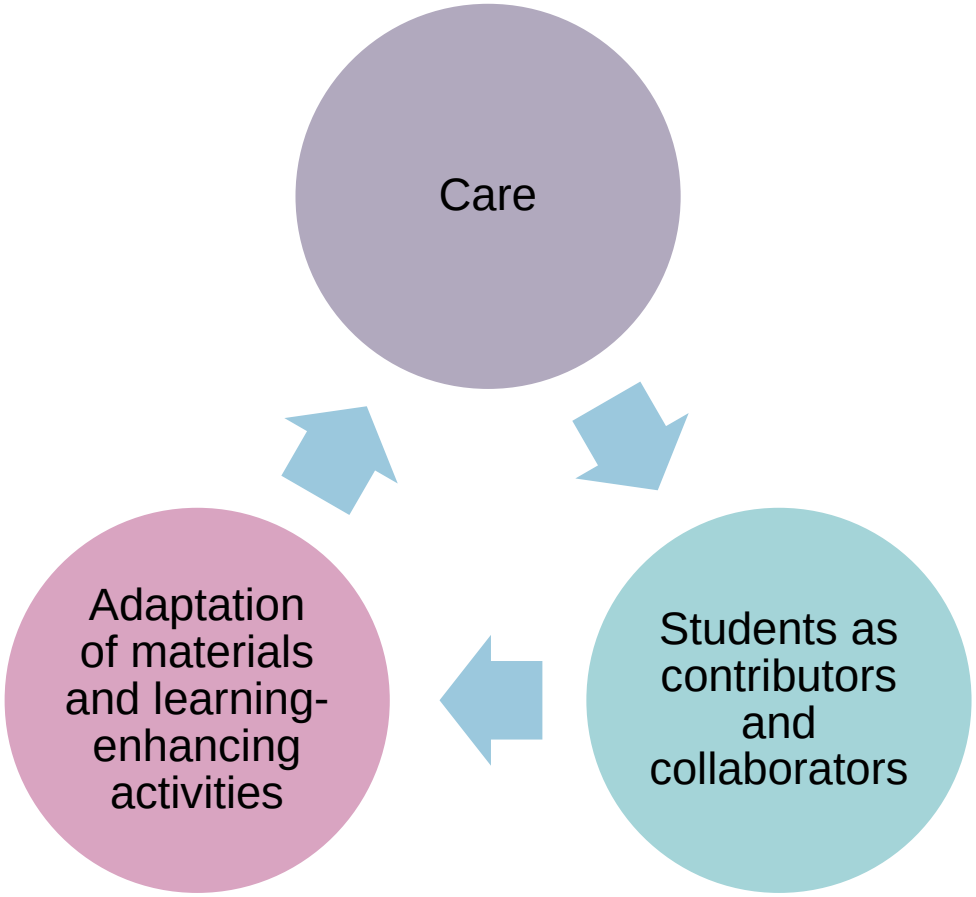
- Nomination 249

"He does everything in his power to make his courses inclusive, as well as making any students with disabilities feel welcome in the department."

