Beginning a Statement of Teaching Philosophy

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What is it?

A statement about why you teach
A declaration of your beliefs or assumptions

Why write one?

Introduce yourself as teacher
Set the stage for your teaching portfolio
Consciously articulate a framework for your teaching
Take time for reflection and self-examination
Identify ways you can grow and improve
Provide a writing sample

What can go into a statement?

There is no one “right” way to write a statement.
The learning theory to which you subscribe
A teaching or learning issue in your field
Skills and attitudes you believe students should gain
Goals for your teaching career
Themes that pervade your teaching

How do your teaching strategies match your philosophy?

Dealing with diversity
Creating a class atmosphere
Motivating students
Grading and evaluating students
Discipline and class management
Physical environment – arranging chairs, etc.
Use and role of technology
Types of assignments
Specific practices
Statement-writing strategies

Start with a goal.
Your statement will be very personal.
Write in the first person.
Take your time
Use quotations.
Create a metaphor.
Give specific examples.
Read other people’s statements.
Get other people’s opinions.
Expect to write multiple drafts.
Write more than you need, then edit it down.

Remember your audience

Identify them
Meet their needs
Limit the assumptions you make about them
Tailor your statement to position and the institution

Most popular advice

- Include anecdotes
- Be honest
- Limit the jargon
- Emphasize learning
- Describe a strategy you want to explore
Teaching Goals Inventory


Take the inventory online at: http://fm.iowa.uiowa.edu/fmi/xsl/tgi/data_entry.xsl?-db=tgi_data&-lay=Layout01&-view

Purpose: The Teaching Goals Inventory (TGI) is a self-assessment for instructors. Its purpose is threefold: (1) to help instructors become more aware of what goals they want to accomplish in individual courses; (2) to help instructors locate Classroom Assessment Techniques they can use to assess how well they are achieving their goals; and (3) to provide a starting point for discussions of teaching and learning goals among instructors.

Directions: Please select ONE course you are currently teaching. Respond to each item on the inventory below in relation to that particular course. Your responses might differ between your teaching and learning goals for an introductory course and an advanced course in your discipline.

For the specific course you have selected, please rate the importance ---from Essential to Not Applicable --- of each of the fifty-two goals listed below. Assess each goal's importance with respect to what you deliberately want your students accomplish and not with respect to that goal's general worthiness. There are no "right" or "wrong" answers, only personally more or less accurate ones. In general, a level of of discrimination that produces somewhere between 3-18 "essential" goals works well for this inventory.

A self-scoring worksheet is available at the bottom of the inventory.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Essential</th>
<th>A goal you almost always try to achieve</th>
<th>= 5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Very Important</td>
<td>A goal you often try to achieve</td>
<td>= 4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Important</td>
<td>A goal you sometimes try to achieve</td>
<td>= 3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unimportant</td>
<td>A goal you rarely try to achieve</td>
<td>= 2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not applicable</td>
<td>A goal you never try to achieve</td>
<td>= 1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Name of Course_____________________________
Some Common Teaching Goals

Adapted from “Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement” by Helen G. Grundman in the Notices of the AMS Volume 53, Number 11 Dec 2006.

1. Communicate that “discipline” is fun
2. Detect and fill gaps in students’ prior “discipline” knowledge
3. Develop a variety of problem-solving strategies
4. Develop basic computational skills
5. Enable and empower students
6. Enable students to make judgments based on quantitative or qualitative information
7. Enable students to read “discipline” effectively
8. Enable students to understand their own thought processes
9. Encourage a broader interest in “discipline”
10. Establish constructive student attitudes about “discipline”
11. Facilitate acquisition of life-long learning skills
12. Foster a desire to ask “discipline” questions
13. Foster critical thinking
14. Foster student discovery of “discipline”
15. Foster understand of key fundamental information
16. Teach the beauty of “discipline”
17. Improve students’ confidence
18. Improve students’ understanding of technology
19. Improve students’ writing abilities
20. Increase the number of “discipline” majors
21. Increase the students’ “discipline” knowledge
22. Model critical thinking and problem solving
23. Motivate students to make an effort to learn “discipline”
24. Open doors to other opportunities for students
25. Prepare future “discipline”
26. Prepare students for technical careers
27. Prepare students to be knowledgeable adults
28. Reduce “discipline” anxiety
29. Teach applications to other fields
30. Teach necessary skills
31. Teach fundamental concepts
32. Teach generalizing
33. Teach logic
34. Teach “discipline” writing
35. Teach students to work collaboratively
Writing a Teaching Statement

Teaching philosophy statements are becoming increasingly important in hiring, promotion, tenure, and even grant proposals. However, writing a teaching philosophy statement can be a challenge for a number of reasons. Some people find it daunting to put a “philosophy” into words, and others are not sure if they actually have a philosophy of teaching. It can also be difficult to determine what to say and how to say it in a limited space. In this issue of the Bulletin, we offer suggestions for easing the process of articulating and developing a statement of teaching philosophy.

