

Writing a Teaching Philosophy

Writing a Meaningful Statement of Teaching Philosophy

Developing a teaching philosophy statement allows you to reflect on and articulate your beliefs and practices as a teacher. The most meaningful statements of teaching philosophy identify sophisticated goals for teaching and describe varied methods for meeting them. They consider the relationship between teaching content and teaching skills and demonstrate an understanding of student learning. At their best, they are intellectually revealing; rather than simply describe your teaching experience, they demonstrate how you think about your teaching.

Questions To Help You Get You Started:*

- Why do you teach the way you do?
- What should students expect of you as a teacher?
- What is a method of teaching you rely on frequently? Why don't you use a different method?
- What do you want students to learn? How do you know your goals for students are being met?
- What should your students be able to know or do as a result of taking your class?
- How can your teaching facilitate student learning?
- How do you as a teacher create an engaging or enriching learning environment?
- What specific activities or exercises do you use to engage your students?
- What do you want your students to learn from these activities?
- How has your thinking about teaching changed over time? Why?

*These questions and exercises are meant to be tools to help you begin reflecting on your beliefs and ideas as a teacher. No single Teaching Statement can contain the answers to all or most of these inquiries and activities.

Preparing to Draft

As you prepare to write, reflect on your goals for teaching in your discipline or area of expertise. In determining your goals, consider not only your content objectives, but also the ways of thinking or the intellectual skills you want your students to learn. (In fact, students learn facts and arguments by using or reasoning about them, integrating them into larger structures of knowledge.) You may also want to acknowledge the more expansive habits of mind or being you want them to adopt. Don't lose sight of the disciplinary context of your teaching. This may mean illustrating your statement with specific examples, or even a critical incident, from your teaching. You want to take into account pedagogical debates about what and how to teach in your field. You may also want to think about the following questions, prompted by the research on what facilitates and impedes learning:

- What conceptions or misconceptions about concepts or inquiry in your field do students bring to your classroom? How do you build on, unsettle, or correct those beliefs?
- How do you get your students interested in or intellectually engaged with your field? What kinds of questions do you ask or problems do you pose to your students?

- How do you develop your students' interpretive frameworks, or how do you teach them to approach the objects of analysis in your field? What questions do you teach them to ask, and how do you teach them how to answer them?
- How do you explain or otherwise help students understand difficult ideas or concepts (hydrogen bonding, false consciousness)?
- How do you balance your objectives for your students with their own?
- What particular offering does your discipline make to a student's liberal arts education?
- How do you help students understand the implications or significance of what they're learning or learning how to do in your classes?

Formatting the Statement

Teaching statements are normally one- to two-page narratives written in the first-person, present tense. Thus they're not comprehensive documents. But they can serve as the basis -- the thesis statement, if you will -- of a longer teaching or course portfolio. We'd be happy to guide you in the preparing of such a portfolio. If you're including your teaching statement in your dossier, keep in mind that the usual guidelines for job materials apply. Demonstrate knowledge without relying on jargon. Be persuasive but not dogmatic. Be sincere. You may want to ask your adviser or mentor to read your statement not only to verify disciplinary conventions, but also, perhaps, to initiate a conversation about teaching and learning.

Resources

Teaching Portfolios

<http://www.syr.edu/gradschool/gsprogram/resources/index.html> (Syracuse University)

http://www.schreyerinstitute.psu.edu/pdf/Designing_a_Teaching_Portfolio.pdf (Penn State)

<http://tep.uoregon.edu/services/portfolio/portfolio.html> (University of Oregon)

Teaching Philosophies

http://www.vanderbilt.edu/cft/resources/teaching_resources/reflecting/philosophy.htm

(Vanderbilt University)

“4 Steps to a Memorable Teaching Philosophy,” James Lang, *Chronicle of Higher Ed*, 8/29/10

<http://chronicle.com/article/4-Steps-to-a-Memorable/124199/>