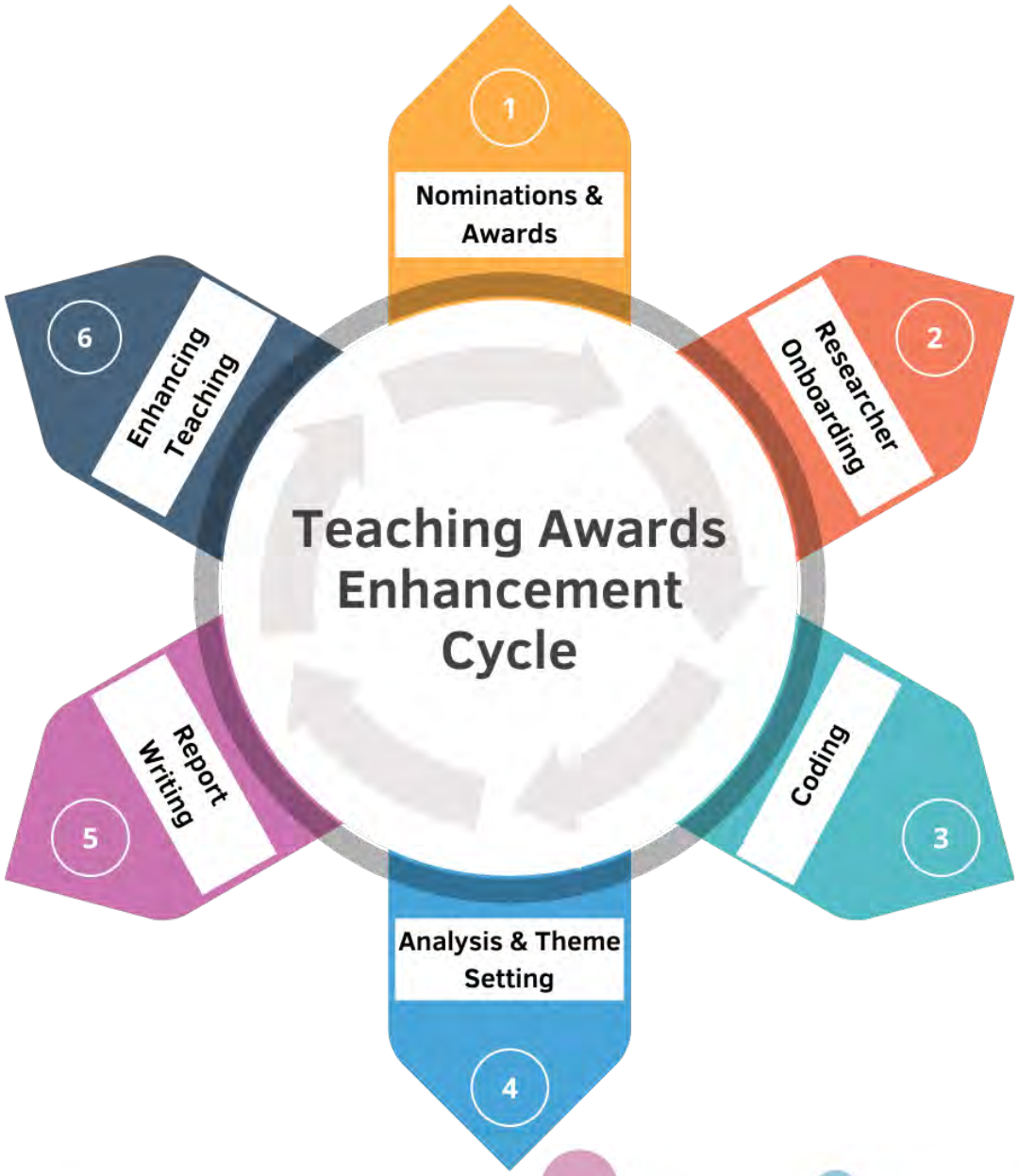
- Nomination 139

No special practice!

- A practical theme that’s based on principles
- Students value:
  - Coherence
  - Organisation
  - Inclusivity


Care
Students as contributors and collaborators
Adaptation of materials and learning-enhancing activities

Enhancing Teaching


Teaching Awards Enhancement Cycle
1
Nominations & Awards
2
Researcher Onboarding
3
Coding
4
Analysis & Theme Setting
5
Report Writing
6
Enhancing Teaching

Enhancing Teaching: Examples

Student Reps

Gather student examples of what exemplary feedback from staff looks like; distil good practices and present this at student/staff meetings.

Work with staff on improving the feedback guidelines for your School

Teachers

What specific materials and activities do students look for?

- Evident module methodology & structure
- Materials that can be revisited
- Actualised knowledge

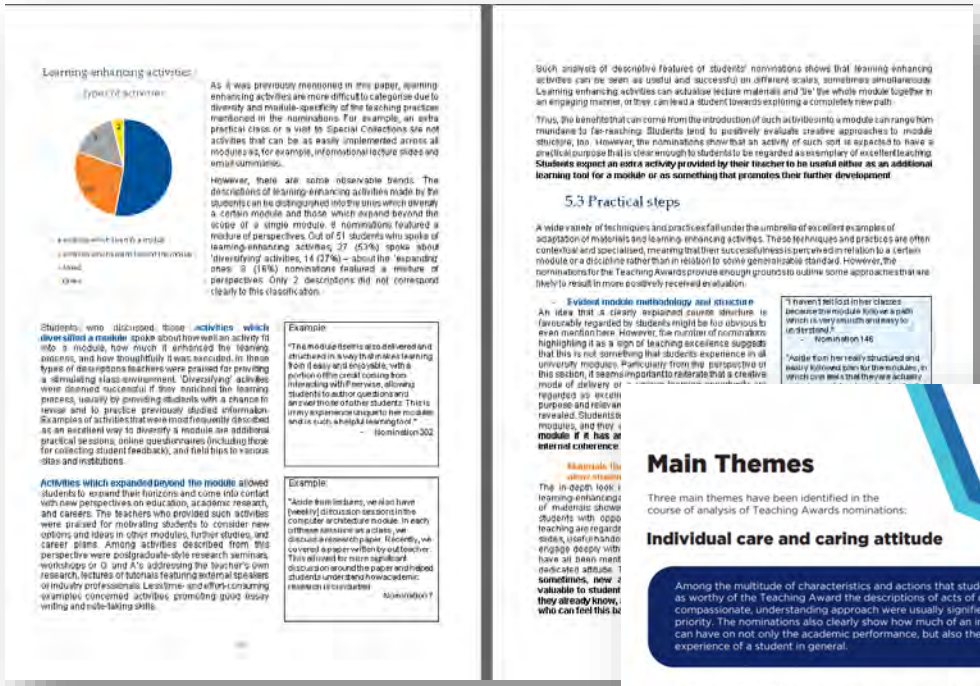
Uniquely Positive

- Untapped wealth of student-generated data
- Empowers students
- A resource for teaching staff
- Snapshot of student views
- Thematic research questions