Elements of an Effective Teaching Statement

There are many ways to develop and organize a teaching statement, but statements that communicate effectively often include elements that are:

- **Descriptive**: What you do when you teach, types of activities or thinking in which you engage your students
- **Analytical**: Why you teach in the ways that you do, how your thinking about teaching has changed over time
- **Empirical**: Experiences or observations of student learning on which your decisions about teaching are based

Starting a Teaching Statement

Here are some different starting points to help you begin organizing your thoughts and putting ideas on paper:

One way to start is to write out answers to questions about typical learning goals and teaching practices:

- What do I want students to learn?
- How do I help them learn?
- What obstacles are there to student learning?
- How do I help students overcome these obstacles?

Another way to start writing is to focus on specific learning activities that you have used in class recently:

- What did I want students to learn from this activity?
- How well did it work?
- How do I know how well it worked?
- What would I change next time? Why?

In addition to your experience teaching in classrooms, consider how you have helped people in other learning situations, even if you weren't formally “teaching”:

- tutoring
- advising
- coaching
- leading a research or design team
- working with patients or clients
- mentoring a new associate

How is teaching and learning in those situations similar to what you do in class? How is it different?

Instead of writing your teaching statement from your perspective as an instructor, try writing from a learner's point of view. How would students describe their experience in a class that you teach?

Developing and Revising a Teaching Statement

After writing in response to one or more of these questions, review your notes and identify main ideas, themes, or underlying principles that characterize your teaching.

Most people find that it takes many drafts to organize their ideas and develop a statement that is a satisfactory representation of the way they think about their teaching.

To help you as you write, ask others to read drafts of your statement, identify ideas or themes that stand out to them, and indicate what might need to be clarified or elaborated:

- If you’re writing a teaching statement for your department or college, find a colleague who has developed a teaching statement for a similar audience.
- If you’re writing a teaching statement as part of a job application, find people with experience at the types of institutions that you are applying to.
- Consult with CIDR staff for feedback and suggestions to help you continue developing your teaching statement.

Additional Resources

CIDR has collected additional resources and examples at http://depts.washington.edu/cidrweb/PortfolioTools.htm
Metaphors for Learning and Teaching

Learning
   Journey
   Dance
   Banking (Freire)
   Two-way street
Learner
   Container
   Disciple
Teaching
   Coaching
   Storytelling
   Weaving
   Lighting a lamp
Teacher
   Yoda
   Cicero
   Matador
   Guide
   Midwife
   Social worker
Classroom
   Stage
   Garden
   Zoo
   Studio
Others
   No child left behind
   Raising the bar
**Quotations about teaching and learning**

He who can does; he who cannot, teaches. What is more they are the only available teachers, because those who can are mostly quite incapable of teaching, even if they had the time for it.
-- George Bernard Shaw

You cannot teach a man anything; You can only help him to find it within himself  -- Galileo

One test of the correctness of educational procedure is the happiness of the child.
-- Maria Montessori

It is the supreme art of the teacher to awaken joy in creative expression and knowledge.
-- Albert Einstein

Teaching should be such that what is offered is perceived as a valuable gift and not as a hard duty
--Albert Einstein

Example isn't another way to teach, it is the only way to teach.  --Albert Einstein

The authority of those who teach is often an obstacle to those who want to learn.
-- Cicero (Quoted by Montaigne)

If you are planning for a year, sow rice; if you are planning for a decade, plant trees; if you are planning for a lifetime, educate people.  -- Chinese proverb

Education is a progressive discovery of our own ignorance.  --Will Durant

Education's purpose is to replace an empty mind with an open one.  --Malcolm Forbes

There are two types of education... One should teach us how to make a living, And the other how to live.
--John Adams

Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lighting of a fire.  --William Butler Yeats

Education is not a form of entertainment, but a means of empowering people to take control of their lives.
--Unknown

Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty. Anyone who keeps learning stays young. The greatest thing in life is to keep your mind young.  --Henry Ford

Learning is not compulsory... neither is survival.  --W. Edwards Deming

Live as if you were to die tomorrow. Learn as if you were to live forever.  --Mahatma Gandhi

He who dares to teach must never cease to learn.  --Richard Henry Dann

Nothing has more retarded the advancement of learning than the disposition of vulgar minds to ridicule and vilify what they do not understand.  --Samuel Johnson

The mediocre teacher tells. The good teacher explains. The superior teacher demonstrates. The great teacher inspires.  --William Arthur Ward
Following Chism’s five components: 
One way to start a statement of teaching philosophy

1. Conceptualization of learning
   What do you think happens when students learn?
   What learning theory do you subscribe to?
   What assumptions do you make about learning?
   What does your experience tell you?

2. Conceptualization of teaching
   What is your role in the learning process?
   What metaphor do you identify with teaching?
   What themes pervade your teaching?

3. Goals for students
   Content-area knowledge
   Thinking and problem-solving skills
   Writing or research skills
   Technical skills
   Social skills – group work, etc.
   Appreciation of the subject
   Encourage lifelong learning
   Other values

4. Implementation of the philosophy
   How do you deal with a diverse student group?
   How do you create a class environment, rapport with students?
   How do you grade or evaluate students?
   What is the role of technology?
   What types of assignments do you prefer?
   What specific practices do you prefer?

5. Personal growth plan
   What are your goals for your teaching career?
   What is your vision of your future?

The components are from Chism, Nancy. (1997) "Developing a Philosophy of Teaching Statement." Essays on Teaching Excellence 9.3. The rest comes from a variety of sources.
Consider your Audience

(Reproduced from Writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement. The Teaching Center at Washington University in St. Louis. Http://teachingcenter.wustl.edu/writing-teaching-philosophy-statement)

When you write your teaching philosophy statement, try to anticipate questions that a search committee would want your statement to answer. Ask your faculty mentors and graduate students who have interviewed for academic positions what they think search committees are looking for; these individuals are your best sources for learning about the expectations and issues that are particular to your field. Consult the Web site of the school to which you are applying to get a sense of the school’s mission and students, and the relative importance of teaching and research within the institution and the department.

Here is a list of potential questions that may be motivating search committees when they ask you to submit a statement of teaching philosophy:

1. Will this candidate be able to handle the teaching responsibilities of the job?
2. Does her approach to teaching suggest that she would be a good “fit” for our department and our students?
3. Does this candidate want to teach? If so, why?
4. If I were to step into a classroom and observe this candidate teaching, what would I see?
5. How do this candidate’s research interests shape her teaching?
6. What will this candidate add to our department? What will our students gain from his classes? What will our department gain in terms of specific courses, new opportunities for students to develop their skills and knowledge, and interesting pedagogical approaches?
7. How does this candidate respond to the perennial challenges of teaching, such as motivating students to learn, evaluating student work, maintaining high standards in the classroom, and juggling teaching with other responsibilities we expect faculty to fulfill?

The Teaching Philosophy Statement is NOT a summary of the experiences on your CV, nor is it an article on pedagogy. It is a concise, specific discussion of the objectives and approaches you currently use, have used in the past, and plan to use in the future. Keep in mind that search committees are looking for colleagues. Reviewing in detail your past experience as a Teaching Assistant, without discussing specific methods or approaches you have developed and used in the classroom, may create an image of you as a student instead of a colleague.
Potential Components of a Teaching Portfolio

Statement of teaching philosophy

Experience
- **List of classes** – teaching responsibilities, course titles, numbers, enrollments and student demographics
- **Representative syllabi** – learning goals, content, assignments, methods, readings, assignments and evaluation activities
- **Honors** – recognition, awards, or nominations related to teaching
- Samples of student work along with your feedback
- Handouts and other material you developed
- Instructional innovations attempted and evaluations of their effectiveness.
- Curricular revisions or new projects/materials/assignments.
- Non-traditional teaching settings or materials used in teaching.
- Videotaped segments of teaching

Evaluations
- Statements from colleagues who observed you, taught with you, or reviewed your teaching materials
- Letters from students
- Course Instructor Feedback (CIF) Results
- Other student evaluations, including Mid-semester feedback
- Analysis of videotaped teaching
- Self-evaluation of teaching-related activities

Professional Development
- Efforts to reflect on and improve your teaching
- List of workshops, conferences, certificates, courses, consultations
- Prospective syllabi – for courses you are prepared to teach (but haven’t)

Service
- Descriptions of supervision of grad students or undergrad honors students
- Evidence of help given to colleagues
- Professional society or University committees dealing with teaching
- Contributions or editing a professional journal on teaching in the discipline
**Teacher**

Identify a great teacher you once had in college or before. Why does that person stand out or bring back memories?

**Student**

Describe a student (real or imaginary) who valued your class. How would s/he describe your teaching or remember most about it?
Learning

Describe a metaphor for teaching, learning, or the classroom.

Class

Describe a memorable class that really “made your day” … in a good way. How did you know it was a success? What keeps it in your memory?