Further Guidance

Further guidance

- Check out the sparqs Resource Library for guidance on:
  - modifying your award process;
  - onboarding a researcher;
  - conducting the thematic review
  - Utilising findings to enhance teaching



Learning-enhancing activities

Types of activities

As it was previously mentioned in this paper, learning-enhancing activities are more difficult to categorise due to diversity and module-specificity of the teaching practices mentioned in the nominations. For example, an extra practical class or a visit to Special Collections are not activities that can be as easily implemented across all modules as, for example, informational lecture slides and email summaries.

However, there are some observable trends. The descriptions of learning-enhancing activities made by the students can be distinguished into the ones which diversify a certain module and those which expand beyond the scope of a single module. 8 nominations featured a mixture of perspectives. Out of 51 students who spoke of learning-enhancing activities, 27 (53%) spoke about 'diversifying' activities, 14 (27%) – about the 'expanding' ones; 9 (18%) nominations featured a mixture of perspectives. Only 2 descriptions did not correspond clearly to this classification.

Students who discussed those **activities which diversified a module** spoke about how well an activity fit into a module, how much it enhanced the learning process, and how thoughtfully it was executed. In these types of descriptions teachers were praised for providing a stimulating class environment. 'Diversifying' activities were deemed successful if they enriched the learning process, usually by providing students with a chance to revise and to practice previously studied information. Examples of activities that were most frequently described as an excellent way to diversify a module are additional practical sessions, online questionnaires (including those for collecting student feedback), and field trips to various sites and institutions.

Example:

"The module itself is also delivered and structured in a way that makes learning both easy and enjoyable, with a portion of the credit coming from interacting with Piazza, allowing students to author questions and answer those of other students. This is in my experience unique to the modules and is such a helpful learning tool."

– Nomination 302

Activities which expanded beyond the module allowed students to expand their horizons and come into contact with new perspectives on education, academic research, and careers. The teachers who provided such activities were praised for motivating students to consider new options and ideas in other modules, further studies, and career plans. Among activities described from this perspective were postgraduate-style research seminars, workshops or Q and A's addressing the teacher's own research, lectures or tutorials featuring external speakers or industry professionals. Less time- and effort-consuming examples concerned activities promoting good essay writing and note-taking skills.

Example:

"Aside from lectures, we also have [weekly] discussion sessions in the computer architecture module. In each of these sessions we as a class, we discuss a research paper. Recently, we covered a paper written by our teacher. This allowed for more significant discussion around the paper and helped students understand how academic research could be..."

– Nomination 7

Such analysis of descriptive features of students' nominations shows that learning-enhancing activities can be seen as useful and successful on different scales, sometimes simultaneously. Learning-enhancing activities can actualise lecture materials and 'tie' the whole module together in an engaging manner, or they can lead a student towards exploring a completely new path.

Thus, the benefits that can come from the introduction of such activities into a module can range from mundane to far-reaching. Students tend to positively evaluate creative approaches to module structure, too. However, the nominations show that an activity or such can be expected to have a practical purpose that is clear enough to students to be regarded as exemplary of excellent teaching. **Students expect an extra activity provided by their teacher to be useful either as an additional learning tool for a module or as something that promotes their further development.**

5.3 Practical steps

A wide variety of techniques and practices fall under the umbrella of excellent examples of adaptation of materials and learning-enhancing activities. These techniques and practices are often contextual and specialised, meaning that their successfulness is perceived in relation to a certain module or a discipline rather than in relation to some generalisable standard. However, the nominations for the Teaching Awards provide enough grounds to outline some approaches that are likely to result in more positively received evaluation.

– **Evident module methodology and structure**

An idea that a clearly explained course structure is favourably regarded by students might be too obvious to even mention here. However, the number of nominations highlighting it as a sign of teaching excellence suggests that this is not something that students experience in all university modules. Particularly from the perspective of this section, it seems important to reiterate that a creative mode of delivery or

"I haven't felt lost in her classes because the module follows a path which is very smooth and easy to understand."

– Nomination 146

"Aside from her really structured and easily followed plan for the modules, in which core ideas that they are actually

The idea of “excellent teaching” can feel subjective or intangible, but this process can help break the student view into thematic building-block with names and examples.

QAA Scotland

Enhancement Themes

Scottish Funding Council
Comhairle Maoineachaidh na h-Alba

Thank you

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